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Ellen Lust | 15th Edition
EDITOR



The Middle East

15th Edition

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Edited by

Ellen Lust
University of Gothenburg

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Lina Khatib





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About the Editor

ELLEN LUST

is a professor in the Department of Political Science and the founder and director of the Program on Governance and Local Development at the University of Gothenburg. She received her MA in Modern Middle East and North African Studies (1993) and PhD in Political Science (1997) from the University of Michigan. She has conducted research and engaged in policy dialogue across the Middle East, including Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Malawi, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, and Tunisia, as well as in sub-Saharan Africa. She has served as an advisor and consultant to such organizations as the UNDP, UN Democracy Fund, The World Bank, USAID, Carter Center, Freedom House, and NDI. Ellen has authored numerous books and articles, including *Structuring Contestation in the Arab World* (Cambridge University Press, 2005); *Political Participation in the Middle East and North Africa* (Lynne Rienner, 2008), coedited with Saloua Zerhouni; *Taking to the Streets: Activism and the Arab Uprisings* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), coedited with Lina Khatib; and *Trust, Voice, and Incentives: Learning from Local Successes in Service Delivery in the Middle East and North Africa* (World Bank, 2015) in collaboration with Hana Brix and Michael Woolcock. Her research has been supported by foundations such as the Moulay Hicham Foundation, National Science Foundation, Social Science Research Council, FORMAS, and the Swedish Research Council (see www.gld.gu.se for further information).

Contributors

LAHOUARI ADDI,

author of the chapter on Algeria, is a sociologist who teaches political sociology at the Institute of Political Science, University of Lyon, France. He is a member of the Research Centre Triangle, UMR CNRS 5206. Addi has published many books and papers on Algeria, among them *L'Algérie et la démocratie* (Editions La Découverte, 1995), *Les Mutations de la Société Algérienne* (Editions La Découverte, 1999), *Sociologie et Anthropologie chez Pierre Bourdieu* (blog, 2002). His most recent books are *Deux anthropologues au Maghreb: Ernest Gellner et Clifford Geertz* (Les Editions des Archives Contemporaines, Paris, 2013) and *Radical Arab Nationalism and Political Islam* (Georgetown University Press, 2017).

HESHAM AL-AWADI,

author of the chapter of Kuwait, is professor of history and international relations at the American University of Kuwait. His recent publications include *The Muslim Brothers in Pursuit of Legitimacy: Power and Political Islam in Egypt Under Mubarak* (I. B. Tauris, 2014).

DINA AL SOWAYEL,

author of the chapter on Saudi Arabia, is associate director of women's studies at the University of Houston in Texas. She received her MA and PhD from Rice University in Political Science and her JD from the University of Houston. Her BA is from Wellesley College. Al Sowayel teaches a variety of courses in the history department, including History of the Modern Middle East, State and Society in the Middle East, Women and Islam, A History of Islam, War in the Middle East, and A History of the Palestine-Israeli Conflict. She also takes students to the Arab and Muslim world annually.

LIHI BEN SHITRIT,

author of the chapter on Israel and coauthor of the chapter “Religion, Society, and Politics in the Middle East,” is an assistant professor at the School of Public and International Affairs, University of Georgia, Athens. Her research focuses on religion, politics, and gender in the Middle East. She is the author of *Righteous Transgressions: Women’s Activism on the Israeli and Palestinian Religious Right* (Princeton University Press, 2015).

MEHRZAD BOROUJERDI,

author of the chapter on Iran, is professor of political science at Syracuse University’s Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs. He is the author of *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism* (Syracuse University Press, 1996), coauthor of *Postrevolutionary Iran: A Political Handbook* (Syracuse University Press, 2018), and editor of *Mirror for the Muslim Prince: Islam and Theory of Statecraft* (Syracuse University Press, 2013).

LAURIE A. BRAND,

author of the chapter on Jordan, is the Robert Grandford Wright Professor of International Relations and Middle East Studies at the University of Southern California. She is a former president of the Middle East Studies Association, whose Committee on Academic Freedom she has chaired since 2007, a four-time Fulbright scholar to the Middle East and North Africa, and a Carnegie Corporation scholar from 2008 to 2010. She is the author of *Palestinians in the Arab World* (Columbia University Press, 1988), *Jordan’s Inter-Arab Relations* (Columbia University Press, 1994), *Women, the State and Political Liberalization* (Columbia University Press, 1998), *Citizens Abroad: States and Emigration in the Middle East and North Africa* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), and *Official Stories: Politics and National Narratives in Egypt and Algeria* (Stanford University Press, 2014).

MELANI CAMMETT,

coauthor of the chapter on the political economy of the Middle East, is Clarence Dillon Professor of International Affairs in the Department of Government at Harvard University and holds a secondary faculty appointment in the Department of Global Health and Population at the Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health. She is the author of four books: *A Political Economy of the Middle East* (with Ishac Diwan, Alan Richards, and John Waterbury, Westview Press, 2015); *Compassionate Communalism: Welfare and Sectarianism in Lebanon* (Cornell University Press, 2014), which won the 2015 APSA Giovanni Sartori Book Award and the Honorable Mention for the 2015 APSA Gregory Luebbert Book Award; *The Politics of Nonstate Welfare* (coedited with Lauren Morris MacLean, Cornell University Press, 2014); and *Globalization and Business Politics in North Africa: A Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge University Press, 2007, 2010). She has received a variety of fellowships and awards and has published articles in scholarly and policy journals. Her current research focuses on governance, welfare, and identity politics in the Middle East and North Africa.

BENOÎT CHALLAND,

coauthor of the chapter on Palestine, is associate professor of sociology at The New School for Social Research in New York. Previously, he has held professorial positions at the University of Fribourg (Switzerland), New York University (Kevorkian Center for Near East Studies) at the University of Bologna, and taught short modules on social research at the University of Bethlehem (Palestine). Professor Challand is notably the coeditor of *The Struggle for Influence in the Middle East: The Arab Uprisings and Foreign Assistance* (Routledge, 2016, with Federica Bicchì and Steven Heydemann); coauthor of *Imagining Europe: Myth, Memory and Identity* (Cambridge University Press, 2013, with Chiara Bottici); and is the author of *Palestinian Civil Society: Foreign Donors and the Power to Promote and Exclude* (Routledge, 2009).

LARYSSA CHOMIAK,

coauthor of the chapter on Tunisia, is a political scientist and the director of the Centre d'Etudes Maghrébines à Tunis (CEMAT) since 2011. She is currently finalizing her book on the politics of dissent under Ben Ali's Tunisia based on doctoral field-based research in Tunisia between 2008 to 2010. Her work has appeared as book chapters and journal articles in *Middle East Law and Governance*, *The Journal of North African Studies*, *Portal 9*, and *Middle East Report*. Dr. Chomiak has received research fellowships from the Fulbright Commission (Morocco), the International Research and Exchange Board (IREX/Ukraine), and the American Institute for Maghrib Studies (AIMS/Tunisia). Her opinion essays have appeared in *The Washington Post*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, and on the Middle East Institute website.

JULIA CHOUCAIR-VIZOSO,

author of the chapter on Iraq, is a political scientist with expertise in comparative politics, network theory, governance structures, and the contemporary Middle East. She is vice chair of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, and was previously a predoctoral fellow at Stanford University, editor-in-chief of the bilingual Arabic-English journal *Sada*, and associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, DC. She holds a PhD in Political Science from Yale University.

JANINE A. CLARK,

author of the "Actors, Public Opinion, and Participation" chapter, is a professor of political science at the University of Guelph, Canada. She is the author of *Local Politics in Jordan and Morocco: Strategies of Centralization and Decentralization* (Columbia University Press, 2018) and of *Islam, Charity, and Activism: Middle-Class Networks and Social Welfare in Egypt, Jordan, and Yemen* (Indiana University Press, 2004), as well as coeditor of *Doing Political Science Research in the Middle East and North Africa: Methodological and Ethical Challenges*

(Oxford University Press, 2018) and of *Economic Liberalization, Democratization, and Civil Society in the South* (Macmillan/St. Martin's Press, 2000). Her publications encompass work on Islamism, women, civil society, decentralization, and local politics and can be found in *Comparative Politics*, *Comparative Political Studies*, *International Journal for Middle East Studies*, *Mediterranean Politics*, and *Ethnopolitics*, among other journals and books. She currently is serving as editor-in-chief of *Middle East Law and Governance* and is working on a project examining LGBTIQ+ activism in the MENA region.

ISHAC DIWAN

is currently a visiting professor at the School of Public Affairs, Columbia University. His main affiliation is with the Paris School of Economics in France as the Paris Sciences et Lettres research chair on the Middle East. Diwan's recent books include *A Political Economy of the Middle East* (coauthored with Melani Cammett, Westview Press, 2015), which analyzes the interplay of economic, political, and social factors in economic and social development in the region. His edited book, *Understanding the Political Economy of the Arab Uprisings* (World Scientific, 2014), reassesses the interests, potential, and constraints of the various socioeconomic players and their importance in the building of an environment for democratic progress in the Middle East. His current research interests focus on political economy issues in the Middle East and include a focus on the study of crony capitalism and of opinion surveys. Diwan is directing the Economic and Political Transformation program of the Economic Research Forum, and he is a fellow at Harvard University Middle East Initiative.

MINE EDER,

author of the chapter on Turkey, is professor of political science and international relations at Boğaziçi University in Istanbul, Turkey. Her work explores different dimensions of Turkey's political economy, including regionalism, welfare reform, poverty, informality, and migrant incorporation. Her most recent study

focuses on various aspects of urban transformation in Istanbul, analyzing dynamics of gentrification, contested urban encounters, and challenges of living together. Her research has been published in journals such as *Political Geography*, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *Middle Eastern Studies*, and *Middle East Law and Governance*.

MICHAEL GASPER,

author of “The Making of the Modern Middle East” chapter, teaches at Occidental College in Los Angeles, California. He coedited, with Michael Bonine and Abbas Amanat, *Is There a Middle East? The Evolution of a Geopolitical Concept* (Stanford University Press, 2011) and is the author of *The Power of Representation: Publics, Peasants, and Islam in Egypt* (Stanford University Press, 2009). He is finishing a manuscript, *Rethinking Secularism and Sectarianism in the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1991)*. He has recently begun a new project on the history and legacy of Ottoman legal practice from the eighteenth century tentatively titled “Post-Ottomanism and Rethinking the Modern Middle East.”

MICHAEL HERB,

author of the chapter on the lower Gulf states, is professor of political science at Georgia State University and serves as department chair. His work focuses on Gulf politics, monarchism, and the resource curse. He is the author of *The Wages of Oil: Parliaments and Economic Development in Kuwait and the UAE* (Cornell University Press, 2014) and *All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution, and Democracy in the Middle Eastern Monarchies* (SUNY, 1999). He has twice won Fulbright awards to study in Kuwait.

RAYMOND HINNEBUSCH,

author of the chapter on Syria, is professor of international relations and Middle East politics at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland and is director of the Centre for Syrian Studies. Among his publications on Syria are *Authoritarian*

Power and State Formation in Baathist Syria: Army, Party, and Peasant (Westview Press, 1990), *The Syrian-Iranian Alliance: Middle Powers in a Penetrated Regional System* (with Anoushiravan Ehteshami, Routledge, 1997), *Syria: Revolution from Above* (Routledge, 2001), *Syria: From Reform to Revolt* (coedited with Tina Zintl, Syracuse University Press, 2013), and *The Syrian Uprising: Domestic Origins and Early Trajectory* (coedited with Omar Imady, Routledge, 2018).

LINA KHATIB,

is Head of the Middle East/North Africa Programme at Chatham House.

ROBERT LEE,

coauthor of the chapter on religion, is professor of political science at Colorado College, where he has taught courses in comparative politics and international relations since 1971. He is the author of *Overcoming Tradition and Modernity: The Search for Islamic Authenticity* (Westview, 1997) and *Religion and Politics in the Middle East* (Westview, 2009).

MARC LYNCH,

author of the chapter on international relations, is professor of political science at the Elliott school of International Affairs at George Washington University. He is author of *Voices of the New Arab Public* (Columbia University Press, 2006), *The Arab Uprising* (Public Affairs, 2012), and *The New Arab Wars* (Public Affairs, 2016). He is also director of the Project on Middle East Political Science, contributing editor for the *Washington Post's* Monkey Cage political science blog, and a nonresident senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

DRISS MAGHRAOUI,

coauthor of the chapter on Morocco, is associate professor of history and international relations with the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane, Morocco. He is the coeditor of "Reforms in the Arab World: The Experience of Morocco" (*Mediterranean Politics*) and the editor

of *Revisiting the Colonial Past in Morocco* (Routledge, 2013). His most recent publications include “Searching for Normalization: The Party of Justice and Development in Morocco” in Chernov and Mecham’s *Strategies and Behavior of Islamist Political Parties: Comparative Lessons from Asia and the Middle East* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), “The Moroccan ‘Effort de Guerre’ in the Second World War” in Byfield’s *Africa and The Second World War* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), “Obedience, Civil Resistance, and Dispersed Solidarities” in *Civil Resistance in the Arab Spring: Triumphs and Disasters* edited by Roberts, Willis, McCarthy, and Ash (Oxford University Press, 2016), and “The Multiple Dimensions of Freedom of Worship and Apostasy” in *Islam and Human Rights* (edited by Geneive Abdo for The Atlantic Council, 2017).

TAREK MASOUD,

author of the chapter on Egypt, is the Sultan of Oman Professor of International Relations at Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government. He is the author of *Counting Islam: Religion, Class, and Elections in Egypt* (Cambridge University Press, 2014) and coauthor of *The Arab Spring: Pathways of Repression and Reform* (with Jason Brownlee and Andrew Reynolds, Oxford University Press, 2015).

VALENTINE M. MOGHADAM,

author of the chapter on social change in the Middle East, is professor of sociology and international affairs at Northeastern University. Born in Tehran, she previously taught at Purdue University and Illinois State University and was a staff member at UNESCO and at the United Nations University’s WIDER Institute in Helsinki. Her recent publications include *Globalization and Social Movements: Islamism, Feminism, and the Global Justice Movement* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2009, 2013) and *Globalizing Women: Gender, Globalization, and Transnational Feminist Networks* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), which won the American Political Science

Association's Victoria Schuck Award in 2006 for best book on women and politics. The third edition of *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East* (Lynne Rienner) appeared in late 2013.

JACOB MUNDY,

author of the chapter of Libya, is an associate professor of peace and conflict studies at Colgate University, where he also contributes to the program in Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies. His research examines the intersection of armed conflicts and global politics in North Africa. He has conducted field research in Algeria, Libya, Morocco, and Western Sahara, and he was a Fulbright Professor in Tunisia during the 2018 to 2019 academic year. His book *Libya* was published by Polity Press in 2018.

ROBERT P. PARKS,

coauthor of the chapter on Tunisia, is a political scientist and the founding director of the Centre d'Études Maghrébines en Algérie in Oran, Algeria. His research has been published in *The Middle East Journal*, *The Arab Reform Bulletin*, *The Journal of North African Studies*, and *The Middle East Report*, and he contributed to *The Politics of Islamic Finance* (Edinburgh UP, 2004), *The Arab Spring* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), and *The Middle East* (CQ Press, 2016). With James McDougall, he is coeditor of *Global and Local in Algeria and Morocco: The World, the State and the Village* (Routledge, 2015) and is currently writing a book on state-building processes in Algeria and Tunisia, examined from the bottom-up.

SARAH G. PHILLIPS,

author of the chapter on Yemen, is an associate professor in the Department of Government and International Relations at The University of Sydney. Her research is based on years of fieldwork in the Arabian Peninsula and Horn of Africa, and she offers a critical perspective on security and development, with a particular focus on external intervention and nonstate

governance. Her publications include *When There Was No Aid: War and Peace in Somaliland* (forthcoming; Cornell University Press, 2020), *Yemen and Politics of Permanent Crisis* (Adelphi Paper Series, 2011), and *Yemen's Democracy Experiment in Regional Perspective* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

PAUL SALEM,

author of the chapter on Lebanon, is president of The Middle East Institute in Washington, DC. Salem is the author and editor of a number of books and reports, including *From Chaos to Cooperation: Toward Regional Order in the Middle East* (ed. with Ross Harrison, MEI, 2017), *Broken Orders: The Causes and Consequences of the Arab Uprisings* (in Arabic, Dar Annahar, 2013), *Bitter Legacy: Ideology and Politics in the Arab World* (Syracuse UP, 1994), *Conflict Resolution in the Arab World* (ed., AUB, 1997), *Administrative Decentralization in Lebanon* (ed. with Antoine Messara, in Arabic, LCPS, 1996), and *Parliamentary Elections in Postwar Lebanon* (ed. with Farid el-Khazen, in Arabic, Dar Annahar, 1993). Prior to joining MEI, Salem was the founding director of the Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut (2006–2013), the director of the Fares Foundation (1989–1999), and the founding director of the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (1989–1999).

ALAA TARTIR,

coauthor of the chapter on Palestine, is a research associate at the Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding (CCDP) and a visiting fellow at the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (IHEID) in Geneva, Switzerland. He is also a policy and program advisor at Al-Shabaka: The Palestinian Policy Network and a visiting professor at Paris School of International Affairs (PSIA), Sciences Po. Among other positions, Tartir was a postdoctoral fellow at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP), a visiting scholar and lecturer at Utrecht University, and a researcher in international development studies at the London School of Economics and

Political Science (LSE), where he earned his PhD. Tartir is the coeditor of *Palestine and Rule of Power: Local Dissent vs. International Governance* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019). He can be followed on Twitter (@alaatartir), and his publications can be accessed at www.alaatartir.com.

MARK TESSLER,

author of the chapter on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, is Samuel J. Eldersveld Collegiate Professor of political science at the University of Michigan, where from 2005 to 2013 he also served as vice provost for international affairs. Tessler is the author or coauthor of sixteen books and more than 150 scholarly articles dealing with the Middle East and North Africa, including the award-winning *History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Indiana University Press, 2009), upon which his chapter draws. He is one of the few US scholars to have attended university and lived for extended periods in both the Arab world and Israel. Among Tessler's other books are *Public Opinion in the Middle East: Survey Research and the Political Orientations of Ordinary Citizens* (Indiana University Press, 2011) and *Islam and Politics in the Middle East: Explaining the Views of Ordinary Citizens* (Indiana University Press, 2015). Tessler is also principal investigator of the Arab Barometer Survey project, which was established in 2006 and through five waves has carried out 49 surveys in fifteen countries and conducted face-to-face interviews with more than sixty thousand men and women. His recent work on political Islam has been supported by a Carnegie Scholar award.

SALOUA ZERHOUNI,

coauthor of the chapter on Morocco, is a professor at Mohammed V University in Rabat, where she was vice dean for scientific research and cooperation. She has taught in several universities and *grandes écoles*, such as the University of Michigan in the United States and Sciences Po Bordeaux in France. Between 2001 and 2003, she worked as an associate researcher at the German Institute for International and Security

Affairs in Berlin (SWP), where she contributed to a study on “Elite Change in the Arab World.” Previously, as part of a Fulbright scholarship, she was visiting researcher at Georgetown University. Zerhouni has publications on Moroccan elites, democratization and its limits, the Moroccan parliament, elections, Islamist parties, and youth and political participation. She is coeditor with Ellen Lust-Okar of *Political Participation in the Middle East* (Lynne Rienner, 2008). Saloua Zerhouni is a cofounder and currently the president of the Moroccan think-tank Rabat Social Studies Institute (RSSI).

Foreword

Lina Khatib Head of the Middle East and North Africa Programme, Chatham House

Perhaps no other region in the world has commanded throughout its history the attention that the Middle East has. Many scholars criticise the Western-centric title by which the region is referred to, on the basis that “Middle” references the region’s geographical proximity to Europe. Developments during the Middle East’s modern history and into the present have given the word *middle* a new meaning, as the Middle East has indeed become the center of global attention.

This attention is unfortunately not always driven by positive developments. The Middle East is one of the most tumultuous regions in the world, with ongoing conflicts and a succession of wars throughout its contemporary history. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict dominated just over half of the twentieth century and continues to grind on, while civil wars appear to ebb and flow in countries across the region, from Lebanon to Libya to Sudan. Cross-regional wars have also been common, from the Iran-Iraq war to Israel’s invasion of Lebanon and Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait.

But the Middle East is also the site of conflicts that transcend neat characterizations of “civil war,” “regional war,” or “international conflict.” The war in Yemen in the second decade of the twenty-first century began as a domestic conflict between Houthi rebels and the Yemeni government and quickly escalated to a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran with American, British, and Emirati backing for Saudi Arabia’s campaign. The Libyan conflict that has run parallel to the Yemen conflict is a mixture of intra-Libyan rivalries between different political and armed groups and regional ambitions for countries like UAE and Egypt, who have given military support for their Libyan allies on the ground. The conflict in Iraq that began with

the US-led invasion in 2003 continues to plague the country as it struggles with postwar stabilization.

The Syrian conflict is perhaps the most complex of these hybrid wars, being at once a civil war, a regional conflict with involvement from Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Israel, and the Lebanese Hizballah, as well as an international conflict, as Western countries not only supported the Syrian opposition against the ruling regime of Bashar al-Asad but also engaged directly in the fight against the so-called Islamic State terrorist organization that emerged at the height of the conflict. Syria also became the playground for the standoff between the United States and Russia as each country backed an opposing side in the conflict.

These examples highlight how even though the mention of the Middle East may invoke the notion of conflict, the situation in the region is far from a simple fight between good and evil or between governments and insurgents. Conflicts in the region are driven by the political and geo-economic interests of both domestic and external actors as well as by the effects of longstanding authoritarianism and are often characterized by pragmatism rather than ideology. Countries may be aligned over one issue but fighting bitterly over another, armed groups frequently change their alliances in their pursuit of power, and people sometimes have to toe the line of whoever is more powerful for the sake of mere survival, which masks deep-held social, economic, and political grievances.

And here is where a volume such as this becomes not just valuable, but essential. It is too easy to imagine that the Middle East is fated to perpetual conflict. But while violence is what usually makes it into the news and what takes center stage in public debate, it masks a region with diverse peoples and much richness in culture and history along with sociopolitical nuances that deserve careful attention if one is to deeply understand this fascinating region.

The Arab uprisings of 2011, for example, did not emerge from nothing. They were the result of decades of oppression by authoritarian leaders that led to a wide gap between the haves and

have-nots. Although most of the uprisings did not result in democratization, their story is far from over. Those who dismiss the Arab Spring as a false alarm on the basis that the Middle East is an “exception” in world politics and destined to enduring authoritarianism fail to see that what appears to be stability under dictatorships hides deep-held grievances by citizens and efforts at popular mobilization and resistance even under the most oppressive of regimes.

This volume goes a long way in taking the reader on a deep dive into the region, its history, social dynamics, and political nuances. It does so both thematically as well as through case studies of individual countries. As such, it both highlights issues that cut across different countries in the Middle East and unpacks the distinct features of various countries. This is important because no two countries in the region are identical even if they appear to share similarities, such as having tribal social systems or multiple ethnic and sectarian groups.

Readers of this volume are therefore invited to examine the Middle East from multiple perspectives that challenge oversimplification and reductionism. A key strength of the book is that it is rich in both data and analysis, with chapters written by scholars who know the region intimately and can bring out its nuances in a way that is accessible even to those who do not have a background in studying the Middle East. Another strength of the book is that it succeeds in presenting the Middle East through exploring not only the roles of ruling elites and international actors but also those of its people. The book showcases the universalism of the aspirations of the people in the region and the diversity of its societies. It is only by acknowledging the Middle East’s richness that the problematic notion of “Middle East exceptionalism” can be challenged. This book is a solid step in that direction.

Introduction

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) remains a region at once united and diverse. The upheavals that began in 2010 reflected the intricate connections between peoples and states of the MENA region. Uprisings in Tunisia that led President Ben Ali to flee the country in January 2011 rippled across the region. Citizens from Egypt to Oman, seeing Tunisia's events as a cue that they, too, could overthrow long-standing authoritarian leaders, took to the streets. Results varied. Leaders in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen were overthrown; Libya, Syria, and Yemen deteriorated into civil war; while incumbents in Algeria, Morocco, Jordan, and the Gulf remained entrenched. Far from isolated incidents, each of these changes impacted and was impacted by neighbors near and far. Refugees fled, placing new burdens on countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq, and Tunisia, as well as the West; transnational radical movements expanded, challenging the very existence of states in Iraq and Syria; and money and resources flowed from one country to another in attempts to influence the region's dynamics. A region long associated with Islam, Israel, oil, and authoritarianism came to be associated with revolution, civil war, refugees, and radical extremism, but it remained a region united, despite its diversity.

The diversity of the MENA region existed before the uprisings began in 2010, and it will continue to do so long after as well. The region is vast, spanning from Morocco in the west, through the countries of North Africa, to Turkey in the north, and to Iran and the Arabian Peninsula in the east. And it contains a range of historical, political, and social factors that both unite the people within it and make each country distinct and complex.

The fifteenth edition of *The Middle East* explores these uniting and distinguishing factors. It introduces readers to the MENA in its domestic, regional, and international contexts, examining the

societies and politics of the region and the challenges facing the people living there. It asks how the trajectories of these countries have differed and the factors that have driven divergent trajectories of social and economic development, politics, and regional and international relations across the region.

The chapters in the book's Overview section introduce readers to the key forces that shape the region—its common history, the types of institutions and governing arrangements at play, the role of religion, avenues citizens use to make demands on the state, societal changes, political economy, and regional and international relations among states. The sixteen country profile chapters that follow give readers a detailed look at each of the region's countries, examining the particular effects of those same forces in a specific country.

The chapter authors collectively bring a wealth of experience and perspectives to the analysis of the Middle East and North Africa today. They include political scientists, anthropologists, historians, and sociologists drawn from Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, the United States, and Australia. Each of their chapters provides a comprehensive, accessible, and balanced look at the region. Readers who are encountering the field for the first time can come away with a strong sense of the factors that connect it as well as an appreciation for the enormous diversity across the region, while more seasoned students of the Middle East can benefit significantly from the insights and expertise offered here. To fully appreciate the range of insights and information contained in the fifteenth edition, and to orient readers to the coverage of the book, we briefly consider the themes discussed in the pages that follow and then turn to a more detailed look at this edition's organization and features.

Overview of Themes

The volume opens by exploring how the historical experiences and identities that tie countries of the region together began centuries ago. As Michael Gasper explains in [Chapter 1](#), the spread of Islam after its emergence during the seventh century in present-day Saudi Arabia was accompanied by the spread of the Arabic language and the development of an Arab identity. It also led to the establishment of a series of Islamic empires. These took various shapes and influenced the peoples living across this vast region differently, but they nevertheless helped to create a common historical experience that influences the region today.

By the twentieth century, the Middle East and North Africa was increasingly engaging the West. The most important factor driving European interest in the Middle East during this period was geography. Located between Europe and today's India and China, the Middle East became a particularly important passageway for Europeans trading with the East after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 linked the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea, creating a direct sea route between Europe and Asia and eliminating the need to circle Africa. In addition, the Middle East (and the Ottoman Empire that ruled much of the area in the late nineteenth century) became increasingly important as a buffer zone between French, British, and the growing Russian power. In short, the region was strategically important long before the discovery of oil and establishment of Israel, two factors many cite as driving the West's interest in the region today.

The establishment of Israel as a Jewish state in 1948 also impacted the region. In [Chapter 2](#), Mark Tessler shows that, instead of a centuries-old and inevitable conflict, the process of establishing modern-day Israel and the ensuing Arab-Israeli conflict was a late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century phenomenon, driven by both international forces and domestic actors. The existence of Israel has

attracted international attention, created a nexus of conflict in the region, and exacerbated domestic political tensions, particularly in neighboring states. Domestic social structures and the political forces of states within the region have combined to yield very different reactions to, and engagements with, the Jewish state, but it also served to draw the region together in shared struggles, if not always common cause.

Thus, the development of the Middle East was driven in part by relation to the West. Indeed, *Middle East* is a Eurocentric term. The term arose around the turn of the twentieth century, as Europeans stepped up their economic and political interests and interventions in the region, and was used to designate the region east of Europe and midway to the Far East. The fact that we call the region the “Middle East”—and that those within the region have largely adopted this label—demonstrates both the extent to which a common identity has been established over the centuries and the indelible influence that outside forces, and particularly the West, have had on the region. However, although historical experience and strategic location between East and West have shaped the Middle East, they have done so in different ways, in different places, and at different times across the region.

The diverse historical, social, and economic influences contribute to a range of political regimes and citizen engagement that is also more varied than often supposed. In [Chapter 3](#), we see that although weak states, authoritarian regimes, and ineffective institutions have hindered development in the region, there is important variation in the region’s states, regimes, and institutions. This was true before the uprisings in 2011. Then, the tendency to characterize the Middle East as a bastion of authoritarianism overlooked democratic competition in Israel, Lebanon, Turkey, and the Palestinian Authority; ignored the broad array of political arrangements even among authoritarian regimes; and missed variation in the strength of MENA states—that is, their ability to accomplish state goals. The diversity became even more apparent after 2010, as some regimes weathered the storm, while others transitioned peacefully and still

others fell into civil war. These patterns of change brought into stark relief important differences in state strength; the role of political regimes, especially that of monarchies and dominant-party regimes; and various institutions, such as the media, military, and political parties.

Regimes also differ significantly in the ways in which they incorporate religion. Asked to describe people of the Middle East and North Africa, many focus on Arab Muslim culture. The majority of inhabitants of MENA are indeed Muslim, but the majority of the world's Muslims does not live in the Middle East.¹ In fact Egypt, the country with the largest Muslim population in the Middle East, is only the fifth-largest country with a predominantly Muslim society in the world today. Moreover, while societies of most countries in the region are predominantly Muslim, they are not uniformly so. The Middle East is the birthplace of the three major monotheistic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—and adherents of all three religions (and others as well) continue to live there. Even among Muslims in the region, there are intense doctrinal differences, as well as in the ways religion and politics intertwine. The dominant distinction is between Shiite and Sunni Muslims, but the picture is complicated by important theological distinctions within each sect, combined with varied practices of Islam that emerged as Islam spread across the region, arrived at different times, and met different cultures. In short, Muslims in MENA societies practice Islam in very different ways, hold competing notions of how Islam should be incorporated into the state, and live in states that incorporate Islam to greater and lesser extents into their regimes. Moreover, as Lee and Ben Shitrit skillfully demonstrate, the variation among adherents, and the role of religion in politics, is not limited to Muslims in the Middle East. Jewish populations are equally diverse, and the role of different religious schools on politics is as important in Israel as in the states with predominantly Muslim societies. There is a great deal of variation in how religion is incorporated into politics. That is true both from its use as an ideology and tool for mobilizing opposition forces and in its use by incumbent regimes to maintain order and stability.

Understanding the nature of states and institutions, and the incorporation of religion in politics, provides a basis for examining public opinion and participation in the region. The level and nature of political participation depends on citizens' interests and demands and on their ability to make themselves heard. In [Chapter 5](#), Janine Clark shows how public opinion has changed, in part, after the Arab uprisings. Many remain critical of their countries' conditions, and particularly economic hardships, but they are also sanguine about the prospects for democracy. They remain engaged, in part facilitated by changes in technology, such as the spread of satellite television, Internet, and cellular telephones. The new media, which arose prior to 2011, provided not only spaces of communication and interaction but also the means to shape the political identities and promote mobilization and real-world action, particularly among the youth. But in the face of authoritarianism, weak institutions, and political constraints, they often mobilize outside of formal political institutions.

The social movements and mobilization described in [Chapter 5](#) both reflect and contribute to societal changes. Perhaps one of the most misleading aspects of how the MENA is conventionally portrayed is in its tendency to portray societies as static and timelessly bound to traditional roles—think images of Arabs in long flowing robes and riding camels through the desert (à la scenes from the film *Lawrence of Arabia*) or of women covered head to toe in black and quietly serving tea. Such accounts are seriously misleading. Although many Middle Easterners are Arabs, the region is also home to peoples from a wide range of ethnic and linguistic identities; Arabs, Turks, and Persians—the major groups in the region—live alongside Azeris, Turkmen, and Amazighs, to name only a few. Moreover, if given the opportunity to visit the region, one finds not only spectacular deserts but also beautiful beaches, towering mountains, lush woodlands, and fruitful plains; small towns and open spaces but also sprawling metropolises and high-rise apartments; and people in traditional dress drinking tea at home but also men and women fashionably dressed, working in advanced medicine, with high tech and other “modern” fields.

As Valentine M. Moghadam explores in [Chapter 6](#), MENA societies have experienced major changes both in the provision of such services as health and education and also in changing norms and values regarding gender roles, human rights, and the role of religion in politics. In some cases, this has resulted in significant legal changes. As Driss Maghraoui and Saloua Zerhouni explain, in Morocco the mobilization of the women's movement combined with the will of the monarchy to create a new family code that enhanced the status of women in 2003; and as Hesham Al Awadi shows, in Kuwait the monarchy responded to long-standing appeals by women for greater political incorporation, leading to the expansion of political rights in 2005. Even in Saudi Arabia, a kingdom perhaps most intensely stereotyped as being conservative, Dina Al Sowayel describes the major social and political changes afoot. Change is often uneven—with some members in societies adapting new mechanisms, changing attitudes and opinions, and pressing for greater social change than others. But it is also widespread across the region.

The region's economies are no more static and homogenous than its societies. There is a tendency to characterize MENA economies as oil dependent and traditional. Melani Cammett and Ishac Diwan's discussion of the region's political economy in [Chapter 7](#) shows that neither of these assumptions is true. Countries in the region vary tremendously in their degree of oil dependency. Some states, including not only those in the Gulf but also Algeria, Iran, Iraq, and Libya, are highly oil dependent, and oil stimulates the migration of unemployed workers and the distribution of remittances from nonoil states in the region as well. This has both economic and political impacts. But it is not the whole story. The states in the region differ significantly in their level of industrialization, their economic policies, and the resultant patterns of human development. Even among oil-dependent countries, there is enormous variation. Studies comparing the Persian Gulf states, Algeria, Libya, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia demonstrate how different the political arrangements and resultant dynamics can be, even among oil-dependent countries. Cammett and Diwan provide a theoretical framework that helps students make

sense of the diversity across the region. The chapter also draws attention to the fact that the presence of oil does not imply stagnation. Indeed, the oil-rich states in the Gulf have seen striking innovation in areas such as architecture and education, and across the region, there have been dramatic changes in the nature of integration in the global economy, the degree of state intervention in the market, and the economic conditions of the individuals living there.

Finally, while the region's strategic location—including the establishment of Israel and the presence of oil—have shaped the Middle East, they have not impacted all societies and countries equally. As Lihi Ben Shitrit highlights, some of the changing relations with neighboring states drive, and are driven by, changes in Israeli society and politics over time. Although it is not a state, the same can be said of the Palestinian Authority; Alaa Tartir and Benoît Challand remind us that not only has the conflict affected Palestinians, but their internal social and political dynamics have structured their engagement with Israel, surrounding states, and the international forces. Palestinians, too, have agency. Similarly, a closer look at Israel's closest neighbors—Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria—reveals enormous diversity in their relations with Israel. Perhaps most notably, Jordan and Egypt have established peace treaties with Israel (albeit creating a rather cold peace), while the Syrian and Lebanese conflicts continue. Laurie A. Brand's discussion of Jordan, however, demonstrates that the impact of Israel's establishment on the societies and politics of its neighboring states can be complex. The 1948 Arab-Israeli war led not only to the opportunity for King Abdallah to expand his Hashemite kingdom but also to the influx of Palestinian refugees, which created fissures in Jordanian society and challenged the monarchy. Indeed, until today, the socioeconomic development and political stability of Jordan remain intricately connected to Palestinian-Israeli relations across the Jordan River.

Moreover, as Marc Lynch shows in [Chapter 8](#), the MENA witnessed significant changes in its regional and international relations. States

in the region are generally enjoying greater bargaining power vis-à-vis the West in bi- and multipolar eras (most notably during the cold war and presently) than unipolar eras (such as that which immediately followed the cold war). Syria provides a case in point. As Raymond Hinnebusch argues, President Hafiz al-Asad's choices to join the US-led coalition against Iraq in the 1990 to 1991 war and then join the Madrid peace talks aimed at solving the Arab-Israeli conflict were largely pragmatic ones. He understood that with the end of the cold war and the loss of his country's powerful backer, the Soviet Union, he faced new constraints and opportunities, and he shifted Syrian foreign policy in response to them. As the United States found itself embroiled in the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, losing ground to Russia and China, Syria's ability to counter US demands once again rose. Indeed, as President Bashar al-Asad faced escalating conflict and international pressure in 2011 to 2012, it was the reemerging bipolar environment and resistance from China and Russia that stymied Western efforts to intervene.

Importantly, although many view the region as constantly embroiled in conflict, conflict is neither constant nor uniformly present across the region. Marc Lynch argues in [Chapter 8](#) that although the region has seen conflict, it has not been particularly war prone. Interstate wars are relatively rare, and those that existed have until recently been centered primarily around two axes: the Arab-Israeli conflict and Iraq. These axes of conflict have, at times, expanded to include a number of peripheral actors, and, indeed, the Lebanese civil war can be seen in part as playing out the Arab-Israeli conflict on Lebanese soil. Generally, however, conflict has been localized, centered on the Levant. Given the regional identity that binds the region together, the resolution of the conflicts—particularly the Palestinian-Israeli conflict—is often seen as a broader Middle Eastern enterprise. As the power structure of regional politics has shifted over time, the leading forces in this enterprise have also changed. Nevertheless, contrary to the notion of a conflict-ridden Middle East, much of the region has remained relatively peaceful.

In short, the Middle East is a diverse, vibrant, changing region, which poses challenges and opportunities not only for the international system but, of course, for the peoples living there. Indeed, this is perhaps never before as true as it is today, when citizens across the region renegotiate their relations with the state, doing so in the midst of changing regional and international relations. Understanding the forces at play is critical for those attempting to make sense of this region in flux.

Looked at closely, we find that most of the conventional wisdom that Westerners hold about the region has some basis in fact: The historical experiences of the rise of Islam and the interaction with the West have left a lasting legacy on the region; societies are largely Arab Muslim; the majority of states in the region are ruled by authoritarian regimes with restricted room for political participation; and regional and international relations are shaped by the region's strategic location, the presence of Israel, and oil.

Yet the reality is also much more complex: The historical influences of Islam and interaction with the West were varied and sometimes left contradictory legacies across the region; the development of predominantly Arab Muslim societies took place over time and through interaction with diverse local cultures, leaving societies that are best understood as a patchwork of ethnicities, religions, and traditions; ruling regimes, their political economies, and citizens' engagement in politics take a variety of forms; and far from a region engaged in endless conflict fueled by oil, the Middle East is better understood as relatively stable, with sets of conflicts by which states are variously affected and in which they differentially engage. Understanding the complexity of the region is the first step to recognizing the conditions for people living there, assessing the challenges and opportunities they face, and formulating effective policies.

Organization and Key Features of the Book

This new edition draws on and retains the strengths of *The Middle East* that have set previous editions apart from other treatments of the region. It continues to provide a wealth of information on regional trends and country studies, giving students and policymakers both theoretically important and policy-relevant insights into the region. Like earlier editions, this volume is also divided into two parts. The first, the Overview section, provides readers thematic overviews of the Middle East that introduce them to major issues that inform studies of the region, including the general trends, important exceptions, and a review of theoretical approaches and concepts. The second, the Profiles section, presents comprehensive studies of individual countries.

The fifteenth edition of *The Middle East* is significantly revised. Thematically, it maintains the eight chapters provided in the fourteenth edition. However, the order of the chapters is significantly changed in an effort to improve the flow of the material. The country studies in the Profiles section continue to be structured to fit closely to the thematic chapters in the Overview section, with each covering the history of state formation, societal transformations, religion and politics, political economy, domestic institutions, political participation, domestic conflict, and regional and international relations. Across the volume, chapters have been streamlined in an order to make the book less daunting to students.

The book maintains pedagogical features aimed at enhancing readers' appreciation of both the continuity and diversity within the Middle East. The symmetry between the Overview and Profiles sections is designed to lend flexibility to instructors. Readers can turn to specific sections of country chapters to gain a deeper understanding of the issues, and teachers can easily assign country profiles to supplement reading on thematic issues. Maps, figures,

tables, and boxes help readers easily digest a wealth of information. The book begins with a full-color map on the inside front cover showing the region's geography, supplemented by additional maps in the chapter openers of each country profile that remind readers of where the country fits within the broader Middle East. The twenty-eight maps in the Overview and Profile chapters provide critical information about the boundaries, resources, and other features of each country. Finally, this edition includes twenty-four photographs, some of which have been taken by contributing authors. The photographs reinforce key points in the chapters and provide insight into the politics and society of these states. The volume encourages readers to pursue further study. Both thematic chapters and country studies are supplemented by reference notes as well as authors' suggestions for further reading.

In short, the goal of this volume is to give readers an entry point into understanding a vibrant, exciting region: the Middle East. The material provided is aimed at making information accessible while encouraging further study. The hope is that a better understanding of this vitally important region will not only help readers comprehend more fully the world around them but also recognize and formulate policies that can more successfully engage the Middle East. A wealth of information from a variety of sources—the hallmark of *The Middle East* series retained in this edition—is a first step in this direction.

Note

1. According to the Pew Charitable Trust, only about 20 percent of the world's Muslims live in the Middle East and North Africa; see Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "Mapping the Global Muslim Population" (October 2009), [http://pewforum.org/Muslim/Mapping-the-Global-Muslim-Population\(2\).aspx](http://pewforum.org/Muslim/Mapping-the-Global-Muslim-Population(2).aspx).

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Part I Overview

1 The Making of the Modern Middle East

Michael Gasper

The Modern Middle East emerged out of a variety of social, cultural, and political transformations. The degree of changes differed from place to place, but they left distinct historical experiences, social structures, cultural norms, and political tensions in common across the region we call “the Middle East.” The early experiences of the region, combined with its nineteenth- and twentieth-century encounters with the West—that led the region to be labeled the Middle East—created a sense of identification across the region.

Elements of this common identity date back to the spread of Islam in the seventh century ce. Islam spread remarkably quickly in the early period, establishing large empires, converting populations to Islam, and spreading Arabic language and culture.¹ The Abbasid, Umayyad, and later the Ottoman, Safavid, and Qajar empires extended across a vast territory, stretching from North Africa to the Gulf. These empires established a memory of “greatness,” a time of Islamic empires that rivaled the West.

By the eighteenth century, the two major political entities in the Middle East, the Ottoman Empire (centered in what is today the Republic of Turkey) and Safavid/Qajar Persia (centered in what is today the Islamic Republic of Iran), enjoyed relative strength and security. The Ottoman Empire was a vast multiethnic, multilingual, and multireligious polity that at its peak stretched from central Europe all the way to Yemen and across North Africa to Morocco. It compared favorably with the expanse of the Roman Empire at its height. The Safavid/Qajar domains stretched from the Caucasus to what is today Afghanistan, and they too hosted a myriad of different ethnicities and religions.

The nineteenth century saw a number of challenges to Ottoman and Qajar power. The resulting pressures convinced the Ottomans and to a lesser degree the Iranian Qajars to undertake substantial political and economic reform during the course of the nineteenth century. These reforms were accompanied by cultural and religious modernization movements that generated new intellectual and ideological perspectives for the people of the region.

In the twentieth century, World War I (1914–1918) was a cataclysmic event in the Middle East. It resulted in a redrawing of the map of the entire area and laid the foundation for a series of rivalries and conflicts that reverberate up until the present day. Anticolonialism, nationalism, and the rise of the United States and the Soviet Union as superpowers after World War II added new dimensions to these questions. Finally, the increasing importance of the politics and economics of oil and the regional role of the states that produce it emerged as a major question in the last decades of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first.

The Ottoman and Safavid Empires

The Ottomans

The infamous Mongol invasion of 1258 ce completely disrupted the political and social worlds of the Middle East. The Ottoman Empire emerged out of the wholesale changes and dislocations wrought by this event. Based in Istanbul, the Empire became a major world power and ruled over much of the Middle East for centuries. The Ottomans descended from Turkish-speaking Muslim tribes that fled the Mongol invaders between 1100 and 1300 CE. Osman I, head of a tribe known for its horsemanship and martial culture, established the Ottoman dynasty around 1300 in the northwestern corner of Anatolia (the central plateau of modern Turkey) on the frontier with the Byzantine Empire. The word *Ottoman* is derived from his name.

By the beginning of the sixteenth century, Osman's descendants had built an empire that stretched from western Asia to North Africa to southeast Europe. Ottoman armies in 1529 and again in 1683 laid siege to the Habsburg capital of Vienna. They controlled much of the Middle East and the Balkans as well as vast areas around the Black Sea until the beginning of the twentieth century. The Ottoman state did not control its vast territory through force alone. Indeed, one of the most remarkable features of Ottoman rule was its ability to insert itself into local power dynamics to achieve a measure of security and stability.² In the Balkans, for example, the Ottomans ended the dominance of feudal lords and limited the growth of church lands. Both moves proved very popular within the majority Eastern Orthodox Christian communities that detested their former Habsburg and Hungarian Catholic rulers.

The Ottoman sultans built a large standing army that successfully dampened the threat of fragmentation, a constant problem in large, premodern, military patronage empires. The janissaries (from the Turkish *yeniçeri*, or new soldier), or infantry force, were a professional, full-time force that wore distinctive uniforms and were paid even during peacetime. Initially, the janissaries consisted of Christian boys enslaved at a young age through a system called the

devshirme (*devşirme*). The Ottoman sultans adopted this system early in the history of the empire to prevent the emergence of rivals from among the Turkish noble and warrior classes. The *devshirme* levy was imposed every four years on non-Muslims in the Balkans. Each locality provided a certain number of boys who were taken from their families, converted to Islam, and trained to serve the Ottoman state—theoretically, absolutely loyal to the sultan. Those with greater intellectual abilities staffed the large bureaucracy throughout the empire, reaching the highest offices in the state. Thus, slavery represented an odd form of upward mobility for the rural poor of the Balkans. Much of the administration and military of the Ottoman Empire was made up of slaves, or Mamluks, of the sultan. They were, in fact, a privileged caste who could profit handsomely from their position in the state hierarchy. Taken from their villages and educated far away, they were theoretically cut off from their families. In practice, however, they often maintained links to their families and found ways to advance their relatives' interests.

Map 1.1 The Expansion of the Ottoman Empire



In addition to a large standing army, the Ottoman military was also innovative in its use of firearms. The Ottoman infantry and cavalry units became legendary for their effective use of gunpowder weapons (such as muskets and cannons) in the conquest of

Constantinople in 1453. The Ottomans became the first successful “gunpowder empire”; the Safavids of Persia and the Mughals of India soon followed suit. In an effort to project this power and authority, the Ottomans developed a predilection for architectural grandness. They built stunning mosques and other magnificent edifices throughout their realm, and visitors to Istanbul still marvel at the splendid monuments built by Ottoman architects.

Photo 1.1 Süleymaniye Mosque



Enes Yidrm/Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

The Safavids

To the east, another state grew into a rival of Ottomans. The Safavid Empire had its roots in the Azerbaijan region of Iran, and its rulers, like the Ottomans, were of Turkic descent. The king, Shah Ismail I, who reigned until 1524, established the Safavid dynasty in 1501 with his capital in Tabriz, and he declared himself the shah of Iran. The Safavids spread from Azerbaijan to unite the lands of Persia for the first time in nearly a thousand years. The borders that Ismail eventually established still define Iran today. To undermine the power of elite Turkic clans, Shah Ismail I established a Persian-speaking bureaucracy and built a conscript slave army made up of peoples from the Caucasus. In contrast to the Ottomans, Shah Ismail made Islam a centerpiece of his authority, declaring that the shah was the shadow of God on earth. Importantly, he decreed that Shi'i Islam would become the state religion, and the central place of Shi'ism in Safavid Iran generated an enduring identification with Shi'ism in Iran. Ismail compelled all of his subjects to embrace Shi'i Islam and abandon Sunni Islam. Sunni clerics were given the choice to convert or face exile or death. In contrast to the Ottoman religious authorities, who were incorporated into the state structure, the *ulema* achieved more independence in Safavid (and later Qajar) Iran. In Shi'i Persia the religious establishment grew into a formidable and separate center of power and remained so until the Iranian Revolution of 1979, after which they became the main power brokers in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The Shi'i identity of Iran and its imperial ambitions were sources of tension with the Sunni Ottoman sultans. The Safavids and the Ottomans were in a constant state of cold and hot war throughout the period. Indeed, the presence of this ambitious and expansionist Shi'i regime on its eastern frontier drove Ottoman conquerors south into the Arab heartlands of the Middle East rather than eastward into Persia and central Asia. The animosity and rivalry between the Ottomans and Persians lasted until well into the Qajar period in the middle of the nineteenth century.

In the late sixteenth century, reacting to a series of military defeats at the hands of the Ottomans, Shah Abbas I (reigned 1587–1629) undertook a number of reforms to reinvigorate the Safavid state. He rebuilt a large standing army of slave conscripts and adopted the use of gunpowder weapons. Abbas I also rebuilt the state bureaucracy in an effort to increase tax revenues to pay for these military reforms. The new army, organized with the idea of matching the strength of the Ottoman janissaries, enabled Abbas to secure the frontiers and to recover territories the Safavids had lost. For a time, he won control over parts of Iraq, Afghanistan, Armenia, and eastern Turkey. Abbas helped finance his army, a reenergized bureaucracy, and a new capital by facilitating commercial relationships between European merchants and local Armenians. Commodities such as carpets and other textiles as well as porcelain found their way to the markets around Europe.

The reign of Abbas I in the first two decades of the seventeenth century was the high point of Safavid power. A lack of leadership and resolve among the later shahs left the Safavid Empire without an effective army and with a weak central government by the end of the seventeenth century. The Safavid state soon collapsed, and more than a hundred years passed before the Qajar dynasty united Iran under one government again.

Photo 1.2 Safavid manuscript. Detail from illustration of Gayumars and his court from the *Shāhnamah* (Book of Kings) by Firdawsī. Sixteenth century (British Museum).



The British Library/GRANGER

Ottoman Society

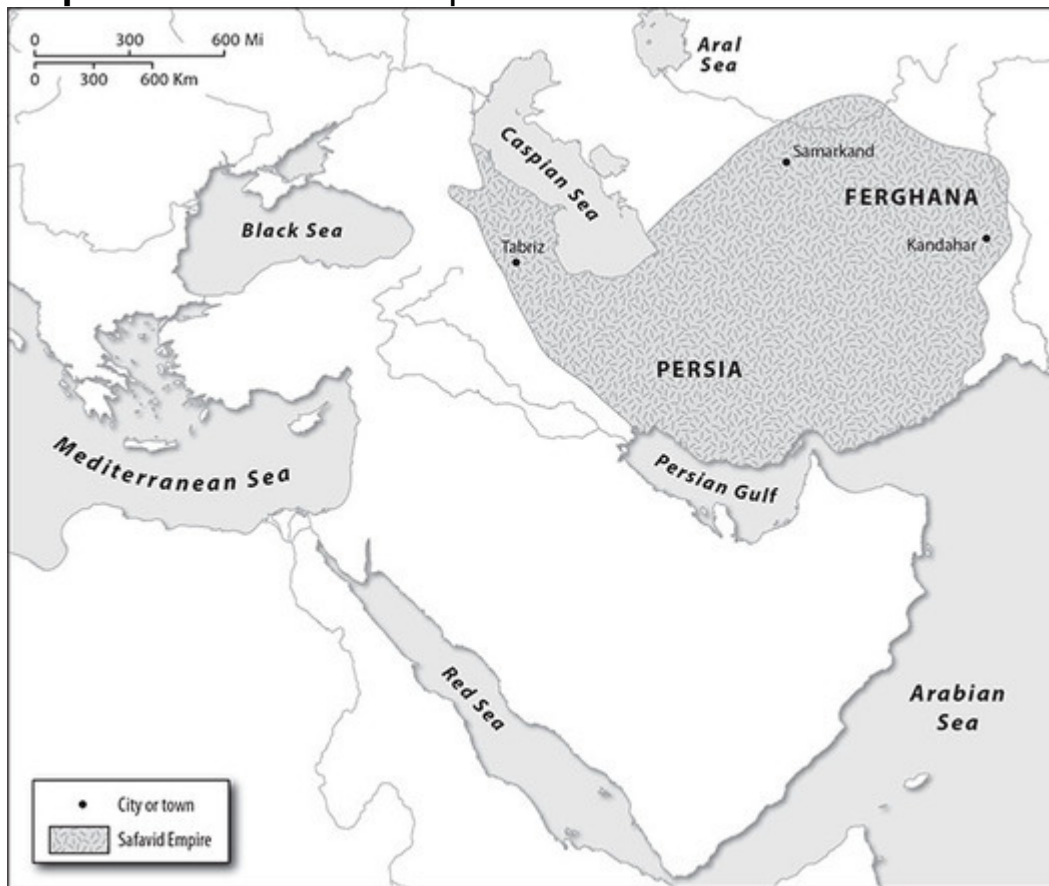
Ottoman society varied a great deal across both its vast expanse and its six centuries of existence. Thus, this section should be read as merely an approximation of how Ottoman society functioned. Nevertheless, one can identify broad patterns of sociopolitical interaction that continue to impact the region today.

Until the 1820s, the multiethnic, multireligious Ottoman society was organized hierarchically on a system of social and legal differentiation based on communal religious identity, with the largest group, Sunni Muslims, at the tip of the pyramid. The guiding social-legal principle of premodern and early modern Ottoman society was that of administration based on a universally recognized hierarchy of identities rather than the modern notion of equality among citizens.³ There were no citizens as such; there were only Ottoman subjects of the sultan. The modern notion that the general population would have duties, responsibilities, and rights as well as an obligation to share in governance through voting, jury duty, or other tasks was not understood at the time. The idea of universal citizenship and equality came to the Middle East in the late nineteenth century. Nevertheless, this social pyramid was flexible to the extent that non-Muslims often achieved preeminent positions both in the state structure and in commerce. The Phanariot Greeks of Istanbul, for example, supplied the empire with translators and diplomats and consequently enjoyed great prestige.⁴

In theory (especially in the late centuries of Ottoman rule), the social-legal structure of the Empire was roughly organized by *millet* (pronounced mil-lét). A *millet* was a religious group officially recognized by the Ottoman authorities and granted a degree of communal autonomy. The leader of the *millet* reported directly to the sultan, who appointed him after consultation with the *millet's* leading personalities. Each *millet* could use its own language, establish charitable and social institutions, collect taxes for the imperial treasury, and operate its own religious courts.⁵ The competency of

such courts extended to personal status (marriage, inheritance, family relations) and sumptuary laws (laws that regulated dress, public comportment, and preparation of food, among other behaviors). State courts adjudicated in areas of public security, crime, and other areas not covered by religious law. These courts applied Ottoman legislation or *qanun* in their rulings. In practice, therefore, a series of local religious courts with no relationship to one another oversaw the daily life routines of individuals and families, while another court system acted as the arbiter of the general society.

Map 1.2 The Safavid Empire



Gender relations were patriarchal but also based on a notion of complementarity. Certain tasks, such as economic production, were the purview of men, and other areas, such as child rearing and the management of the household, were women's responsibility. This general outline varied according to social class and communal

identity. For example, gender roles tended to be more flexible among the poor than among the ruling elite. Urban women worked in markets and textile workshops, while rural women worked in the fields alongside the males of the family. Women also tended animals and saw to the affairs of the household when men were conscripted into military service or drafted into levies to repair or construct agricultural canals and roads.

In urban society, public life—that is, life outside of the home—was divided along gender lines. To a great extent, social space was largely homosocial; in other words, people of the same gender socialized together. Strict separation of the sexes was thought to be the best way of maintaining the moral and social order. Gender separation led to misunderstanding on the part of some Western travelers about the notion of the harem. Some wrongly believed that women were locked away in a harem, and the image of women imprisoned in a luxurious golden cage persists in the popular imagination to this day. Some wealthy urban households did make efforts to seclude the family's women, but the fact is that this sort of lifestyle was unknown among the vast majority of the population. The harem was merely the part of a large house or villa open only to immediate family members. Social life with people from outside the family was conducted in more public sitting rooms. Of course, almost no one in Ottoman society possessed the financial wherewithal to live in such a home; for all intents and purposes, the idea was unknown to the general population. This began to change in the nineteenth century with the emergence of new middle classes. While historians sometimes argue that this class was more “Westernized” than the traditional Ottoman elite, many of its members imitated some of the old guard's cultural practices; as a consequence, the practice of seclusion became more, not less, widespread with the proliferation of Western education and tastes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁶

Society was arranged hierarchically, with each stratum undertaking tasks thought to be essential for the maintenance of society. Many trades were organized into guilds in order to ensure proper taxation

as well as to regulate competition and quality of work. Carpenters, tanners, smiths, peasants, sharecroppers, servants, and even those working in sex trades (such as dancers and prostitutes) were understood to be engaged in trades like any other. In some places, prostitutes were organized into guilds similar to those in other lines of work.

In a political and social sense, society consisted of rulers and ruled. The ruling caste comprised the leaders of the military, the chief bureaucrats, and the religious authorities or the *ulema*. Despite the social hierarchies, markets and coffeehouses were open to people of all classes. Residents in a particular quarter of a city or in a smaller town's central market gathered to conduct business and to socialize. Markets and the coffeehouses usually located near them were places where traveling merchants and others would discuss news and developments from other regions. Coffeehouses were also sites of relaxation, socializing, and entertainment. The Ottoman authorities understood the potential for political agitation in markets and coffeehouses, and they placed informants in them to keep them apprised of what was discussed.⁷

Changing Contexts

The Challenge of the West

Even as the Ottomans lay siege to the Habsburg capital of Vienna in 1683, the center of power in the West had already shifted from the Mediterranean to the North Atlantic. Benefiting from the vast riches of the New World, technological advances, and increasing economic output, ascendant European powers caught up to and then surpassed the Ottomans' military might. England, France, Holland, Spain, Portugal, and soon Russia increasingly exerted economic and political pressure on the Ottoman government (or the Sublime Porte, or Porte, as it was known in the West).

The initial push was provided by the wealth brought to Europe from the Americas beginning in the sixteenth century. The huge influx of silver from South American mines set off an inflationary cycle in the Ottoman lands. As the value of silver decreased with the increase in supply, prices for the products and goods and services purchased with silver coins necessarily increased. Smuggling became a major problem as merchants sought to avoid increased customs duties and to profit from the suddenly more valuable raw materials such as Balkan lumber. These developments resulted in lower Ottoman tax receipts, major security issues, and an increase in corruption. All had a corrosive effect on the state.

The so-called Capitulations treaties that date from the sixteenth century were a testament to Ottoman strength that vanished so quickly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Ottoman rulers sought to encourage foreign merchants' activities in the Ottoman domains, and thus, these treaties offered favorable conditions to European merchants doing business in Ottoman lands. Consular courts set up by the various embassies adjudicated cases between European merchants who were exempt from Ottoman laws. This legal immunity meant that these foreign merchants essentially paid no taxes. Initially, the treaties enabled the empire to obtain goods and maintain a positive relationship with other European states. As the balance of power shifted away from the Ottomans, however,

these concerns paled in comparison to the depredation caused by the treaties. Europeans flooded local markets with finished goods, devastating the Ottoman merchant class. Adjusting to these changed circumstances, local merchants began to acquire foreign citizenship in order to enjoy the advantages of the Capitulations. In doing so, many became local agents of foreign trading houses. In addition, the Europeans used these treaties and the economic power they provided to exert political pressure on the Porte, the government of the Ottoman Empire.

The question of the treatment of minorities in the Ottoman Empire was another tactic that European powers used to bring pressure on the Porte. In claiming that minorities were denied equal rights, European critics ignored the fact that there was no notion of rights in Ottoman law for any subjects of the sultan. This did not stop the major European powers from asserting that they would “protect” a particular group from discrimination and persecution. Orthodox Christians and Armenians became the patrons of Russia, and the French and Austrians looked after the interests of Catholics, while the British sponsored the Greeks in their war of independence in the 1820s and later declared Ottoman Protestants and then Jews to be under British protection.

With economic and political pressure mounting, the Ottoman Empire suffered through a long period of crisis that began at the end of the eighteenth century. The newly ascendant Russian Empire defeated the sultan’s armies on several occasions beginning in 1774, and the Ottomans were forced to cede large amounts of territory around the Black Sea. The French invaded and occupied the Ottoman province of Egypt in 1798. Egypt’s Mamluk rulers had become increasingly remote from the Porte over the course of the eighteenth century, but they continued to send tribute to Istanbul up until the time of the French campaign. Meanwhile, the Balkans became restive with the rise of Greek and Serbian nationalist movements. The Serbs achieved de facto independence in 1817, and the Greeks gained independence with British help in 1830. Finally, the French conquered and annexed the province of Algeria in 1830.

Napoleon's Invasion of Egypt and Reaction

In 1798, Napoleon Bonaparte landed a French expeditionary force of twenty-five thousand troops on the northern coast of Egypt.

Napoleon hoped to cut British supply lines to India. He also viewed the conquest of Egypt in historical terms, seeing himself as a new Alexander the Great. Along with his army, Napoleon brought a group of experts, or *savants*, who were tasked with studying Egypt's people, history, and archaeology and thereby to provide assistance to the French occupiers. At the outset of the occupation, these savants tried to establish legitimacy for French rule by claiming the French had arrived merely to remove Ottoman oppression. They also tried to camouflage the fact that Egypt's new rulers were non-Muslims. They posted notices in appallingly bad Arabic around Cairo not only informing the populace that the French meant them no harm but also implying that Napoleon was a Muslim.⁸ These notices and other attempts by the French to legitimate their rule failed.

Consequently, despite quick victories over the antiquated tactics and weaponry of the Mamluk cavalry, the French never succeeded in stabilizing their rule throughout much of the country. The British and the Ottomans organized a military campaign to dislodge the French. British ships transported Ottoman troops to Egypt, and this, combined with popular resistance, convinced the French to sue for peace. They departed Egypt in 1801 leaving little trace of their brief occupation.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the main question for the Great Powers was no longer how to defend themselves against Ottoman expansion; instead, it was how to deal with an Ottoman Empire that was not keeping up with its neighbors' growing strength. This was the "Eastern Question" that dominated European international relations for more than a hundred years until the end of World War I. Any change of status of the Ottoman Empire was seen as almost inevitably benefiting the interests of one European state over the interests of another, potentially upsetting the carefully maintained balance of power. Thus, those seeking to change the status quo, in

particular the Russians, did their utmost to undermine the Ottoman state. Meanwhile, those invested in the status quo, in particular Britain and Hapsburg Austria, supported the sultan whenever convenient.

Egypt: Mehmet Ali

An indirect consequence of the French campaign in Egypt was the emergence of Mehmet Ali (in Arabic, Muhammad Ali). Mehmet came to Egypt as part of the Ottoman force sent to battle the French. Within a few years, this ambitious Mamluk officer from Albania had established himself as the de facto ruler of Egypt. Through a combination of political skill and ruthlessness, Mehmet Ali consolidated his position in Egypt and established a ruling dynasty that would endure until 1952. He then set about building a strong, centralized state by bringing tax collection and other functions under his direct control. Wanting to expand from Egypt, Mehmet built a formidable military machine with its own industrial base. He also established modern schools, sent promising students abroad to complete their studies, and brought in foreign advisers and experts to train military officers and to teach at new scientific and technical institutes.

He paid for these elaborate reforms by setting up agricultural monopolies. The Egyptian government essentially became the only merchant in the entire country licensed to buy and sell agricultural commodities. Mehmet Ali compelled peasants to grow export crops and sell them to his government at low prices. In 1820, he introduced the cultivation of long-staple cotton. Egypt soon became famous for high-quality cotton that English mills bought up in large amounts. The immense wealth this created provided Mehmet Ali the necessary capital to build the Egyptian state and his army. The Egyptian government also undertook a number of steps to increase agricultural production, including building major roads, irrigation canals, dams, and waterworks. Cotton cultivation proved, however, to be as much of a curse as a blessing. During the last third of the nineteenth century, Egypt's overreliance on cotton as a source of income led not only to increased hardship for its peasant producers but also to devastating financial crisis, breakdown of the state, and, ultimately, to British occupation.

In any case, Mehmet Ali's army of Egyptian conscripts conquered Sudan, the Arabian Peninsula, and then the eastern Mediterranean through Syria, and for a time, it threatened the Ottoman heartland of Anatolia and Istanbul itself. It seemed as though Egypt might even supplant the Ottoman Empire as the major power in the East. However, just as they had done against Napoleon in 1801, the British (with Austrian help) came to the Ottomans' rescue and confronted the Albanian's Egyptian army in 1840. Mehmet Ali was forced not only to withdraw from Syria but also to accept the Treaty of London of 1840 that included the British-Ottoman Commercial Convention forbidding monopolies in the Ottoman Empire. The treaty deprived him of the ability to raise the enormous sums of capital that had funded his reforms, and it also limited the Egyptian army to 18,000 troops from its previous 130,000. In return for Mehmet Ali's withdrawal from Syria and signing this treaty that effectively put an end to his short-lived mini empire, the sultan declared Mehmet Ali's family the hereditary rulers of Egypt. Indeed, Mehmet Ali's heirs remained in power until the 1952 military coup led by Gamal Abdel Nasser.

The Tanzimat Reforms

From at least the end of the eighteenth century, Ottoman rulers recognized that drastic administrative and organizational changes in the empire were necessary. However, stubborn resistance from entrenched interests hobbled the first steps toward change. For example, the janissaries, once the heart of the Ottoman army, had become less a military force and more a political lobby in Istanbul. Their military effectiveness declined precipitously after the end of the seventeenth century. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, they were completely outside of the sultan's control and more interested in pursuing the good life than in protecting the empire's borders. In 1808, Sultan Selim III paid with his life when he attempted to abolish the janissaries; however, his son and successor, Mahmud II, planned carefully for years and successfully disbanded the janissaries in 1826.

Any resistance to change that existed in Ottoman ruling circles disappeared with the shock caused by Mehmet Ali's march to the doorsteps of Istanbul.⁹ No one in a position of authority could now doubt the imperative of fundamental change. Mahmud II's successor, Abdülmecid I (Abd al-Majid I), introduced a series of major reforms that came to be called the Tanzimat (Reorganization). What had once been a strength of Ottoman administration and governance—its practice of making allowances for local custom and tradition—had become a major liability. The Ottomans' Western European rivals ruled over states with relatively centralized, uniform administrative regimes that promoted a single economic policy. The Ottoman Empire's propensity toward local autonomy, in contrast, handicapped efforts to formulate coherent economic strategies across the entire realm. It was abundantly clear to Abdülmecid I, his successor Abdülaziz I (Abd al-Aziz I), and even more so to their advisers such as Mehmet Fuad Pasha, Mustafa Reshid Pasha, Ahmed Shefik Mithat Pasha, and Mehmet Emin Ali Pasha that this situation needed to be rectified.

Historians term the sort of reform strategy the Ottomans undertook as *defensive developmentalism*.¹⁰ Ottoman rulers attempted to modernize the state by centralizing power in order to maintain their position and to stave off revolutionary change. They wanted to reproduce the modern, efficient European state model in the Ottoman Empire. This would enable them to manage and tax their population more efficiently and in turn provide the necessary capital to undertake ambitious reforms. The Ottoman reform program bore some resemblance to that of Mehmet Ali's in Egypt. Like their rebellious Egyptian governor, the Ottoman sultans aimed to improve security, concentrate power in the central government, build a more stable economic base, and guarantee sufficient income for government coffers to pay for their development plans. Unlike Mehmet Ali, however, who had brought his reform program to a fairly homogeneous population living in a contiguous geographic area, the Ottoman reformers faced the much more onerous task of trying to implement fundamental change across a multilingual and multiethnic empire that spanned three continents.

The question of security was paramount to the reformers as corruption and porous borders weakened the economic foundation of the empire. They tackled this complex problem with administrative reforms and by rebuilding the armed forces and upgrading the empire's communication and transportation infrastructure. They built vast road, railroad, and telegraph networks that crisscrossed the empire. These improvements enabled Istanbul to act quickly to quell disturbances and to confront internal challengers to the Ottoman center. This, in combination with more professionalized and efficient policing throughout the empire, led to increased security, making it possible for the state to extend its writ to outlying areas such as Syria and Palestine, which had often suffered from raiding and general lawlessness.

A rationalized and modernized bureaucracy required qualified and educated officials; thus, the Ottomans expended a great deal of effort to modernize education. They established new kinds of primary and secondary schools throughout the empire. In Istanbul, they

opened a modern university, as well as medical, veterinary, and engineering schools. They also established an institute to train the bureaucrats who were to implement the Tanzimat reforms. The Ottomans also created modern military academies for infantry and naval officers and other technical schools for munitions experts, engineers, and military doctors.

Legal reform represented another priority for the Tanzimat reformers. They took a number of steps to rationalize the complicated and multilayered Ottoman legal system. For example, the Ottoman Land Code of 1858 and Land Registration Law of 1859 codified, standardized, and modernized land ownership rules that varied widely from place to place throughout the empire. Reformers then introduced a modified French civil code that restricted the brief of Islamic law. These moves brought the Ottoman legal regime in line with those operating in Western Europe. The hope was that these steps would help Ottoman merchants compete with their European competitors. Unfortunately, legal reform also made it easier for European merchants to do business locally. It did nothing to stem the tide of European finished goods pouring in; nor did it change the fact that the Ottoman Empire was merely a source of raw materials for Western European manufacturers. All of this deepened the Ottoman's marginal economic position in the emergent global economy.

The scale of the reforms was staggering and extremely expensive. To fund the Tanzimat, the sultans took out a series of loans beginning in 1854. Given the vast sums required and the relatively limited ways the Ottomans could raise the funds necessary to meet their obligations, it is hardly surprising that the Porte soon found itself in dire financial straits, and by the mid-1870s, bankruptcy loomed. In 1881, European creditors forced the Sultan into accepting a financial oversight body called the Ottoman Public Debt Commission made up of representatives of British, French, Dutch, and other nations' bondholders, and it had extraordinary power to use tax payments to reimburse foreign investors. With the debt commission, the Ottoman

Empire essentially ceded control of its finances to Western Europeans.

Legal Reform and Ottomanism

Legal reform had far-reaching consequences beyond the economic sphere. With the Hatt-i Hümayun decree of 1856 and the Nationality Law of 1869, the Ottomans undertook one of the most sweeping social and legal reforms of the Tanzimat period. They completely restructured the *millet* system and its multiple status hierarchies and, in its place, inaugurated a form of modern proto-citizenship. All individuals were accorded the same legal status regardless of religious identity. This step raised new questions of collective belonging and identity. How would the Ottomans replace the multiple sectarian identities of the past with a single modern form of identity? Did the diverse peoples of the Ottoman lands comprise a single people? One response to these questions was through the promotion of a kind of proto-nationalism called *Osmanlılık* (Ottomanism) that stressed that all citizens were equal members of the same political community and bound together by a common allegiance to the state. This notion of universal political community was supposed to transcend religious and regional identity. One early twentieth-century reformer put it this way:

Henceforth we are all brothers. There are no longer Bulgars, Greeks, Romanians, Jews, Muslims; under the same blue sky we are all equal, we glory in being Ottomans.¹¹

Equality did not prove to be very popular. Equality politicized difference in ways that had not been seen before. This was true among Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Some Muslims, especially among the elite, felt they were losing privileges justified by their status as the majority of the population. At the same time, some Christians objected to the new definition of equality and proto-citizenship because of the duties it imposed upon them—in particular, military conscription. Indeed, conscription was so

unpopular that the Ottoman authorities eventually permitted Christians to buy their way out of military service. This concession then created great resentment among Muslims, who were not granted this right. Equality and a universal legal definition of the individual in effect created the idea of a “minority.” Instead of a discrete community with its own hierarchy and therefore its own privileged elites, all members of the seventeen recognized *millet*s became part of the larger pool of Ottoman citizens. This new status deprived the well-connected within each *millet* of their privileged position; moreover, the Christian population in general became a minority within a predominantly Muslim empire. The relationship of Christians to the state was changed as their former collective autonomy was replaced by the individual’s direct relationship to the state. Influence in these changed circumstances no longer depended solely on status within an identity group; now it depended on numbers. In this new legal world, even elites had to gather sufficient numbers for the state to take notice. Popular appeal to sectarian and national identity in order to mobilize large groups of people replaced the older, more “polite” form of the politics of notables.¹²

The new legal regime left almost everyone dissatisfied. The Ottoman world became politicized in ways it had not been before.¹³ This led to the emergence of political tensions that plagued the empire during its final decades and led to its final dissolution after World War I. The irony is that measures intended to promote equality resulted in sharpened divisions between Christians and Muslims and others. These divisions then fed latent nationalist tendencies, which were in turn fomented by the empire’s enemies in Moscow, Vienna, and elsewhere.

The End of the Tanzimat

The last of the Tanzimat reforms was the promulgation of the first Ottoman constitution in 1876 and the election of the first Ottoman parliament in 1877. A new sultan, Abdülhamid II (Abdul Hamid II), ascended to the throne in August 1876. Many assumed that he was another liberal reformer. But dismayed at what he saw as the dissolution of the empire, Abdülhamid II suspended the constitution, dismissed or pushed aside the reformers, and reversed the devolution of the sultan's absolute power to other state institutions. Yet, even as he reversed some of the political reforms, he continued other aspects of the Tanzimat, such as the modernization of the communication and transportation infrastructure and educational reform.¹⁴

Abdülhamid II became well known for emphasizing the Islamic character of the Ottoman Empire and using the title of caliph rather than sultan. Beginning in the sixteenth century, the Ottomans had claimed descent from the family of the Prophet, but this had been generally viewed as a convenience and hardly taken seriously by the sultans themselves or anyone else for centuries. Abdülhamid II's focus on the Islamic character of the Ottoman Empire thus was not a turn back to the past but rather a completely new departure. The importance he accorded the Islamic aspects of Ottoman identity contrasted with what he saw as creeping Western influence and interference in Ottoman lands. He was convinced that the political reforms of the Tanzimat era had only aggravated these problems.

Abdülhamid II's Islamic Ottomanism potentially appealed to Muslims whose communal identity was no longer validated by the now-revamped *millet* system. Indeed, nascent forms of pan-Islamic thought were already circulating in intellectual circles around the Muslim world. With Britain, France, Holland, and Russia ruling over so much of the world's Muslim population, thinkers throughout the Muslim lands argued that political unity was the only way to resist further domination. Aware of this, Abdülhamid II hoped to capitalize

on this idea in his efforts to build support for his besieged regime. Perhaps an indication of the success of his efforts was the fact that his reign is associated with a dramatic expansion of the secret police and the use of informants and spies to keep tabs on the public. Likewise, his government suppressed dissidents such as Arab nationalists with great vigor, but Abdülhamid II reserved the harshest treatment for Armenians who were perceived as a “fifth column” that might ally with the rival Russians to the north. Consequently, Armenians faced moments of extreme state-sanctioned violence in the mid-1890s and once again in 1909.[15](#)

Reforms in Qajar Persia

Qajar Persia, like the Ottoman Empire, gradually succumbed to the pressure of the Great Powers. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Qajar state was in disarray. The shah had little direct authority outside of the capital, Tehran. The Qajars relied on farmed-out tax collection to various fief holders and ruled not through a central administration or through coercion but rather through the shah's balancing tribal, clan, and ethnic factions against one another. To offset the power of the Shi'i *ulema*, the Qajars created genealogies that linked them to Shi'i imams, presented themselves as the protectors of Shi'i Islam, and made very public shows of their piety and support for shrines in Mashhad and Samarra. Nevertheless, as was the case with the Ottoman Empire, the lack of central authority resulted in the growing influence of European powers, primarily the Russians in the north and the British in the south, who bypassed the shah's government altogether by signing treaties with various tribal leaders and regional notables.

The shah Nasser al-Din attempted some reforms during the nineteenth century. In 1852, he opened a school staffed mostly with teachers from France to train personnel for the military and for the bureaucracy. Beginning in the 1860s, he tried to extend his reach outside of the capital by building telegraph lines and a postal service across the country. Then in 1879, he created a new military force called the Cossack Brigade, officered by Russians. These moves did little to stem the decline of Qajar power. Indeed, at the turn of the twentieth century, most of the tribal confederations grew more autonomous and had greater military capability than the central state.

To reverse the dissolution of their authority, the Qajars, like the Ottomans, contemplated a program of defensive developmentalism. Of course, this entailed raising more revenue, but the state could not collect taxes more efficiently because it lacked both a bureaucracy and an effective military to impose its writ. Consequently, Nasser al-

Din borrowed money and sold concessions to foreigners to raise funds. In the 1870s, he began selling the rights to build a communications infrastructure (railroads, telegraph lines, roads, and dams) to European investors who would then pocket most of the proceeds. This paved the way for his successor, Mozaffar al-Din, to grant the famous D'Arcy oil concession in 1905 that surrendered much of Iran's oil wealth to the British for decades. Despite their efforts, the Qajars could not hold off the Russians and the British. Around the turn of the century, the two Great Powers essentially divided the country into two spheres of influence, with the Russians dominating in the north and the British in the south. At the same time, the state was unable to repay British and Russian loans, and a Belgian-administered financial oversight board was put in place. Economic distress caused in part by foreign economic encroachment led to growing dissatisfaction among the bazaar merchants and the *ulema*. These groups together rebelled in 1906 and forced Mozaffar al-Din to accept a constitution. However, Persia's new constitution did not solve the basic problem of a weak state. As a result, the next two decades witnessed increasing anarchy and civil war. Order was not restored until the 1920s with the emergence of Reza Khan.

European Encroachment Elsewhere in the Middle East

From the later part of the nineteenth century until World War I, the entire Middle East experienced deepening European influence and domination. Often, this involvement began with crushing debt, leading to financial crisis that Europeans took upon themselves to “resolve.” In other cases, European powers simply wanted to build colonial empires.

In Egypt during the second half of the nineteenth century, for example, Mehmet Ali’s successors undertook a number of large infrastructure projects to expand agricultural production. The most spectacular was the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. The Egyptian government secured loans from European creditors that it intended to pay off with the proceeds from expanded cotton cultivation. A spike in world cotton prices during the US Civil War (caused by the blockade of the Confederate states by the Union Army) spurred the hopes of substantial returns for cotton growers. Cotton prices soon collapsed, however, and Egypt found itself on the verge of bankruptcy. In 1876, Egypt’s European creditors took control of Egypt’s finances, and the ensuing resentment helped lead to rebellion. In 1882, an Egyptian army colonel, Ahmad Urabi, led a revolt that aimed to remove foreign influence from Egypt. The British put down the rebels in the summer of 1882 and occupied Egypt and Sudan, where British troops remained until 1952 and 1956, respectively. Beginning in 1882, British officials governed Egypt. It would not be until the 1950s that Egyptians governed their own country again.

With the exception of Morocco, Libya and the area known collectively as the Maghreb (Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco) had been part of the Ottoman order for centuries. As was often the case in much of the Ottoman periphery, the reach of Istanbul was tenuous at best. In general, these territories were ruled over by semi-independent Ottoman-appointed governors (Deys or Beys) whose

tenure depended on skillfully managing relations with different elements of elites such as tribal leaders, sufi sheikhs, and merchants in coastal cities. North Africa's population spoke Arabic and Berber (Tamazight) and was predominantly Muslim, although there were Jewish communities in a number of cities across the region.¹⁶ Merchants and craftsmen made up the urban population along the coast and in inland market towns. Tribal formations and pastoralists dominated the countryside, and sufi Islam played an important role in the organization of society and the legitimization of authority.

All of North Africa came under control of European colonial powers beginning in the first third of the nineteenth century. In 1830, after the famous "fly swatter" incident when the Ottoman ruler of Algiers, Hussein Dey, slapped the French consul, Pierre Duval, during a disagreement about French debts, the French occupied the city. Thus began a campaign of conquest that, due to determined local resistance, required forty years to complete. In 1848, France declared Algeria an integral part of France and divided it into three administrative units, or *départements*. Algeria's legal status as part of France came to a bloody end with the Algerian War of Independence in the 1950s and 1960s. Through the 1860s and 1870s, the Ottoman province of Tunisia experienced a financial and debt crisis not unlike that of Egypt. Just as in Egypt, foreign creditors came to control Tunisian finances; then, the French army occupied the country and added Tunisia to its official North African colonial portfolio in 1881 when it declared Tunisia a protectorate under the pretext that Algerian rebels used the territory for sanctuary. In Morocco, after a period of tension caused by conflicting French and German colonial ambitions and after the collapse of Morocco's finances, it too fell to European rule. The French and the Spanish (who were granted a strip of land along the Mediterranean coast) occupied and then divided Morocco into two protectorates in 1912. Italy, too, desired a foothold in North Africa, and in 1911, Italy invaded Ottoman Libya. It took two decades to subdue local resistance. The Italians finally succeeded in combining Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan (the three Ottoman provinces that made up Libya) into a single colony in the mid-1930s. Libya remained a

colonial possession of Italy until after World War II, when the United Nations declared that it should become independent.

The Ottomans lost other territories during this period; for instance, in southern Arabia, the British chipped off pieces of Yemen, such as the Aden Protectorate. The British established a line of protectorates and principalities from Kuwait to Yemen by throwing their support behind cooperative local families who, in return, they recognized as rulers of small statelets. Many of these families remain in power today. During the course of the nineteenth century, Britain installed the ruling families that currently rule Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and the principalities that came together as the United Arab Emirates in 1971.

Originally, the British saw these ruling families and the small states they controlled as a way to maintain trading privileges and to keep the shipping lanes to India free of piracy. With the discovery of oil, these small semicolonies took on more direct importance. For example, Kuwait had been merely a coastal town known for its pearl divers and fishermen. In 1913, the British forced the Ottoman government to recognize the Sabah family as the rulers of the city of Kuwait and the surrounding area. After World War I, the British declared Kuwait an independent British protectorate, controlling it until 1961. British Petroleum received a lucrative concession after oil was discovered in the emirate in 1934, and within two decades, Kuwait became one of the largest oil exporters in the region.

Cultural Renaissance: Social and Religious Reform

The reforms of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries set in train far-reaching cultural and social changes that continue to reverberate today. In building educational institutions to officer armies and staff modern bureaucracies, the Ottomans, Qajars, and others helped create a new literate stratum not associated with religious institutions. Western missionaries also contributed to this development through the schools they established during the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While Christian missionaries had little success in converting the local Muslim and Jewish populations, the schools they set up played a significant role in producing a modern, educated intelligentsia. From primary and secondary schools to modern postsecondary institutions such as the Syrian Protestant College (American University of Beirut), Robert College of Istanbul (Boğaziçi University), and then the American University in Cairo, missionary schools had a role in producing many important Middle Eastern intellectuals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The graduates of the state and missionary schools were the force behind far-reaching cultural and intellectual movements that began to crystallize during the second half of the nineteenth century. What first began as a series of critical questions blossomed into a full-fledged cultural renaissance as many in the region sought to answer how the Middle East, North Africa, and indeed most of the Muslim world came to be dominated by the Great Powers. Intellectuals began to ask questions about themselves, their societies, and their future: How did this happen? What is wrong with us? How can we change these circumstances? This questioning inaugurated an intensely creative period in the region's cultural history and was instrumental in producing many of the ideological currents later translated into the nationalist and Islamist politics of the twentieth century. Two extremely influential trends were the Arabic Nahda (or literary renaissance; there were Turkish- and Persian-language

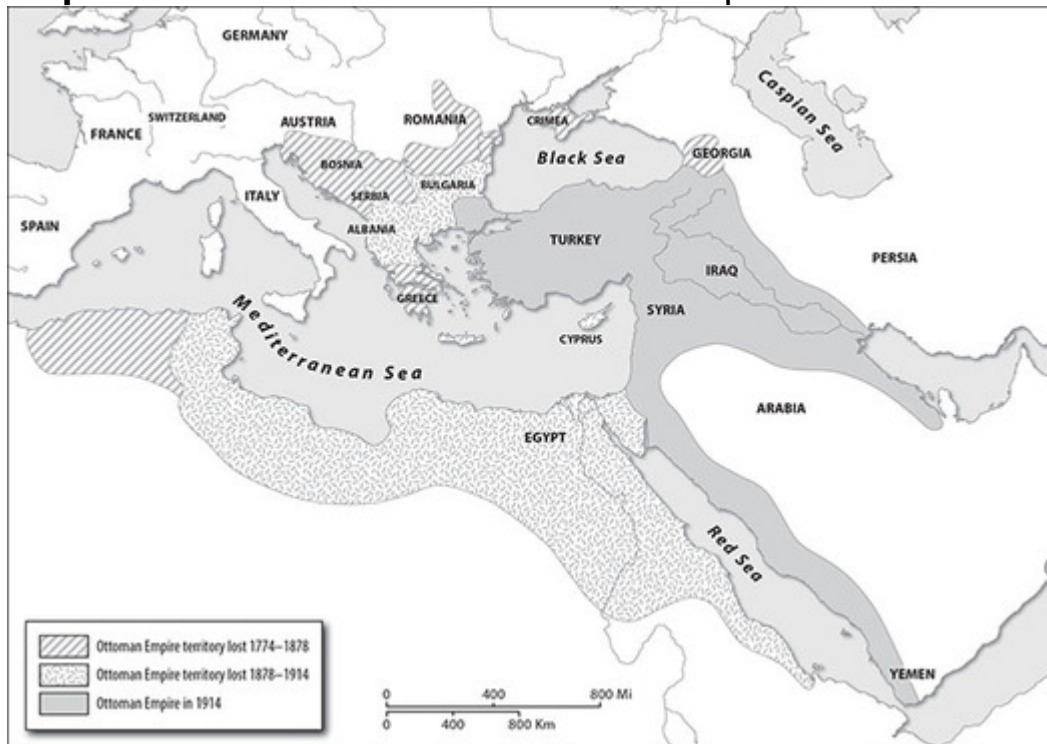
counterparts) and the Islamic Modernist or Islamic Reform movement.

The Nahda—the Arabic literary renaissance—refers to a cultural phenomenon that began around the middle of the nineteenth century and drew to a close before the middle of the twentieth century. The Nahda began as a revival movement in Arabic literature that sought to rejuvenate Arabic letters and music. Figures such as the Egyptian Rifa'a Rafi' al-Tahtawi and the Lebanese Butrus al-Bustani were leaders in the movement to modernize Arabic. Many of those associated with this literary movement also became advocates of Arab nationalism. The progression was logical. Men and women of letters such as the Lebanese May Ziade and the Egyptian Malak Hifni Nasif began their quest to revive Arabic by developing new forms of prose and poetry. This led them to study the long history of classical Arabic letters. They compared what they saw as the decline of Arabic letters with the stagnation of Arab society. It was not long before some traced this stagnation to Ottoman hegemony. These theories evolved into a political prescription: Arab society could not move forward until it threw off the yoke of "Turkish" dominance. It was no coincidence that these thoughts crystallized at a time when Abdülhamid II's government began to press Turkification of the Ottoman Empire. This nascent Arab nationalism was given a further boost after the Young Turk coup of 1908 brought an even more extreme Turko-centric leadership into power.

The emergence of the newspaper was a significant factor in the Nahda. Newspapers were an incubator of discussions and political ideas, allowing Arabic speakers from across the region to engage with one another in ways that had heretofore been impossible. One can compare the emergence of the newspaper in the Arabic-speaking world to the invention of the Internet. The first newspapers, little more than government newsletters or gazettes, appeared in the first half of the nineteenth century. By the 1880s, however, with the emergence of capitalist print culture, newspapers had become fairly widespread. A relatively large audience of voracious readers created a market for the new literary products.¹⁷ Newspapers were important

laboratories for linguistic experimentation with simplified forms of expression, grammar, and punctuation. Traditional forms of prose (such as rhyming prose) gave way to sentence structure and syntactical style more recognizable to the modern reader. But newspapers were also the primary conduit for new ideas written in this new, simplified idiom of Arabic. Newspapers helped to manifest the idea of an Arabic-speaking community, and in this sense, they helped create the idea of an Arab world that had not existed before.

Map 1.3 The Decline of the Ottoman Empire



This new forum inevitably led to new forms of solidarity across the Arab world, and it also helped fuel a vibrant culture of research and critique. This in turn led to a greater interest in a variety of questions related to culture, identity, history, and social reform. Indeed, newspapers became the preferred method by which social reformers detailed their ideas, communicated with their fellow travelers, and challenged their opponents. The newspaper was the vehicle for the sustained debate over the status of women at the turn of the century. The controversy followed the publication of Egyptian lawyer Qasim Amin's books *The Liberation of Women* (1899) and *The New*

Woman (1900). Every major newspaper and public figure weighed in on the topic.¹⁸ Qasim Amin called for the elimination of the full-face veil, the education of girls, and reform of marriage practices. For these views, some condemned him as a “Westernizer.” Reformers were sensitive to the charge made by some of their opponents that they were advocates of Westernization. Thus, important figures, especially those who were not men of religion, such as Qasim Amin, Abdallah al-Nadim, and Muhammad Kurd ‘Ali, were very careful to explain that their calls for women’s rights, education, and social and political change were aimed at reform and advancement of Muslim society and not its destruction. The Islamic reformer Rashid Rida spoke for many when he called the uncritical adoption of all things European a dangerous form of imitation that led only to cultural obliteration.

Islamic Modernism

Another important current of thought spurred by the ethos of reform and the culture of debate during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the Islamic reform movement, or the Islamic modernist movement. The influence of the luminaries of the movement, the Iranian Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, the Egyptian Muhammad Abduh, and the Syrian Rashid Rida, continues almost a century after the death of the last of them. Their writing and activism shaped a major rethinking of the practice of Islam on a scale that compares with that of the Protestant Reformation in sixteenth-century Europe. Islamic modernists reread the canon of Islamic thought in light of the changed circumstances of the modern world, the challenge of colonialism, and the cultural power of the West. The era in which they wrote was unlike any other in Islamic history. Most of the Muslim world was either colonized or dominated in other ways by the non-Muslim European states.

As was the case with social reformers, newspapers and other kinds of periodicals were the preferred technology for transmitting their ideas. Jamal al-Din al-Afghani provided financial support to a number of newspapers, and among his many devotees were some of the most prominent journalists and editors of the era. Rashid Rida studied to be a religious scholar in Syria before going to Cairo. There, he became a journalist and essayist, founding the legendary Islamic reform journal, *al-Manar*. Muhammad Abduh had a regular column in *al-Manar*, and his writing appeared often in other newspapers.

Islamic modernists were not only in conversation with other Muslims but also with the many European commentators discoursing about Islam and the state of the Muslim world. Many of these Europeans were connected to, or were supporters of, the colonial enterprise, and they thought that only through enlightened European intervention and guidance could the Muslim world emerge from what they saw as its stupor. In many cases, Islamic reformers and their

European interlocutors agreed on the diagnosis about what ailed the Muslim world. Both groups used the word *backward* to describe its general condition, and they agreed that ignorance and superstition were by-products of the intellectual isolation of Muslims. Likewise, they concurred with the suggestion that Islam was stagnant because too many Muslims mindlessly repeated what they had been taught. In addition, they both decried religious scholars at some of the major centers of Islamic learning who opposed any call for change or modernization.

European critics of Islam and Islamic modernists saw the same problems, but they differed markedly in their analyses about the source of the problems and how to overcome them. Simply put, Europeans argued that Islam was the major problem facing Muslim society, while Islamic reformers countered that Muslims were the source of society's difficulties. Indeed, Islamic reformers asserted that Islam was the solution rather than the problem: Muslim society began to decline, the reformers argued, when Muslims strayed from the true essence of Islam. They had distorted its true meaning and its simple practice, and only by returning to the faith of the first generations of Muslims, the so-called *al-salaf al-salih* (the pious ancestors), could Muslims reverse the corrosion of their civilization. Because of their emphasis on the experience of the *al-salaf al-salih*, modernists were sometimes called *salifiyun* and their movement *salafiyya*.

Islamic modernists pinned the blame for "distortions" in Islamic practice on the role played by Muslim scholars and their views on Islamic thought that supported centuries of repressive rule. They argued that these scholars were an entrenched interest group that gave more importance to loyalty and obedience to rulers than to following God's law. They had declared all major questions of Islamic law settled and advised Muslims that they needed only to imitate precedent. Islamic modernists saw this not only as a prescription for suicidal rigidity but as a violation of the basic tenets of Islamic law. Because of the history of despotism and its deleterious effects on Islamic practice, Islamic reformers became strong advocates of

representative government. Colonial domination by non-Muslims made this all the more imperative.

The cure for the illnesses of backwardness and foreign domination lay in a return to the original teachings of Islam and to the reimplementation of its simple message. They argued that Muslims must seek the answers to today's problems through the use of reason derived from the Islamic tradition. For them, there were no answers either in "blind imitation" of the past or in "blind imitation" of the West. The solutions to their problems would be found in Islam. Islamic modernism offered a dynamic picture of Islamic law and thought. For reformers, the universality of Islamic law meant that it was appropriate for every time and place and could never be "settled" because every era is unique. Muslims of every generation must seek answers in the Qur'an and other foundational texts to meet the challenges of their age. In this sense, they advocated for a methodology of Islamic rational practice rather than a specific set of rulings.

Muslims must be taught how to seek answers within Islam and not outside of it. Superstition entered Islam because Muslims had borrowed from other traditions. Reformers cited ecstatic mysticism with its "wild" chanting, self-flagellation, and saint worship as an example of this sort of dangerous syncretism. Such practices contradicted Islam's strict monotheism. Through them, Muslims appeared to be seeking the divine intercession of human, or worse, other godly figures. If Muslims learned to think rationally, they would never partake in such rituals. Consequently, education was the centerpiece of Islamic modernism. Reformers campaigned for modern education for both men and women. They asked, "How can women be expected to raise upright children if they are slaves to superstition?" They also were strong advocates for scientific and technical education, as this knowledge would help Muslims build a modern society.

Religious and social reformers had much in common. Whether in the Arab East, Egypt, or Istanbul, reformers sought to reconcile what

they saw as the positive elements of European society—scientific and technical knowledge, new economic practices, democratic political institutions, and freedom of expression—with what they believed was essential to Muslim or Eastern society. Both contained elements of cultural translation as reformers of all stripes self-consciously and unapologetically borrowed from the West, but in ways they felt most appropriate for their own societies. In so doing, they viewed themselves as taking these new forms and implanting them in an Eastern or Muslim cultural and religious context that would produce a fusion that was true to Islam and to the culture, history, and mores of the East.

The New Middle East

The Ottoman Empire in the Post-Tanzimat Period and World War I

The map of the Middle East was completely redrawn as a result of World War I. The only prewar border in the region that remained essentially unchanged was that between Iran and what became the Turkish Republic. These changes had extraordinary effects on the region's entire population, upsetting centuries of commercial, social, political, and cultural ties. The effects of these wholesale changes still reverberate nearly a century later.

The twentieth century began with the Ottoman state facing a multitude of external and internal problems, including dissent throughout the provinces and among reformers unhappy with the absolutist rule of Abdülhamid II. The reformers believed that Abdülhamid II had moved the Ottoman state backward by suspending the constitution in 1878 and by using religious rhetoric to prop up his authority. He was deposed in 1908 by a group of reformers known as the Young Turks in a revolt that started as a military insurrection in the Balkans and eventually moved to Istanbul.¹⁹ After the coup, power moved from the older Ottoman institutions to the newly formed Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) that the Young Turks established. Across the Ottoman Empire's ethnic and religious communities, groups of new leaders modeled on the Young Turks replaced the traditional leaderships. The new leaders did not possess the same allegiance to the Ottoman state and its institutions as the traditional elite. The stage was set for the rise of nationalist movements throughout the empire.

The end of the nineteenth century also saw a shift in the British attitude toward the Ottomans. Throughout the nineteenth century, Britain had viewed the empire as a strategic asset because it acted as a buffer between the Mediterranean and the Russians, whom the British viewed as their most immediate threat. The only ports the Russians could use year-round were in the Black Sea, and this required them to pass through Ottoman-controlled sea-lanes

whenever they wanted to move. Later, the rise of Germany began to concern British strategists more than the Russians. Support that Britain had given the Ottoman Empire throughout the nineteenth century no longer seemed necessary. Instead of looking for ways to preserve the Ottoman Empire, Britain now contemplated the best way to carve it up.

When the CUP government in Istanbul threw its support behind Germany and the Central Powers in World War I, the die was cast. Britain now had a green light to begin dismantling the Empire. In 1914, Britain declared the Ottoman province of Egypt a protectorate of the British Crown, independent of the Ottoman Empire for the first time in four hundred years. The British deposed the khedive, Abbas II, the Egyptian head of state, and chose the pliant Hussein Kamel from among the descendants of Mehmet Ali and gave him the title of sultan of Egypt.

After two years, the war in Europe had been fought to the bloody stalemate and wholesale slaughter of trench warfare. Worried about troubling signs of unrest in Russia, the British sought ways to keep the Russians in the war. At the outset of hostilities, the Russian military had inflicted a crushing defeat on the Ottoman army in the east. The Ottoman forces were completely wiped out not by enemy bullets but by the catastrophically inadequate supply lines set by Enver Pasha. This defeat led Enver to seek a scapegoat for his mismanaged and ill-advised plan to march through the Caucasus during the dead of winter. He accused the region's Armenians of actively supporting the Russians and, beginning in April 1915, used the crisis as an excuse to deport the entire Armenian population in eastern Anatolia. This precipitated what is now referred to as the Armenian Genocide and resulted in as many as one million deaths. Less than two years later, however, the Russians seemed to be the ones wavering. The British were convinced that they could knock the Ottomans out of the war and, by doing so, alleviate the pressure on the bogged-down Russian-led eastern front. This thinking led to the disastrous campaign on the Gallipoli Peninsula southwest of Istanbul in 1915 to 1916. After nine months of bloody fighting, the British

withdrew in ignominious defeat, and the Ottomans had their first war hero. The Ottoman commander, Mustafa Kemal, devised strategies that frustrated all attempts by the British to break out of their beachhead. Mustafa Kemal, who later became known as Atatürk, would make an even bigger name for himself after World War I as the leader of the new Turkish Republic.

Contradictory British Promises

After their defeat at Gallipoli, the British sought other ways to undermine the Ottoman Empire. British armies moved from Basra in Iraq toward Baghdad and from Cairo toward Palestine. They also responded positively to the promise of Hussein bin Ali (aka the Sharif or Guardian of Mecca) to revolt against his Ottoman overlords in exchange for British guarantees for an Arab kingdom after the war. The British were willing to support Hussein's aspirations as long as they coincided with their own strategic interests. British advisers, including Thomas Edward (T. E.) Lawrence, later known as Lawrence of Arabia, aided the rebellion. Throwing in their lot with the British would make Hussein and his three sons Faisal, Abdallah, and Ali pivotal figures in the history of the Middle East.

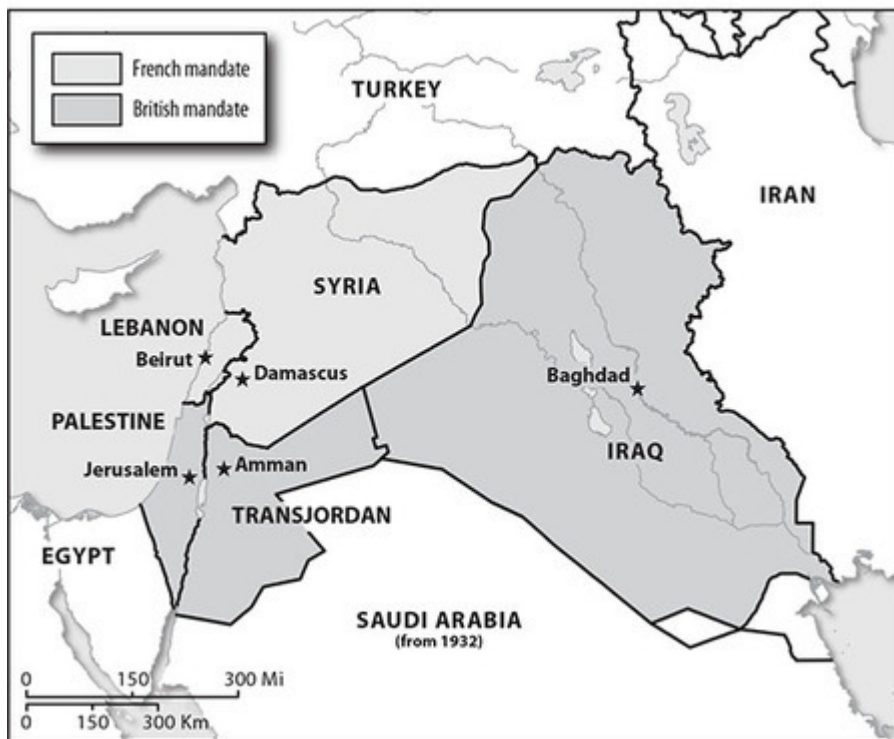
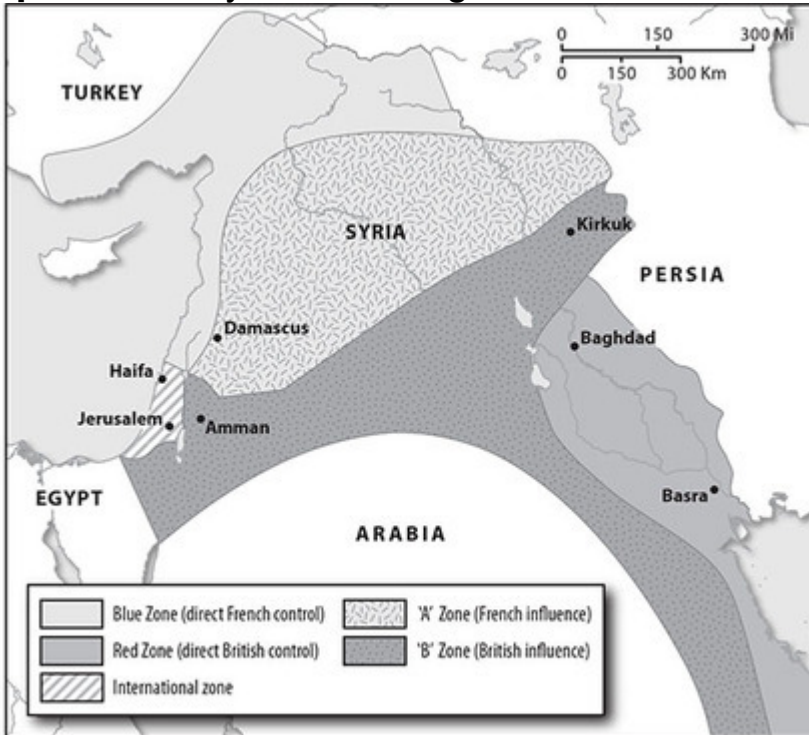
British interests in the Middle East at the time could be summarized by two words: *oil* and *India*. Oil had become a strategic asset a little more than a decade before World War I, when the Royal Navy switched from coal to oil. The British never wavered in their quest to control the oil fields of Iraq in any postwar settlement. Since the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, British strategic planning in the Mediterranean was fixated on the need to protect the supply lines to British India.

Henry McMahon, the British high commissioner in Cairo, and Sharif Hussein exchanged a series of letters in 1915 and 1916, the content of which later became a source of much trouble. Hussein understood the letters to say that the British pledged that the Arabian Peninsula and the Arab lands of the Eastern Mediterranean (except what is now Lebanon) would be granted independence as an Arab kingdom in return for Hussein organizing a rebellion against the Ottomans. McMahon, however, was intentionally vague so as not to restrict British maneuverability. The Arab Revolt nevertheless commenced soon after and was led by Hussein's son, Faisal.

In May 1916, about a month after making their pledges to Hussein, the British, French, and Russians completed other postwar settlement agreements. The Sykes-Picot Agreement violated the spirit if not the letter of the Hussein-McMahon correspondence. The French and British agreed to divide much of the Middle East between them. The British received most of Iraq and the lands of the Persian Gulf, while the French would control Syria, Lebanon, and parts of Anatolia. The fate of Palestine would be decided later through consultation with other allies and other concerned parties, including Hussein. The actual borders of the spheres of influence of the parties to the Sykes-Picot Agreement were to be delineated at a later time. In a separate agreement, Russia would realize its long-held desire to have access to the Mediterranean from the Black Sea, as the Russians gained control of Istanbul, the Bosphorus, and the Dardanelles as well as the Armenian lands to the east. However, this agreement was not honored because mounting Russian losses and the general misery of the Russian population resulted in Russia's 1917 revolution. Russia soon dropped out of the war and signed a peace treaty with the Ottomans.

If all of this were not already complicated enough, the British made one additional set of promises about how conquered Ottoman land would be divided. On November 2, 1917, an advertisement appeared in the newspaper *Times of London* that soon became a source of resentment and scorn among Britain's Arab allies in the Middle East. The Balfour Declaration, as it became known, was a note signed by Arthur James Balfour, the British foreign secretary, and addressed to the banker Lord Walter Rothschild. The simple four-line announcement pledged British support for a "national home" for the Jews in Palestine. The Balfour Declaration was the culmination of a massive lobbying campaign by the influential Polish-born chemist Chaim Weizmann. Weizmann was widely known in London's power circles, and he had an important role in British munitions production. He also had a gift for political lobbying and networking, and he convinced British politicians to regard the small Jewish nationalist movement, Zionism, as a potential British ally in the Middle East.

Map 1.4 The Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Mandates



The Balfour Declaration was a sign of British desperation. Britain was deeply troubled by the prospect of a collapse of the French

army after a mutiny in its infantry divisions. Some in Her Majesty's government even believed that if Britain seemed positively disposed toward the Zionists in Palestine, the government might convince the Jews in the Russian revolutionary government to remain in the war. The Bolsheviks not only rebuffed this idea but also made a mockery of it by releasing the details of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, the contents of which infuriated Britain's Arab allies. In the end, the French stayed in the war, and the British managed to convince Greece to join the allies by making yet another promise of postwar spoils from the carcass of the Ottoman Empire.

The End of the War and the Mandate System

The end of World War I signaled the beginning of a new era in the Middle East. The peace treaties that followed the armistice introduced a new term into the lexicon of international relations: the *mandate*. A mandate was essentially a colony by another name. It was given an international legal fig leaf by its authorization through the newly organized League of Nations. The people of mandated territories were deemed unable to “stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world.” The state designated as the “Mandatory Power” would provide “administrative advice and assistance” until the people of the mandate could “stand alone.” Just when that time would be was not specified.

The 1923 Treaty of Lausanne formalized the mandate system, and it recognized the borders of the new Turkish Republic. This ended any hope for independent Kurdish and Armenian states as part of the Great War settlement. The British received mandates in Palestine, Transjordan, and Iraq. The French, who had appended some Syrian territory to the Mount Lebanon area in 1920, creating a larger Christian-dominated entity, were granted mandatory power over Syria and over this new Greater Lebanon. The new lines drawn on the post–World War I maps of the Middle East effectively divided a contiguous area into discrete entities. These new borders disrupted commercial ties that had existed for centuries and placed restrictions on the movement of people and the flow of goods around the region. The economies of these individual mandates became increasingly oriented toward the mandatory power and away from its neighbors. The mandate system’s multiple jurisdictions replaced the central Ottoman political and legal structure throughout the Middle East.

Administering the new territories necessitated establishing individual governments and other institutions of state. New borders created an assortment of regimes and forms of local administration that imposed new kinds of responsibilities and legal sanctions on the peoples of the various mandates. As a consequence, new kinds of

loyalties and identities began to take hold among locals. While the idea of a Greater Syrian Arab nation encompassing Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine/Israel, and parts of Iraq, Turkey, and Iran continued to have a powerful hold on some, it was not long before ideological rivals in the form of Iraqi, Syrian, or Palestinian nationalism came to vie for the hearts and minds as well.[20](#)

The British and Mandate Iraq

The case of Iraq is representative. Although much of the area that became the mandate had been known as Iraq for millennia, the new entity combined three Ottoman administrative units: Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra. The population of the mandate was diverse, with a majority of Shi'i Muslim Arabs, a sizable minority of Sunni Muslim Arabs, along with Assyrian and Armenian Christians, and a large, ancient Jewish community in Baghdad. Complicating matters even more were the many ethnic groups such as Turkmen and the large number of Kurds in the north around Mosul. In addition, the experience of Iraq during late Ottoman times was such that the Tanzimat and post-Tanzimat era reforms had little effect outside of the largest cities. Iraq had been on the margins of Ottoman society, and the presence of the central government had never been very pronounced.

The establishment of the British mandate government and its powerful security forces signaled an abrupt change. The new British-run administration in Baghdad imposed its will through military force, especially by using the new technology of airpower.²¹ Local objections took a variety of forms. Arab nationalism had found fertile ground among the literate urban classes. These groups objected to the semicolonial rule implied by the mandate and sought outright independence. The lower middle classes and small merchants resented military conscription and the tax collection apparatus of the new government. Regional elites objected to the centralized power the British built in Baghdad, seeing it as a direct assault on their prerogatives. The British were oblivious to these concerns, and their heavy-handedness touched off a major rebellion in 1920 that joined together many segments of Iraqi society, including tribal confederations and urban notables. Although the rebellion was suppressed, it signaled the emergence of what later became Iraqi nationalism. In the wake of the 1920 rebellion, the British established separate legal and administrative regimes for the cities and for the countryside. In the semiautonomous Kurdish north, the British

devolved administrative and legal authority to Kurdish tribal leaders and other important figures such as sufi shaykhs in exchange for pledges of loyalty.

Britain encountered great financial difficulty in the postwar era. Therefore, the British looked for a cost-effective style of indirect rule for their new possessions. They handed the reins of state to friendly leaders who signed treaties favorable to British commercial interests and backed them with British military power. Faisal, the British-installed king of Iraq, for example, granted a seventy-five-year oil concession in 1925. In the early 1920s, the British granted a limited form of independence to Iraq, Transjordan, and Egypt. These “sovereign” states did not control their militaries, their borders, or their foreign affairs, and they granted Britain the right to maintain troops on their soil.

Britain came to depend on Sharif Hussein bin Ali and his sons to maintain its new colonies in the Middle East. At the outset, the ambitious Sharif Hussein hoped to lead an Arab kingdom himself, and he even declared himself caliph in 1924. His grand scheme did not come to fruition as his ambitions rankled the Al Saud family of Riyadh, with whom he had fought a few years earlier. In 1924, the House of Saud attacked Hussein’s British-backed kingdom of the Hejaz and forced Hussein into exile. A few years later, the Al Sauds also deposed Hussein’s third son, Ali, and incorporated the entire kingdom of the Hejaz into their territory. At that point, the British merely shifted their support from the hapless Ali to the House of Saud.

Hussein’s other sons were more fortunate. In 1920, the Syrian National Congress declared Hussein’s son Faisal king of Syria. The French, who had been promised the Syrian mandate, objected, and they deposed Faisal five months later. The British, still reeling from the Iraqi revolt of 1920, hoped Faisal could bring legitimacy to “independent” Iraq and installed him as king of Iraq in 1921. The British subsequently named Faisal’s brother Abdallah the king of Transjordan (Jordan).

Mandate Palestine and Zionism

The question of Palestine had its own unique complications and would significantly shape the region, from the early twentieth century to today. While known as Palestine during Ottoman times, the area was divided between several administrative units belonging to the province of Beirut. Muslims, Christians, and people who were later called “Palestinian Jews” (to differentiate them from European Jewish immigrants who had begun arriving around the turn of the twentieth century) populated the area. On the eve of World War I, the total population of Palestine was approximately 850,000—about 750,000 were Muslims and Christians; 85,000 were Jews; and the remainder were made up of Ottoman troops and officials and Europeans of various nationalities. A detailed examination of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is found in [Chapter 2](#), as well as in the chapters on Israel and Palestine in this volume. Given the importance of the mandate in shaping the region, however, a brief overview is in order here.

Zionism in Europe

Before we examine the Palestine mandate, it is necessary to say a few words about the background of the Zionist movement and its prewar history and presence in Palestine. Zionism is a form of Jewish nationalism, the roots of which go back to central and eastern Europe. In response to a history of oppression punctuated by periods of extreme violence, Jews of those European regions began to despair about their future. In response, increasing numbers of Jews chose to immigrate to the United States and elsewhere. Others, such as the Russian Jew Leon Pinsker, suggested in 1882 that, just as the Jews would never be accepted in eastern Europe, it was only a matter of time before every host nation would reject them. This was the predicament articulated in the so-called Jewish Question: Could Jews ever be accepted as Jews in a nation made up of non-Jews? No, responded Zionists, arguing that Jews must therefore have their own nation-state.

Zionism was very much an eastern-European phenomenon at its inception, but this changed in the last years of the nineteenth century. In 1897, Vienna-based Jewish journalist Theodor Herzl published *The Jewish State*. Through his experiences in France, Herzl had become convinced that Jews could never be safe from oppression except through the “restoration of the Jewish state.” For Herzl, a nonreligious Jew, the Jewish Question was not a religious question but a political one. For him, it was a simple formula: Jews were not French, nor were they German, nor were they Dutch. As such, France, Germany, and Holland could never fully assimilate them.

Herzl was neither the first nor the most articulate to make this argument. He was a skilled publicist, however, and he brought the Zionist message to Jews around the world. He was also a tireless organizer. Through his efforts, the first international Zionist conference was convened in Basel, Switzerland, in 1897. There, he proposed that Jews should endeavor to obtain “sovereignty over a

portion of the globe large enough for the rightful requirements of a nation.” After some disagreement about where that “portion of the globe” should be, the conferees founded an organization to assist Jews in immigrating to Palestine, which began in earnest shortly after the Basel conference.

The Beginning of Zionism in Palestine

The Zionists were not successful in acquiring a large footprint for their community during the first decades of the twentieth century. Perhaps this is why the rural Palestinian population perceived the early Zionist settlements as little more than a curiosity. The small numbers of settlers made an insignificant impact on the area. Later, with the advent of Zionist agricultural estates, Palestinians saw a chance to work. The early Zionist planters were more than willing to hire Palestinians because it was more economical to hire them at lower wages than Jewish workers who demanded wages more in line with those in Europe.

Nevertheless, there was some resistance to the Zionist presence from the beginning because of the question of land. Palestinian peasants often did not own the land they worked; according to local practice, when a new landlord took over a piece of land it was understood that the peasants would simply work for the new landowners. In contrast with this practice, when Zionist immigrants bought the land they sometimes tried to expel the peasant renters. Peasants objected to being removed from land that they had rented for decades. Tensions also developed between the Palestinian population and the newly arrived Zionists in the cities. Resentment toward them emanated from small merchants and artisans, who were weary of the Zionist competition. As in other places in the Ottoman Empire, the fact that these new arrivals often had the protection of foreign governments—because of the Capitulations—intensified this resentment. In addition, these new arrivals were wealthier than the local Palestinians. The Palestinians also grew suspicious of what they perceived as the Zionists' aloofness. The Zionists set up their own institutions and organizations and seemed uninterested in becoming part of local society.

Upper- and middle-class Palestinians soon joined peasants and lower-middle-class artisans and merchants in their discomfort with the growing Zionist presence. Before the end of the first decade of

the twentieth century, local newspapers voiced their opposition to land transfers to the “foreigners.” With the greater freedom of expression that came with the 1908 Young Turk coup, criticism of the central government for allowing Zionist immigration became widespread. Some of this anger took the form of Arab nationalist agitation against the local “Turkish” officials for aiding the Zionist purchases of land. Newspaper editors and journalists began to write more frequently about the expropriation of peasant land and the lack of concern shown by Ottoman authorities toward the local Palestinian population. In the second decade of the twentieth century, this criticism spread to the newspapers of Beirut and Damascus. This growing discontent took on an Arab nationalist tone as the CUP government was depicted as ineffectual and unconcerned with the fate of the Arab population of the Ottoman Empire. By the outbreak of World War I, the land question in Palestine had become a central issue in Arab nationalist grievances against the CUP government of the Young Turks. It was one of the factors that led to widespread support of the Arab Revolt during World War I.

Zionists and Palestinians in the British Mandate

When the British took over their mandate in Palestine in 1920, they found brewing tensions between the Palestinians and Zionists. These tensions were compounded by the Balfour Declaration, which created a general feeling of distrust toward British intentions in Palestine and throughout the entire region. These doubts were certainly not assuaged by the fact that the preamble of the League of Nations Charter for the Palestine mandate included the text of the 1917 Balfour Declaration. Thus, this short statement that began its life as a newspaper advertisement became a legal document with the backing of the Great Powers.

The British and Palestinians did not get off to a good start, and things soon got worse. When the British set up their mandate government, they chose Herbert Samuel, a dedicated Zionist, as the first high commissioner of Palestine. Their mandate policies recalled the Ottoman *millet* system, as each religious community was treated as a single unit. Funds from the mandate authority were distributed on a community basis—not according to population, but as a proportion of taxes collected from each community. Members of the Zionist community, or *yishuv*, received a much greater percentage of government funding because they earned higher wages and therefore paid more in taxes. Each community was to have its own executive that would represent the collective interests to the British authorities. The Zionists had already set up an organization, known as the Jewish Agency, as their de facto government, and it represented the *yishuv* to the British mandate authorities. The Palestinians had no such local administration, so they were at an immediate disadvantage in seeking intervention and help from the British authorities. Two early attempts by the British to set up a representative body of all the communities did not succeed. The Palestinians rejected the first plan because it gave disproportionate representation to the *yishuv*. They rejected the second because the British authorities forbade the body from discussing the only two

issues important to the Palestinians: Jewish immigration and the sale of land.

Violence broke out intermittently even before the official declaration of the mandate. On November 2, 1918, fights flared in Jerusalem on the one-year anniversary of the Balfour Declaration. In 1920, only weeks after Faisal's short-lived Arab kingdom was declared in Damascus, riots erupted after a local religious occasion was transformed into a celebration of Arab nationalism. In 1921, May Day riots began as clashes between Jews in Tel Aviv, but soon the Palestinians were drawn in, and violence spread to Jaffa and Jerusalem. In the ensuing rioting, Palestinians killed dozens of Jews, and British soldiers gunned down a large number of Palestinians. The volatility of the situation led the British to issue their first policy study or "white paper" on the question of Palestine in 1922. British investigators concluded that resentment toward the Zionists and the perceived British favoritism toward the yishuv was the primary cause of the violence. At the same time, the white paper re-endorsed both the British commitment to the Balfour Declaration and the continuation of Jewish immigration to Palestine. The yishuv welcomed the report while the Palestinians repudiated it.

Underlying tensions exploded again in the 1929 Western Wall clashes. These disturbances began when some Zionists tried to change some of the conventions regarding the use of space around the highly contested Western Wall–al-Aqsa Mosque complex, an area that both Muslims and Jews view as sacred. Quickly, this dispute became a clash of Zionism versus Arab nationalism. An orgy of violence erupted in several towns that resulted in 250 dead Palestinians and Zionists. The Jewish community of Hebron suffered tremendously and was not rebuilt until after the Israeli occupation of the West Bank in 1967.

The wanton violence of this event led the British to produce another investigative report about Palestine. This 1930 report essentially absolved the Palestinian leadership of responsibility and put the blame on increasing anger toward Zionist immigration and the ways

in which the Zionists were acquiring land. Another report issued less than a year later made the case even stronger. As a consequence, some British officials called for restricting Jewish immigration to Palestine. This drew the ire of the Zionists in London, and Chaim Weizmann pressured the British prime minister into releasing a letter that rejected these reports and dismissed any notion of restricting Jewish immigration.

The Arab Revolt of 1936

The Palestinians were incensed at what they saw as British partiality toward the Zionists. This set the stage for the Great Arab Revolt of 1936 through 1939. The aftermath of this revolt transformed the dynamics of the Palestine question forever. During the 1930s, tensions were high and needed only a spark to set off a conflagration. There were two sparks in 1935. The first was the discovery of a ship carrying arms for the military arm of the Zionist movement, the Haganah. The second was the killing of Shaykh Izz al-Din al-Qasim in 1935. Al-Qasim was born in Syria but came to Palestine after fleeing the French in the wake of the collapse of Faisal's Arab kingdom in 1920. He worked with the urban poor in shantytowns but also traveled widely in the countryside. He was a well-known figure whose populist nationalism drew on religious imagery. Al-Qasim also preached the importance of military organization and helped set up an armed group called the Black Hand. His importance as an organizer, agitator, and militant brought him to the attention of the British, who ambushed and killed him in 1935. Open rebellion was now just a matter of time.

The rebellion that began in April 1936 in Nablus as a series of attacks and counterattacks between Palestinians and Zionists escalated. The British called for a state of emergency, and then the Palestinian leadership headed by Hajj Amin al-Husseini called for a general strike. Strikes soon spread across Palestine. This in turn led to a generalized rebellion against the British and the Zionists. The British tried to force merchants to open their shops, and they brought strikebreakers to mines and large industrial enterprises. As a result, the level of violence rose dramatically. The leadership then called for a boycott of Jewish products and businesses and adopted a policy of noncooperation with British authorities. Fissures within Palestinian society came to the fore as some traditional leaders, fearing increasing economic damage to their interests, began to take a more conciliatory approach toward the British. Meanwhile, militant elements from among the lower social classes pushed for more radical and violent methods of resistance.

After months of clashes, the British convened a commission to study the troubled state of their Palestine mandate. War was brewing in Europe, and the British could ill afford to spare large numbers of troops to keep the peace in a small colony on the Mediterranean. The so-called Peel Commission report succeeded in nothing except fueling the most violent round of fighting. The report concluded that the mandate as constituted was unworkable and a clash between “national” communities inevitable. Then, it went on to suggest partition for the first time. It recommended that 80 percent of Palestine be set aside for the Palestinians and 20 percent for the Zionists. The Palestinian community reacted strongly against the report. Many in middle-class leadership positions and virtually every local leader rejected the proposal because of what they saw as its fundamental unfairness. According to the partition plan, the Zionists would receive the most fertile land of Palestine in areas where Arab land ownership was four times greater than that of the Zionists. Furthermore, Palestine would not be independent; instead, it would be linked politically to Britain’s closest ally in the area, King Abdallah of Transjordan. Zionist leaders such as Chaim Weizmann and David Ben-Gurion tentatively accepted the idea of partition as a first step toward acquiring all of Palestine. Nevertheless, because of the vehemence of the Palestinian rejection and the upsurge in fighting after partition proposals were made public, the British were forced to repudiate it.

From the summer of 1937 and until it was finally put down in January 1939, the Great Arab Revolt shifted to the countryside and became more violent. By 1938, there were perhaps ten thousand insurgents. In this stage of the rebellion, traditional notable figures gave way to a new stratum of grassroots leadership who controlled the local “popular committees” that determined tactics and strategies. The appearance of these local figures marked something of a social revolution within Palestinian society. Indeed, after the emergence of this new leadership, the rebellion took a more radical approach to social questions within Palestinian society itself. The insurgents now not only targeted British and Zionist interests but also attacked privilege among Palestinians, obliging wealthy Palestinians to

“donate” to the nationalist cause. In the countryside, they attacked large landowners and threatened moneylenders. In the cities and towns, they warned landlords not to try to collect rents. Meanwhile, middle-class urbanites were compelled to wear the Palestinian scarf, or *kaffiyeh* (also known as the *hatta*), as a sign of solidarity, transforming this traditional peasant garment into a national symbol. As the rebellion dragged on, criminal elements also took advantage of the chaotic security situation, and brigandage became a constant worry. Inevitably, wealthy Palestinians began to flee. Many left for Beirut or Cairo, leaving Palestinian society further depleted economically and politically. The Palestinian economy was devastated by the rebellion and especially by the anarchy and criminality that became so prominent in its last stages.

Through spring and summer 1938, the insurgents controlled the central highlands, as well as many towns and cities. In October 1938, the British moved twenty thousand troops to Palestine just after reaching the Munich agreement with Nazi Germany that cleared the way for the occupation of Czechoslovakia. With war looming in Europe, the British were determined to do anything necessary to calm the situation in Palestine. Accordingly, their counterinsurgency campaign was brutal, with tactics that included the destruction of whole villages, assassinations, and the employment of Zionist “night squads” to perform some of the more unsavory tasks for the British.

With one eye on the situation in Europe and the other on pro-German demonstrations in Arab capitals, the British policymakers became very uneasy. They began to search for ways to extract themselves from the morass of Palestine. Trying to curry favor with the Arab world, the British released yet another policy study in 1939. It called for a limit of seventy-five thousand Jewish immigrants for five years and then a total moratorium. The white paper of 1939 also promised that only with Palestinian acquiescence would the British allow the establishment of a Jewish state. This, in turn, infuriated the Zionists.

The events of 1936 to 1939 had far-reaching consequences. The British no longer wanted to deal with Palestinian leaders such as Hajj Amin al-Husseini, especially after he fled to Germany during World War II. Instead, they tried to negotiate the Palestine question with Egyptians, Iraqis, Saudi Arabians, Transjordanians, and Yemenis. It was another thirty years before the Palestinians would once again gain the ability to speak for themselves and nearly sixty years before Palestinians and Israelis would hold face-to-face negotiations. Perhaps paradoxically, the rebellion was also a catalyst for the emergence of Palestinian nationalism. Large segments of the Palestinian public joined in the nationalist cause for the first time through strikes, demonstrations, boycotts, and combat. At the same time, the rebellion was an economic and social disaster for Palestinian society. Many wealthy and educated Palestinians fled the violence, depriving Palestinian society of an important mediating group. Years of fighting left many exhausted, and whatever military capabilities the community had were lost in the British counterinsurgency campaign. As a result, the Palestinians were at a major disadvantage when the war for Palestine started seven years later.

Palestine Mandate after World War II

On the Zionist side, the diplomatic approach to the British championed by the London-based Chaim Weizmann came under increased pressure after the release of the 1939 white paper. Zionist leaders in Palestine such as David Ben-Gurion favored a more confrontational approach and were deeply concerned about the legacy of the white paper in postwar Palestine. Other more radical elements among the Zionists chose to confront the British militarily right away; these radicals were the so-called revisionists. They wanted to revise the Balfour Declaration's promise of a Jewish national home west of the Jordan River by claiming the area to the east—that is, Transjordan—as well.

During the 1940s, the United States stepped into the question for the first time since the Versailles Conference in 1919. In 1942, American Jewish leaders called for the United States to back their call for a Jewish national home in all of Palestine. Then, immediately after the war, President Harry Truman pressured the British to admit European Jewish refugees to Palestine on humanitarian grounds. The British feared the powder keg of Palestine was on the verge of detonation. They were right. As expected, soon after the end of World War II, the British sought a quick exit from what one minister called the “millstone around our neck” that Palestine had become. By 1947, nearly one hundred thousand British soldiers were in Palestine trying to keep the peace. This was more than in all of India for a place a fraction of the size.

Two irreconcilable positions defined the immediate postwar situation. Zionist representatives refused to participate in any conference or negotiation where partition was not the starting point. Meanwhile, the Palestinians rejected on principle all suggestions about partitioning Palestine into two separate states. Palestinians called for a single secular state and an end to Jewish immigration. Their argument was simple: They made up 70 percent of Palestine's population, and it was manifestly unfair to divide the land for the sake of a minority.

The War for Palestine

In early 1947, with no deal in sight, the British announced that they would withdraw from Palestine in May 1948. On November 29, 1947, the United Nations voted in favor of partition. Immediately after the vote, the war for Palestine began. From December 1947 until May 1948, war between the Zionist Haganah (soon to be renamed the Israel Defense Forces [IDF]) and Palestinian irregulars raged in Palestine. Then, when the British withdrew in May 1948 the Zionists declared Israel an independent state, and units from the Egyptian, Syrian, Iraqi, and Saudi Arabian armies invaded. This fighting went on until mid-1949. Fortunately for the Israelis, these Arab armies not only lacked a unified command structure; they also did not have unified war aims in mind. Indeed, they were as opposed to one another as they were to the state of Israel.

Each of the Arab factions had its own reasons for becoming involved in the war, and very few of them had to do with the Palestinian right to self-determination. Egypt and Saudi Arabia did not trust the Hashemite “axis” of Iraq and Transjordan. They knew King Abdallah wanted to prevent the emergence of an independent Arab state on his western border and was in contact with the Israelis on how best to carve up the area. Transjordan’s Arab Legion was the best-trained fighting force in the Arab world, and with the exception of some fighting around Jerusalem, barely participated in the war. By prior agreement with Zionist leaders, King Abdallah’s men occupied central Palestine, the area that has come to be called the West Bank. The Egyptians supported the Palestinians only to the extent that they opposed King Abdallah. The Egyptians also hoped that they could use any territory they captured as a bargaining chip in negotiations about the future of the British army in Egypt. After some early losses, the Israelis pushed these armies back. By midsummer of 1948, with the exception of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, the Israeli forces had taken all of the land set aside for both the Jewish and Palestinian states. The war officially ended with the armistice agreements of 1949.

The Arab-Israeli war resulted in the establishment of the state of Israel and crushing defeat for the Arab armies—even more so for the Palestinians, who have come to refer to the war as the *nakba*, or catastrophe. Approximately 750,000 Palestinians were displaced and expelled through a combination of fear, compulsion, and psychological pressure on the part of the IDF. Out of a prewar population of nearly 900,000, only about 133,000 Palestinians remained within the borders of Israel.

States, Nations, and Debates about the Way Forward

In the region, the processes of state- and nation-building were two of the most notable features of the post–World War I period and, indeed, in the first two-thirds of the twentieth century. The decades after World War I also saw a transition to mass politics with political mobilization and agitation centered around anticolonial nationalism. It began in Syria, Iraq, Palestine, and Egypt and spread to almost every other country in the region to some degree. The period also saw the emergence of new political entities, which required the development of new institutions, practices, and identities.

The late 1930s and 1940s saw the rise of elite-led nationalist parties more often narrowly focused on the interests of their supporters—urban professionals from large, landowning families, big-business owners, and elements of the old Ottoman elites (the Turkish Republic was an exception in this regard). These groups wanted merely to take the reins of the colonial mandate, or protectorate state, leaving intact the extant social structure. They feared popular democratic rule and its threat of social revolution, and they showed little or no interest in the problems faced by the vast majority of the populations. The myopia of elite nationalists opened the door to movements from the lower social classes.

Communist parties, various Arab nationalisms, ethno-nationalisms, groups inspired by the Italian Fascists and Franco's Spanish Falange movement, and Islamist parties all drew supporters from groups alienated from elite nationalism: the peasantry, the growing labor sector, small-business owners, tradespeople, and other marginalized ethnic and religious groups. They formed the basis of Ba'athist support in Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon; Nasserist Arab socialism throughout the entire Arab world; communist parties in Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Iran, Turkey, and North Africa; the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and its branches elsewhere in the region; and

also groups such as Young Egypt and the Phalange Party of Lebanon.

The interwar period also witnessed the beginning of the cultural struggle between the self-described secular modernists and those claiming to stand for the preservation of Eastern and/or Islamic tradition. The opening salvo in this face-off began in Egypt with controversies around two books written by respected intellectuals. Ali Abdel Raziq, an Islamic scholar, published his *Islam and the Foundations of Governance* [*Al-Islam Wa Usul Al-Hukm*] in 1925. He argued that there existed no Islamic textual support for the idea of the caliphate. His book appeared just after the Turkish Republic was officially abolishing the office of caliph and declaring itself a secular state based on a modified Swiss legal code, causing much consternation throughout the Muslim world. A year later, Taha Hussein, a Cairo University literature professor and well-known author, published *On Pre-Islamic Poetry* [*Fi al-Shi'r al-Jahali*], which some read as expressing doubt about the authenticity of the Qur'an. Both of these authors were accused of attacking Islam, and protracted and inconclusive public debates and legal moves followed. Taha Hussein became a symbol for a form of modernization that his critics described as Western-style secularism. He championed the idea that Egypt's Mediterranean heritage should be the source of inspiration for overcoming the country's "backwardness."

The other pole of these culture wars was personified by Hassan al-Banna and the organization he founded, the Muslim Brotherhood. He and his successors argued that Muslims must look to the leaders of the Islamic past for guidance. Nevertheless, theirs was not a call for a *return* to the past. Indeed, they became strong advocates for adopting Western technology and science and modern education for boys and girls.

In any case, these two "opposing camps" had much in common. They shared the view that Egypt and indeed the entire Muslim world was plagued by backwardness compared with Europe. They both

called for political and cultural independence and sought to modernize Egyptian society by adapting appropriate elements of Western civilization while preserving Egyptian identity.

As we have seen, the map of the post–World War I Middle East was populated with semicolonial political entities called mandates. Iraq, Jordan (Transjordan), Syria, Israel (Palestine), and Lebanon all began their lives as mandates. But this map also shows other new states, such as the Republic of Turkey, Pahlavi Iran, and Saudi Arabia, that emerged out of the wreckage of the old Middle East.

Every political entity in the region was new (see [Table 1.1](#)). Almost without exception, governmental and legal structures, institutions, and practices had to be created from scratch. All of the states in the region ratified constitutions that delineated the limits of governmental power and defined the rights and responsibilities of the citizenry. In addition, elections were held in most countries. These practices produced at least an illusion of a modern state and mass participation, even if they would become little more than window dressing for authoritarian regimes.

These structures were planned and designed with the aim of inculcating a national consciousness, a sense of “modernity” and national pride. For example, public schools and the military imparted nationalist ideology (and in some cases, such as Iran, taught the national language) to students and conscripts. Museums were dedicated to national history and culture; sporting clubs and competitions were instituted at the local and national level; institutes for the study of national folklore and folk customs were established. The new states became more deeply involved in the daily lives of their populations while self-consciously using this power to sanction modern ways of life. They did this through such things as outlawing traditional dress and compelling the use of one national, and therefore “modern,” language while forbidding the use of others; by using the most ordinary forms of surveillance, such as licensing, permits, zoning laws, and identification documents; and by using, of course, an expanded and more efficient security apparatus.

Employment in the public sector was another way that these states induced a sense of loyalty from the population. The bureaucracy was not only a source of patronage but also a tie between people's personal interests and the maintenance of the regime. All of this helped generate a sense of national identity and belonging where none had existed before.

Table 1.1 Dates of Independence of Middle Eastern and North African Countries

Table 1.1 Dates of Independence of Middle Eastern and North African Countries

Country	Date of independence	Former colonial holding power
Algeria	1962	France
Bahrain	1971	Great Britain
Egypt	1922	Great Britain
Iran	1925	None; Qajar dynasty
Iraq	1932	Great Britain
Israel	1948	Great Britain
Jordan	1946	Great Britain
Kuwait	1961	Great Britain
Lebanon	1943	France
Libya	1951	Italy, France, Great Britain

Country	Date of independence	Former colonial holding power
Morocco	1956	France, Spain
Oman	1951	British Protectorate
Qatar	1971	Great Britain
Saudi Arabia	1932	None
Sudan	1956	Great Britain de facto (de jure Anglo-Egyptian)
Syria	1946	France
Tunisia	1956	France
Turkey	1923	None; Ottoman Empire
United Arab Emirates	1971	Great Britain
Yemen	1967	Great Britain

Source: Author's data.

The Birth of the Turkish Republic

The birth of the modern Republic of Turkey upon the ruins of the Ottoman Empire was not without severe labor pains. In the peace negotiations after World War I, the victors demanded their recompense in the form of Ottoman territory. The sultan reluctantly signed the Treaty of Sèvres in 1920, ceding huge swaths of territory to Britain, Italy, Greece, and France and tacitly agreeing to the establishment of Kurdish and Armenian states on former Ottoman territory. The sultan also agreed to relinquish control of the waterways between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. Only a small Turkish rump state would remain from the lands of the once-vast Ottoman Empire. Nationalist sentiment was enflamed throughout Turkey.

For nearly two years prior to Sèvres, however, nationalist leaders were planning a new direction for postwar Turkey. From their base in Ankara, the Turkish nationalists quickly rejected the Sèvres treaty and established a parliament, the Grand National Assembly. The nationalist government denied that the sultan possessed the authority to sign the treaty because he no longer represented the Turkish people. The Grand National Assembly soon voted to abolish the office of the sultan, whose collaboration with the Entente powers deprived him of whatever semblance of legitimacy he might have once had. In the subsequent Turkish war of independence, fighting erupted between nationalist forces and British, Armenian, French, and especially Greek armies in the east, southwest, and south of the country.

Mustafa Kemal, the hero of the Gallipoli campaign, was one of the major figures behind the nationalist movement. He organized the nationalist army and directed the insurgency against the Entente forces. Fighting raged off and on until 1922 when the Entente powers no longer had the stomach to continue. They admitted defeat and agreed to renegotiate yet again the postwar settlement.

The Treaty of Lausanne of July 1923 recognized the legitimacy of the nationalist government and delineated the borders of the new Turkish state. The Turkish Republic was declared in October 1923. After more than 600 years, the Ottoman Empire had ceased to exist. International recognition of the Turkish Republic was the beginning of a new era in modern Turkish history. It signaled another stage in the top-down, state-led transformation process that began with the Ottoman Tanzimat eighty years earlier. In this stage, the nationalist government transformed the former heartland of the Ottoman Empire into a secular republic. Like the transformations of the nineteenth century, this process was neither seamless nor without violence.

The early history of the Turkish Republic is almost inseparable from its founder, Mustafa Kemal. The provisional government in Ankara chose him as its president during the war for independence in 1920. During the course of the next few decades, he became the most important Turkish political figure of the twentieth century. Kemal created a model of secular populist nationalism that guided Turkey in the transition from "Ottomanism" to "Turkishness." His program, which became known as Kemalism, was a conscious effort to break with the Ottoman past and replace it with a modern, nationalist, and secular consciousness. He moved the capital from the old imperial center of Istanbul to the central Anatolian city of Ankara. Kemal also acted to impose a strict separation of religion and state and to remove all vestiges of Ottoman efforts to harness religious legitimacy for the regime. Through the use of state edict, Kemal's government tried to remove religion from the public sphere. The office of caliphate was abolished in 1924, and a modified Swiss legal code replaced Islamic law in 1926. The new state replaced the Muslim calendar with the Gregorian calendar and adopted Sunday as the official weekly holiday instead of Friday, as was traditional in Muslim societies.

Kemalism projected a populist vision of Turkish nationalism. Kemal presented himself as a man of the people, and the new Turkish Republic declared universal suffrage for all adult citizens, male and female. The state was interested in more than promoting populist

republicanism, however; it sought to reproduce its vision of modernity in every citizen. The Kemalist state outlawed clothing that hinted at regional, ethnic, or religious identity. Women were forbidden from wearing the Muslim veil on state property. In 1928, the Turkish language was “purified” and modernized. Arabic words were removed from the language, and the Arabic script was replaced with a Latin alphabet. In 1934, citizens were obliged to use Turkish surnames, eschewing the traditional practice of children simply taking their fathers’ first names as second names and the names of their paternal grandfathers as third names. No longer were people in Turkey going to be known as Mehmet son of Ahmet son of Murad. It was at this time that by an act of parliament Mustafa Kemal became Mustafa Kemal *Atatürk*, or Father of the Turks. Banning traditional customs does not stamp out identity, however, and this move pointed to the deep suspicion that came to mark Republican Turkey’s view of its minorities, particularly its Kurdish population.

A centerpiece of Kemalist nationalism was its emphasis on Turkishness. This left little or no room for minorities. Among strident nationalists, even the act of acknowledging the presence of minorities seemed to call into question the validity of the idea of the Turkish nation. Consequently, the history of non-Turkish peoples in the new republic has not been a happy one. While not nearly as bad as their previous experience under the Ottomans, Armenians continued to face discrimination well into the republican period as well. The ethnically distinct Kurdish population who live in the southeast of the country faced the greatest difficulties in the new era. Kurds speak an Indo-European language from the Iranian branch that is far more similar to Farsi than it is to Turkish. At one point after World War I, there was some momentum to create a Kurdish mandate and eventually a state, but resistance from the Great Powers who would have had to cede parts of their newly won territories scuttled those plans. They have maintained strong ties to their traditional homeland now split between four states: Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran.

To say that there have been problems between the Republic of Turkey and its Kurdish population is an understatement. For decades, Turkey relentlessly suppressed Kurdish language and culture. The legislation outlawing traditional dress in Turkey was aimed primarily at the Kurds, and until recently, it was illegal to teach or even speak Kurdish in Turkey. Turkey would not even admit that Kurds existed; for decades, state media routinely referred to them as “mountain Turks.”

In the 1980s, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) launched an insurgency against the Turkish state, seeking greater cultural and political rights, including an autonomous Kurdistan region in Turkey. The Turkish military responded with a ferocious counterinsurgency campaign that led to the deaths of nearly forty thousand people, most of them Turkish Kurdish civilians, and the displacement of more than three million Kurds from southeastern Turkey.

Beginning in 2004, the Turkish government, bowing to long-standing demands, permitted Kurdish-language radio and television programs. Political rights, however, continued to be circumscribed by a constitution that outlaws ethnically based political parties. There was a brief glimmer of hope on the Kurdish question around 2013 when Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s government began talks with Kurdish militants. Unfortunately, the subsequent spillover of the Syrian Civil War put an end to this process.

Reza Khan and the Pahlavi Regime

Post–World War I Iranian history has some parallels with Turkey’s history. Iran suffered foreign intervention and was also invaded and partially occupied. After the war, the British occupied the southern half of the country, while a Soviet-led army moved toward Tehran from the north. With Persia’s leadership either paralyzed or openly collaborating with the occupying forces, an ambitious army officer attacked the old regime and eventually set the country on a path toward fundamental change.

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, the British sought access to Persian oil while the British-Russian understanding regarding their respective spheres of influence continued undisturbed. After World War I, the British feared that the Soviet Union would try to install a friendly government in Persia. Consequently, the British became heavily involved in supporting Persian resistance against the Soviet-backed invasion in 1920 and 1921. They chose an officer of the Persian Cossacks named Reza Khan to be the Iranian face of their efforts. After Reza Khan and his forces succeeded in pushing back the Soviet-sponsored forces, he set his sights on a much higher goal. In 1925, he deposed the last of the Qajar Shahs and declared himself Shah of the new “Pahlavi” dynasty. Reza Shah was independent minded, and one of his first acts was to refuse the terms of the much-despised Anglo-Persian Agreement of 1919 that would have made the whole of Persia a de facto British protectorate.

Over the next fifteen years, through a combination of brute force, clientelism, and political savvy, Reza Shah built the rudiments of a centralized, modern state. There are some similarities between Reza Shah’s modernizing programs and those of Mustafa Kemal in Turkey. As was the case in Turkey, much of the shah’s initial base of support was in the military. Reza Shah secured the loyalty of the military through generous financial inducements to the officer corps. Army officers received excellent benefits and were provided with

opportunities for personal enrichment in return for their service. The Conscription Law of 1925 provided new recruits for the security forces, whose size was increased from around 20,000 in 1925 to 127,000 fifteen years later. The expanded army and the paramilitary forces in turn played a pivotal role in the extension of state authority throughout the entire country for the first time in its long history. At the same time, the shah established a number of new ministries while thoroughly modernizing those that his government had inherited. He built a bureaucracy of some ninety thousand civil servants by 1941. Improved security and efficient administration enabled the central government to collect taxes and customs duties throughout the country. The collection of tax arrears and customs duties along with revenue from oil sales provided much of the revenue necessary for the shah's reforms.

Reza Shah undertook wide-reaching legal and social reforms that, as in Kemalist Turkey, were imposed by government decree. These reforms aimed at modernizing the country and building a sense of Iranian nationalism. Legal reform brought a new secular judiciary to Iran. The state adopted French law in 1928 and all but eliminated the public role of the *ulema* and religious institutions. The shah decreed that all Iranians should take family names, and he chose Pahlavi for himself. Pahlavi was the name of an ancient form of the Persian language and evoked its classical literary and imperial traditions. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the shah's version of linguistic reform did not consist of imposing a Latin script, as had been done in Turkey, but rather involved "purifying" the Persian language by removing all so-called foreign words.

Reza Shah, like Atatürk before him, focused much attention on the gender question and on dress in an effort to build a sense of national unity. In 1936, Iran banned the wearing of the veil, and Iranians were encouraged to appear at all public functions with their unveiled wives in tow. Gender separation in cafés and cinemas was outlawed. Reza Shah, however, was no advocate of women's equality. Even as he promoted a form of state feminism in the battle against "backwardness," he offered little in the way of political or social rights

to women. Women never gained suffrage, divorce was almost impossible for them to obtain, and polygamy continued to be permitted even after the adoption of the French civil code. In the shah's eyes, state diktats on gender issues, dress, and personal grooming were not an infringement of personal rights but a means to produce a modern Iranian people. Therefore, men too were subject to the brief of the shah's intrusive vision. The state compelled men to wear Western-style clothes and hats. Any headgear that hinted at one's occupational identity was outlawed, as were all tribal or traditional clothes. Reza Shah's "Pahlavi cap" eventually gave way to a fedora-type hat that men were encouraged to wear. In addition, men were aggressively discouraged from growing beards, and only neatly trimmed moustaches were deemed acceptable.

Despite their many similarities, the nationalist modernizing projects of interwar Turkey and Iran had significant differences. In contrast with Atatürk, who sought to distance his new republic from its Ottoman past, the shah drew on the cultural heritage of pre-Islamic Iran in conjuring his vision of modernity. Thus, he changed the name of the country from Persia to Iran. Likewise, he replaced the Muslim lunar calendar with an Iranian calendar that begins on March 21. The name the shah chose for his dynasty, Pahlavi, was also meant to recall pre-Islamic times, as it was the name of an ancient Persian language. In addition, Reza Shah eschewed the populism of Atatürk. He self-consciously wrapped himself in regal spectacle meant to evoke the splendor of ancient Iranian kings. In any case, any populist airs he might have put on would have been contradicted by both the substantial wealth he amassed and his lavish and ostentatious lifestyle.

In another departure from the Turkish case, Reza Shah made no effort to institute a republican regime. In Pahlavi Iran, legislative elections were insignificant events because the parliament, or *majles*, exercised little real power. Almost from the beginning, Reza Shah's Iran began to take on characteristics of an authoritarian state. The shah paid little heed to the constitution, imposed strict media censorship, and abolished political parties and trade unions at will.

Political opponents faced arrest and sometimes execution. Nevertheless, although he did not hesitate to use coercion to achieve his aims, the shah was also skillful in the use of patronage to build support. He appointed political cronies to important positions in the state bureaucracy or within his myriad personal enterprises.

While Reza Shah's regime adopted policies aimed at linguistic "Persianization," in contrast to Turkey, it did not take a suspicious or hostile approach to its "minority" populations. Iran's population was and remains ethnically and linguistically very diverse. By one count, there are more than seventy languages spoken in Iran. The vast majority of these are usually classified as either Iranian (such as Farsi and Kurdish) or Turkic (such as Azeri and Turkmen), but there are also Arabic, Armenian, and Assyrian speakers in Iran. While Shi'i Muslims form the largest religious group, there are large numbers of Sunni Muslims as well as Armenian and Assyrian Christians and Jews.

Despite his efforts at state- and nation-building, the main economic jewel in the country—the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC)—remained largely outside his control. Frustrated with the situation, the shah tried to wrest increased rents from the AIOC. This did not please the British, who were already becoming disenchanted with their man in Tehran. Then, the shah committed the fatal mistake of making friendly overtures to the Germans during World War II. The British and Soviets deposed him and placed his twenty-one-year-old son, Mohammad Reza, on the throne in 1941.

The beginning of young Mohammad Reza Shah's rule was marked by the return of the landed elites to power through their control of the majles. The late 1940s and early 1950s was a period of rising discontent and nationalist agitation. The Soviets, now occupying the north and hoping to expand the territory they controlled, encouraged Kurdish nationalists to establish their own short-lived Republic of Mahabad in 1945. In 1951, even as the inexperienced young shah was seeking some way to step out from behind the domination of the majles, he was obliged to accept a popular nationalist prime minister,

Mohammad Mossadeq. This set in motion a series of events that some believe was a decisive factor in the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

In 1951, Mossadeq nationalized (in other words, put under Iranian government control) the AIOC (later called British Petroleum), enraging Britain. As a consequence, Britain, the United States, and the shah plotted to remove the Mossadeq government by force. In late August 1953, the US Central Intelligence Agency, with the help of a group of Iranian military officers, staged a coup against the popularly elected Iranian prime minister. The shah was returned to power, and then he made his move against the majles and against all his political opponents. With the help of the American FBI and the Israeli Mossad, he built his notorious state security organization, SAVAK, and began to construct the absolutist state that would become the hallmark of his rule by the 1970s. The legacy of British and US involvement in Iranian domestic affairs and the taint that this put on Mohammad Shah was a major part of anti-shah agitation in the run-up to the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

In 1961, Mohammad Shah launched what he called the White Revolution, which he hoped would increase support for his regime and prevent a “Red Revolution” (i.e., communist takeover). The White Revolution was in essence a top-down reform initiative consisting of such measures as land reform and increased spending on public health and education. The reforms failed to satisfy expectations of the urban working and middle classes, did little to alleviate rural poverty, and alienated some of the Shah’s supporters among rural landowners. All in all, the reforms succeeded in little more than generating resentment toward the Shah, and with an increasing monopoly of state power, all avenues for expressing discontent were increasingly circumscribed. Indeed, by 1975 Mohammad Reza Shah had created a one-party state (his Resurgence Party was the only legal party), based largely on a cult of personality.

Consolidation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

The modern state of Saudi Arabia emerged out of a long-running series of tribal wars in the Arabian Peninsula. Beginning in the first years of the twentieth century, the historically powerful Al Saud family of the town of Riyadh in the Nejd, or central highlands, of what is now Saudi Arabia sought to reestablish its dominance throughout the peninsula. The Saudis and their main fighting force, the Ikhwan (a group inspired by the idea of purifying the Arabian Peninsula through imposing their austere understanding of Islam), vanquished their neighboring rivals one by one. By 1926, ibn Saud, the sultan of the Nejd, and his Ikhwan had brought all his rivals to heel. The last of these was the British-supported Hashemite family of Hussein ibn Ali in the western part of the Arabian Peninsula, or the Hejaz. The British had promised the Hashemites a kingdom in Arabia in return for their service during World War I. When the British saw the writing on the wall, however, they deftly transferred their support from their protégés to the Al Saud clan. In 1932, after uniting the entire peninsula, Abdul al-Aziz ibn Saud proclaimed the kingdom of Saudi Arabia with himself as king, thus becoming monarch of the only country in the world named after a family.

Oil was discovered in the kingdom during the mid-1930s, but it was only after World War II that commercial exploitation of oil began in earnest. US oil companies assisted by the US government displaced the British as the main suitors for the right to access this oil wealth. In 1933, ibn Saud granted the first oil concession to the Arabian American Oil Company (Aramco). Aramco was a consortium, or joint venture, made up of the companies that later became Shell, Exxon, Mobil, Chevron, Gulf, Texaco, and British Petroleum.

Aramco developed a close relationship with Saudi rulers by transferring vast sums of money to them and undertaking the immense task of building a state where none had existed previously. Until the mid-1940s, Saudi Arabia was basically a confederation of tribes and small towns on the coast or built around oases. Beginning

in the late 1940s, Aramco and major US defense contractors, such as the Bechtel Brothers, undertook a variety of development activities throughout the new country. Because of the sheer volume of projects in which they were involved, ranging from road and airport building to launching a telephone network to establishing and operating air transport, one scholar referred to Aramco as the de facto “Ministry of Public Works.”²² In short, they created the entire transportation and extraction infrastructure necessary for oil exportation. Meanwhile, Abdul al-Aziz ibn Saud used the Ikhwan to attack enemies of the state who were seeking a more equitable relationship with Aramco or those calling for more democratic politics. The Saudis also set the Ikhwan against “anti-Islamic” workers’ movements in the mid-1950s. US oil executives were fond of describing the Aramco-Saudi relationship as a “third way.” They boasted that the Aramco model was neither socialist radicalism nor an example of colonial exploitation. For them, it was a capitalist partnership in which both sides benefited.

Post–1948 Egypt and the Rise of Nasserism

The repercussions of the Arab defeat in the war for Palestine in 1948 reverberated throughout the Arab world. In Egypt, many ordinary citizens saw the monarchy as complicit in the defeat; moreover, Egyptians regarded the country's so-called liberal era of the previous two decades as an abject failure. Neither the charade of parliamentary elections nor the power struggles among the tiny ruling elite brought relief from poverty for most Egyptians. The country's rulers seemed oblivious to growing landlessness among peasants as well as the lack of education and opportunity available to Egyptians in general.

Even more ominous for the king was that the military was disenchanted with what it considered a lack of support for the war effort in Palestine. In addition, the continuing presence of British troops in the Suez Canal Zone stoked nationalist resentment. Egyptian guerrillas began to clash with British forces in 1951, and this led to the January 1952 Black Sunday fire in Cairo that targeted foreign-owned businesses, hotels, nightclubs, and bars. The general chaos of this period set the stage for the July 1952 coup that toppled the Egyptian monarchy.

The old regime was swept away by the so-called Free Officers who had grown impatient with the king's inability to negotiate a British withdrawal (the 1952 coup began a period of military rule that continues to this day with the exception of Mohamad Morsi's popularly elected government in 2012–2013). Soon after deposing and exiling the king, the Free Officers set up the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) as the main governing institution in the country. Lieutenant Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser soon emerged as the major force in the new regime.

Nasser, the new Egyptian ruler, implemented a series of reforms that remade Egyptian society. These domestic reforms and the foreign policy of the new regime came to be known as Nasserism.

Nasserism was populist and vaguely socialist. Nasser introduced land reform that restricted the amount of land a single family could hold, and the new government nationalized (or took control of) banking, insurance, large manufacturing, and other industries. The Nasserist state built a mass education system and opened universities to large numbers of Egyptians for the first time. A greatly expanded public sector guaranteed employment for university graduates, and the state offered vastly improved health services to many millions. One of the achievements of Nasserism was the creation of a wide and viable middle class for the first time in Egyptian history. Nasser adopted a foreign policy of aggressive anti-imperialism and nonalignment, which meant that he endeavored to steer a course between the Eastern and Western blocs of the Cold War. Regionally, Nasser expressed support for the Palestinian cause and espoused a commitment to Arab nationalism. Arab nationalist fervor was such that Egypt and Syria briefly merged as the United Arab Republic from 1958 until 1961.

Gamal Abdel Nasser was more than just the leader of a coup that toppled a moribund and corrupt monarchy in Egypt. This charismatic young leader projected a great sense of optimism about the future. He proffered an ideology that inspired some in the Arab world for decades. Many in Egypt, the Arab world, and even throughout much of the postcolonial world saw in Nasserism the dawning of a new age when the have-nots of the world would finally receive their due. His place in history was confirmed by the Suez Crisis (known in Egypt as the Tripartite Aggression) of 1956.

In July 1956, Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal that had been British-controlled since 1875. This move was met with wild enthusiasm and national pride throughout Egypt. Even though Nasser pledged to compensate the canal's foreign stockholders, the British government was incensed. Almost immediately, the British began to build an alliance to attack Egypt. France, angry about Nasser's support for the Algerian revolution, and Israel, concerned about the threat of such a charismatic leader on its southern border, both signed on. In late October 1956, the three allies attacked Egypt.

The Egyptian military was defeated rather quickly, and the Egyptian cities of Port Said and Port Fouad were heavily damaged.

The United States reacted with anger, however, and in cooperation with the Soviet Union compelled the British, French, and Israelis to withdraw. After 1956, the United States replaced Great Britain as the dominant Western power in the region. In addition, the Israeli Defense Forces' (IDF) performance during the Suez crisis erased any doubt about Israel's military supremacy among regional powers. Moreover, through an agreement reached with the French before the hostilities commenced, the Israelis procured a nuclear reactor that they subsequently used to produce material for their substantial (although officially unacknowledged) stockpile of nuclear weapons.²³ In the immediate wake of the crisis, however, Egypt held on to the canal, and Nasser was hailed throughout the Arab world as a champion against the old imperial powers.

Syria and Jordan: Turmoil and Change after 1948

Syria and Transjordan became independent states in 1946. Two years later, both were drawn into the Arab-Israeli war for Palestine, and both experienced a period of turmoil following the events of 1948.

In Syria, there was little consensus within the political class that inherited the mandate state from the French. As in Egypt, the military did not forgive the civilian leaders of the country for what they perceived as their lack of commitment to the war for Palestine. In 1949 alone, there were three military coups. This was the beginning of more than twenty years of political instability, with nearly twenty different governments and the drafting of multiple constitutions. In 1958, the military, fearing a full-fledged communist takeover would be the alternative, embraced unification with Egypt. The United Arab Republic, as the unified state was called, fell apart three years later following another military coup in Syria. The Syrians and Egyptians spent most of the 1960s in an Arab cold war, with each trying to establish its credentials as the true champion of Arab nationalism. At the same time, stability in Syria remained elusive, with Syria experiencing successive coups, until the young air force commander and Ba'athist Hafiz al-Asad established rule in 1970.²⁴

The war for Palestine also had important ramifications for the former British mandate of Transjordan. In return for his unwavering loyalty, the British gave Transjordan's King Abdallah a yearly stipend, and a British army officer even led his armed forces until 1956. During the war in 1948, King Abdallah's Arab Legion, the best trained and equipped of the Arab armies, fought only briefly against the Israelis. Jordan's main goals in the war consisted of preventing the establishment of an independent Palestinian state and seizing control of central Palestine. Zionist leaders ceded the area to Abdallah in exchange for his not getting involved in the fighting elsewhere. In 1949, Abdallah annexed central Palestine and discouraged the use of the word *Palestine* in his kingdom. As a

consequence, central Palestine eventually became known as the West Bank (of the Jordan River). He also changed the name of Transjordan to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. In 1951, a Palestinian, unhappy with the king's dealings with Zionist leaders, assassinated him in Jerusalem.

Abdallah's son Talal ascended to the throne but was deposed shortly afterward in favor of his son Hussein bin Talal. After the 1956 Suez crisis, the Hashemite Kingdoms of Jordan and Iraq came together in a confederation called the Arab Federation of Iraq and Jordan, hoping to offset the growing power of Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser and his own newly declared United Arab Republic with Syria. Their wariness of the Egyptian leader and his influence in the region was well founded, as the Iraqi Hashemite monarchy was overthrown in a violent coup in July of 1958 by army officers who modeled themselves on Nasser's Free Officers. The coup leader, Colonel Abdel Karim Qasim, initially allied himself with Nasser's Arab nationalism. As an ally (and cousin) of the deposed king, Jordan's King Hussein found himself in a precarious position, and the British brought troops to the country under US air cover to protect his regime. Hussein, who ruled until 1999, continued to receive British (and later US) subventions and, like his grandfather Abdallah, remained unpopular with many Jordanian Palestinians, who eventually comprised about half of the country's population. The Qasim government soon took a more independent line and adopted a hybrid Iraqi Arab nationalist position. These ideological commitments, combined with a low tolerance for opposition, led the postrevolutionary Iraqi state into almost constant strife with Kurdish nationalists. After failing to convince Qasim's revolutionary government to fulfil its commitment to Kurdish regional autonomy, Mustafa Barzani led his militia, the Peshmerga, in rebellion against the Baghdad government. Fighting raged from 1961 to 1970, until the Ba'thist government agreed to another autonomy plan. When the Ba'thists proved to be as insincere as Qasim's government had been about autonomy, a second rebellion broke out in 1974. The Kurds rebelled again in the 1980s and in the 1990s. Only in the aftermath of the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 did Iraqi Kurdistan finally gain

officially recognized status in the new federal system. However, since 2017 after a series of missteps by the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG), including the loss of its main oil fields to the central government, the future of an autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan became uncertain.

North Africa after 1948 and toward Independence

North Africa did not play a direct role in the events of 1948; however, its history during the 1950s and 1960s has much in common with the history of the Arab states that did, with one major exception: The North African countries achieved their independence later than the countries in the Arab East. Nevertheless, in postindependence Algeria and Tunisia and later in Libya, new military-backed leaders implemented sweeping social and economic reforms. Their foreign policy tended toward Arab nationalism, although Tunisia's first president, Habib Bourguiba, remained a thorn in Nasser's side during the 1960s. Libya and, to a lesser extent, independent Algeria used their oil to support a variety of nationalist and leftist movements in the Arab world.

Libya was granted independence in 1949 and ruled by King Idris I (Sayyid Muhammad Idris) until 1969. The country remained extremely poor and underdeveloped, even after oil was discovered in the late 1950s. In 1969, a military coup modeled on that of Egypt toppled the monarchy. The coup planners, a group of army officers who emulated Egypt's Free Officers, named Colonel Muammar al-Qadhafi as chairman. He remained the head of state until 2011, when he was deposed and killed in an uprising supported by NATO airpower. Some talked at first about unification with Egypt, but that soon faded. Instead, Qadhafi used Libya's oil wealth to build a modern state and to fund radical Arab nationalist and leftist movements throughout the Arab world. He became a major source of financial support for the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in the early 1970s. Like the rest of the military-run Arab states, Qadhafi's government became more repressive with time.

In Algeria, the National Liberation Front (FLN) launched a war of independence against France in 1954. The French refused to grant what they considered an integral part of France the right to secede. The ensuing Algerian war of independence was a protracted and bloody affair, with more than five hundred thousand Algerian deaths

and tens of thousands of French soldiers and civilians killed. In 1962, France reluctantly granted Algeria independence. In the postindependence era, FLN-led Algeria started down a road of socialist-style central planning. The state became increasingly authoritarian, and its foreign policy remained anti-imperialist and openly supportive of the Palestinian cause.

Tunisia gained its independence from France in 1956 and was declared a republic in 1957. Despite its democratic façade, the new government never countenanced political opposition or even debate. From 1957 to 2011, there were only two presidents, and elections meant little or nothing. Tunisia's first president, Habib Bourguiba, initiated intensive reform and modernization programs that have been compared with those of Mustafa Kemal in Turkey for their emphasis on secularism and women's emancipation. Like Egypt, Tunisia experimented with quasi-socialist economic planning in the 1960s, and, as Egypt, abandoned socialism in the 1970s. Throughout the 1960s, Bourguiba and Nasser were rivals for the sympathies of the Arab public. After Egypt signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1979, the League of Arab States moved its headquarters from Cairo to Tunis. Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali replaced Bourguiba in a bloodless coup in 1987. Ben Ali was the first leader toppled in the so-called Arab Spring in 2011 and 2012. Since then, despite ongoing economic difficulties, Tunisia has become one of the most democratic countries in the Middle East and North Africa.

The French (and the Spanish in the northern Rif region) ruled over Morocco from 1912 to 1956. The French governed their protectorate indirectly through the Alaouite sultans and favored tribal and Sufi figures. As in other French colonies, French farmers and factory and mine owners enjoyed tax policies and government support that created great advantages for them. This, combined with France's obdurate refusal to grant even the most basic concessions, gave impetus to a burgeoning anticolonial nationalism in the interwar period. By the early 1950s, Moroccan nationalist leaders persuaded Sultan Muhammad V to adopt their cause. The French, still determined to hold on to their North African possession, exiled the

increasingly defiant Muhammad V for rejecting a dual sovereignty plan in 1953. However, within two years the French had to yield, as popular pressure nearly boiled over into open revolt. In 1956, the French recognized Moroccan independence, and shortly thereafter, Muhammad V was proclaimed king.

Despite Morocco's formal constitutional structure, from 1961 to 1999 King Hassan II, buttressed by patronage and the policing and surveillance power of the state, became an absolute monarch. The 1960s witnessed political violence and repression, with regime opponents jailed, exiled, and disappeared. In the 1980s, International Monetary Fund–mandated privatization policies increased income disparity, deepening poverty for many on the margins. Predictably, the 1980s and 1990s were decades of growing political opposition, protest, and government repression. In 1999, there were high hopes that Morocco's new king, Muhammad VI, would undertake fundamental reforms. With the exception of some minor post–Arab Spring initiatives, after nearly two decades on the throne these hopes have yet to be realized.

AI-Naksa and Its Ramifications

The June 1967 War and the End of Nasserism

The June 1967 War caused a major upheaval in the region, the reverberations of which still echo. Throughout the 1960s, tensions increased between Israel and its Arab neighbors. The Israeli policy of massive retaliation for attacks by Palestinian guerrillas or anything it considered a breach of its borders created instability in the region, especially in Jordan and later Lebanon. Meanwhile, Syria and Israel engaged in periodic artillery duels over demilitarized areas between the two states.

The Suez crisis of 1956 had clearly demonstrated that the Arab armies were no match for Israel's military might. Nevertheless, Nasser and the other Arab leaders continued to confront Israel in defense of the Palestinians as an indirect way to pressure rivals among other Arab states and to curry favor with their own populations, who were increasingly disenchanted with political repression and the material progress that the military regimes had failed to provide. Because support for the Palestinian cause was so strong among the general Arab populations, the regimes cynically channeled domestic political criticism toward the Palestine issue. Likewise, the Arab regimes regularly accused one another of not showing real commitment to the Palestinians.

The June 1967 War, or the *naksa* (the Setback) as it is known in the Arab world, resulted from a fundamental misreading of the military-political situation by the Arab states in general and Gamal Abdel Nasser in particular. Nasser hoped that through a game of brinkmanship he could force the United States to rein in Israeli attacks on Jordan and Syria. He assumed that the United States and the Soviet Union would not permit a war in the Middle East. There is also some evidence that he thought Israel wanted to avoid a war, at least for the moment. He was badly mistaken on both counts. In the spring of 1967 at a particularly tense moment, Nasser asked for the removal of UN observers between Egyptian and Israeli forces in the Sinai and announced a blockade of the Israeli port on the Red Sea.

He did not expect Israel to attack, and in any case, he was confident that the superpowers would prevent a regional explosion. In this way, he would be seen as standing up to the main regional power—Israel—without any real risk. His gambit failed disastrously. The Israelis struck on June 5, 1967. Within hours, the Israeli surprise attack destroyed the Egyptian, Syrian, and Jordanian air forces on the ground. Without air cover, the Arab armies were defenseless, and by June 11, Israeli infantry units had occupied the whole of the Sinai Peninsula, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and the Golan Heights.

In just six days, Israeli-controlled territory quadrupled in size, and Israel occupied territory with one million Palestinian residents. The Arab world was devastated. Nasser submitted his resignation immediately but withdrew his resignation after huge, government-backed demonstrations expressed support for him. In the wake of the defeat, Nasser was forced to reconcile with King Hussein of Jordan, seek financial support from his Saudi rivals, and accept large quantities of Soviet armaments that essentially put him in the Soviet camp in the Cold War. The Israeli victory in 1967 marked the twilight of Nasser's dominance over the political scene in the Arab world. Soon, more radical Arab nationalist, leftist, and Islamist political groups vied for the hearts and minds of the Arab public.

Although not tied directly to the events of 1967, in Iraq Ahmed Hasan al-Bakr, with his deputy Saddam Hussein, led the Ba'ath party to power in a bloodless coup in 1968. In consolidating their position, the Ba'athists systematically eliminated all their internal opponents and negotiated an end to the insurgency in the Kurdish north. In 1979, Saddam Hussein forced an aged and ailing al-Bakr into retirement, and within a year, Hussein's Iraq launched a disastrous war with the Islamic Republic of Iran that lasted nearly eight years and resulted in more than a million deaths.

Radical Palestinian Nationalism

For Palestinians, 1967 represented a turning point in their quest to achieve their own state. The military defeat of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan set the stage for a new phase of direct Palestinian participation in the question of Palestine. A younger, more radical leadership inspired by anticolonial struggles in Algeria and Vietnam called on Palestinians, for the first time since 1948, to take up the fight for a homeland themselves. This new revolutionary spirit resonated both inside and outside of the Middle East, and it pushed the entire political orientation in the region to the Left. The June 1967 War had led radicals to conclude that the Arab states possessed neither the capability nor the desire to win them a homeland and that Israel would respond only to the language of force. No Israeli government would come to the negotiating table willingly. They recognized Israel as invincible militarily, but reasoned that Palestinian resistance could inflict enough pain to compel Israel to bargain.

The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) became the vehicle through which Palestinians came to articulate their own collective aspirations. This was not always the case. Nasser was instrumental in the formation of the PLO in 1964, and he chose as the organization's first leader the lawyer Ahmad al-Shuqayri, who had previously worked for Aramco and the Saudi government. The PLO was an umbrella group made up of a number of different Palestinian resistance movements. Nasser hoped to control Palestinian resistance through the PLO. He sought to avoid any Palestinian provocations that might lead to direct confrontation with Israel. The defeat of 1967 changed all of this. The guerrilla leader, Yasir Arafat of the Fatah (Palestine Liberation Movement) faction, parlayed Palestinian frustration into his election as chairman of the PLO in 1969. The PLO, based in the Jordanian capital Amman, began to attack Israel in the West Bank and then within Israel itself. This prompted conflict between the Palestinians and Jordanian regime, ultimately culminating in Black September (see [Box 1.1](#)).

However, the fractious nature of Palestinian politics and the basic Palestinian condition of being dispersed across a region divided by all-but-impassable borders made unity a hard-to-achieve ideal. In addition, a number of Arab states—Libya, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait—funded individual factions of the Palestinians, some within the PLO and some outside of the organization. This funding came with strings attached, and this too had centrifugal consequences for Palestinian unity. The Palestinian question was a way for Middle Eastern regimes to fight proxy wars. Thus, the Iraqis might fund a group opposed to factions supported by Syria; Syria and Iraq both might support radical Palestinian factions opposed to the Jordanian regime; while Kuwait and Saudi Arabia supported the PLO with the understanding that the group would do nothing to harm the Jordanian monarchy. The many permutations of this logic and its manifestations in practice are too numerous to detail here. One can say that, ultimately, just as the Arab states never had a united position on Palestine, the Palestinians, funded by various regimes, often worked at cross-purposes because of ideological differences as well as between those of their paymasters.

Box 1.1 Black September

In the wake of the June 1967 War, Palestinian guerrilla groups began to fight in earnest against Israel. Egypt, Syria, and the rest of the Arab states feared military confrontation with Israel. As 1967 clearly demonstrated, their fears were well founded. They sought to curb Palestinians' attacks on Israel and instead to exploit the Palestine question in their domestic and regional political manoeuvring.

In the late 1960s, King Hussein became increasingly wary of the radical regimes on his Iraqi and Syrian borders. Meanwhile, these regimes supported Palestinian groups united in little else than their disdain for the Hashemite monarch, whom they saw as a stooge for the imperialist West and its local ally, Israel. By 1970, Hussein became worried about the stability of his regime in the wake of Palestinian raids on Israel and the massive Israeli reprisals they inevitably provoked. While Arafat was well aware that his funding from the Gulf states was contingent upon avoiding conflict with King Hussein, radical Palestinian factions supported by Syria and Iraq sought to topple the Hashemite monarchy.

The situation in Jordan came to a head in September 1970. After a series of provocative moves designed to undermine the Jordanian regime, King Hussein moved against the PLO in a confrontation known as Black September. Thousands of Palestinian civilians lost their lives in several rounds of fighting. Nasser negotiated an agreement to end the conflict, although he died unexpectedly the day after completing it.

Following Black September, the PLO moved its headquarters and its base of operations to Lebanon. The events of September 1970 also led to the emergence of the Black September terrorist group, whose first act was to kill the Jordanian interior minister who had been the architect of the Black September violence. The group is much better known for its infamous attack on the Olympic Village in Munich, Germany, in 1972, which led to the deaths of thirteen Israeli athletes and coaches during a botched German rescue operation.

The October War and the First Peace Treaty

In the aftermath of the June 1967 War, the UN Security Council agreed on Resolution 242. This resolution, which enshrined the notion of land for peace, became the basis of all subsequent peace initiatives. Not surprisingly, there exists strong disagreement about what this short document says. This confusion was not accidental. The English version of the resolution is more ambiguous than the French and Arabic versions. The author of the resolution, the British UN representative Lord Caradon, called the wording “constructive ambiguity.” The resolution called for Israel to withdraw “from territories occupied in the recent conflict.” The Arabic and French versions have a definite article before the word “territories.” That little word makes a world of difference in interpretation. The Arab states and Israel have argued about this for fifty years. Israel understands the resolution as requiring it to withdraw from “territories”—that is, some territory but not all of *the* territories. In other words, Israel need not withdraw from all of the territory it captured in 1967 to satisfy the conditions of the resolution. The Arab states argued for a long time that Israel must vacate all of the territory captured in 1967. For their part, the Palestinians rejected UN Security Council Resolution 242 outright for the simple reason that it refers to them not as a national group seeking a state, but only as refugees.

In the aftermath of their defeat, the Arab states reconciled themselves to the fact that Israel was there to stay. In the summer of 1967, the League of Arab States adopted a resolution that has come to be known as the *Three NOs*. In it, the members of the League affirmed that there would be no negotiation with Israel, no peace with Israel, and no recognition of Israel. However, the resolution was also a tacit recognition that the Arab-Israeli conflict had shifted from a question of the destruction or removal of Israel to the inescapable conclusion that Israel was not leaving. They adjusted their aims accordingly by seeking to regain the territory they lost in 1967. Meanwhile, the Palestinian cause more than ever became a tool by which these states manipulated regional political questions or attempted to draw superpower interest to their parochial concerns.

The Arab states were clearly not powerful enough to defeat Israel militarily. This realization did not bring hostilities between the Arab states and Israel to an end. Instead, the Arabs merely altered their tactics a bit to keep pressure on the Israeli military. Between 1967 and 1970, Israel and Egypt fought a war of attrition across the Suez Canal. In reality, this war of attrition was a series of artillery duels and aerial attacks on each other's fixed positions. The Egyptian cities of Ismailia and Suez were constantly under attack and were heavily damaged, and eventually, their entire populations of nearly a million were evacuated. Syria encouraged Palestinian guerrilla attacks across Israel's northern border and in the West Bank.

Then in October 1973, Egypt and Syria launched an attack on Israel. The Egyptian forces crossed the Suez Canal and overwhelmed the Israeli defenses while Syrian armor also achieved initial success on the Golan Heights. However, the Egyptian infantry units abruptly halted their advance eight miles into the occupied Sinai. In so doing, the Egyptian president, Anwar al-Sadat, was demonstrating his desire only for the return of the occupied Sinai and not the destruction of Israel. He hoped at this point that the superpowers would intervene and bring about negotiations. The Syrians, not having been privy to Sadat's plans, were baffled. This soon gave way to feelings of betrayal, as the Israelis were now free to concentrate all of their forces on the Syrian front in the Golan Heights. The United States undertook a massive airlift to resupply Israeli forces, and the ensuing Israeli counterattack devastated the Syrian forces and pushed them back across the 1967 cease-fire line. Israel then turned its full attention to the Egyptian front. The Israelis crossed the Suez Canal and besieged the Egyptian army defending Cairo. At this point, the superpowers became involved. They brokered the ceasefire and withdrawal agreements that ended the immediate hostilities.

The agreements that came out of the October War of 1973 eventually led to the signing of the 1979 Camp David Accords between Israel and Egypt. The beginning of the process came with Egyptian president Sadat's visit to Jerusalem in 1977. Two years

later, the two states signed a peace treaty ending their thirty-year state of war. The Israelis agreed to give up the Sinai Peninsula in return for full diplomatic relations. This agreement officially delinked Egypt from the Palestinian issue. The treaty was extremely unpopular in Egypt and the Arab world. Egypt was expelled from the League of Arab States, and the League moved its headquarters from Cairo to Tunis. Ultimately, the treaty led directly to Sadat's assassination two years later.

Internally, Israel witnessed a major transformation of its political culture in the 1970s. The Israeli electorate's perception that the Israeli military was unprepared for the 1973 war accelerated this change. In the 1977 parliamentary elections, the Labor Party's monopoly of power came to an end with the victory of Menachem Begin's revisionist Zionist Likud Party. The "earthquake election" signaled the rise of non-European Jews as a major political force in Israel. These so-called Eastern Jews resented what they saw as preferential treatment for European Jews in Israel. The right-wing parties had courted these voters for decades, and it began to pay off by the 1970s. With a Likud prime minister, a more strident rhetoric emanated from the Israeli government toward the Palestinians. This did not seem to augur well for those seeking peace; however, it was the Likud government under Begin that signed the first peace treaty with an Arab state in 1979.

The War Moves to Lebanon

Paradoxically, the Likud government also seemed willing to use force on a greater scale than its predecessors. For example, as was the case in Jordan, Palestinians began to attack Israel from Lebanese territory after 1967, and, just as in Jordan, this brought massive Israeli retaliation. The Israelis argued that these actions were justified because they were in response to Palestinian provocations or undertaken to preempt attacks. Israeli forces engaged in constant fighting in southern Lebanon, with incursions a regular occurrence. Between 1968 and 1975, Israel bombarded Lebanon more than four thousand times and undertook nearly 350 incursions into Lebanese territory. In the midst of Lebanon's violent civil war, Israel launched major invasions of its northern neighbor in 1978 and again in 1982. The Israelis hoped to remove Palestinian guerrillas from the border area from where they staged attacks on Israel. After the invasion of 1978, the Israelis set up a Lebanese proxy force to protect Israel's northern border.

The second invasion in June 1982 was much more substantial and even led to the brief occupation of parts of the Lebanese capital, Beirut. After more than two months of fighting and thousands of Lebanese casualties, the United States brokered a deal for the withdrawal of the PLO and Palestinian fighters from Lebanon. Immediately following the departure of the PLO, the Israeli government, working with its allies within the right-wing Christian camp, sought to install a new pro-Israeli government on Lebanon that would sign a peace treaty. Israel coerced the Lebanese parliament to elect its candidate, Bashir Gemayal, as president. The Israeli goals of a PLO withdrawal from Lebanon and a peace treaty with Lebanon seemed within reach. However, days before the new president was to take office, he was assassinated by a bomb planted by allies of the Syrian government. In the aftermath of his death, Gemayal's Christian supporters took their revenge on defenseless Palestinian civilians. Over the course of two days, Israeli troops allowed Gemayal's militia to enter Palestinian refugee camps and

killed between 2,000 and 3,500 people. The Sabra and Shatila massacres caused such revulsion in Israel that the defense minister, Ariel Sharon, was forced to resign.

The events of summer 1982 also set the stage for the disastrous US and French involvement in Lebanon. After Israel laid siege to Beirut for more than two months, the United States along with France and Italy contributed troops to the newly formed multinational force (MNF) to supervise the removal of the PLO fighters and to provide security to the Palestinian civilian population left behind. The MNF inexplicably withdrew two weeks before scheduled, setting the stage for the horrors of Sabra and Shatila. After the massacres, the MNF returned to Beirut, where it would stay for another year and a half. During the next few months, US and French armies became directly involved in the civil war on the side of the Christian right. The headquarters of the US Marines and the French paratroopers serving in the MNF were destroyed by simultaneous bomb blasts a little more than a year later, resulting in the deaths of more than three hundred military personnel. The United States soon withdrew ignominiously. The Lebanese civil war continued for nearly eight years after the US and French withdrawals.

The civil war was an extremely complex affair. In reality, it was a series of wars that lasted from 1975 until 1990 and resulted in the complete breakdown of the Lebanese state. From its inception in the 1940s, Lebanon had a weak central government with a decentralized power structure that resembled something close to the late Ottoman *millet* system in miniature. Much of the authority normally associated with the modern state devolved onto the seventeen recognized sectarian religious groups. Unfortunately, this also meant that the state did not enjoy a monopoly of arms. A number of militias and sectarian parties trained and carried weapons openly. According to the 1946 National Pact (a power-sharing formula worked out by the Lebanese elite shortly after independence), government positions were distributed according to a sectarian formula. Thus, the all-powerful president was required to be a Maronite Christian, the prime minister a Sunni Muslim, and the speaker of the parliament a

Shi'a, while parliamentary seats were divided according to a six-to-five ratio in favor of the Christian minority. All of the ministries and units of the government as well as civil service positions were likewise distributed. This odd formula was inherently unstable, and civil disturbance and political violence were common. The country suffered through a brief civil war in 1958 that resulted in the landing of US Marines on Lebanese soil.

After the PLO moved its headquarters from Amman to Beirut in 1970, the situation in Lebanon became even more unstable. Pressure to abolish the sectarian system came up against an entrenched class of wealthy families that rejected any change. By the mid-1970s, tensions had reached a boiling point, and in April 1975, the situation exploded. The war began as a showdown between leftist nationalist forces allied with the Palestinians against right-wing, predominantly Christian forces seeking to preserve their privileged position and resentful of the Palestinian presence. The war quickly became far more complex. The fighting unleashed social forces marginalized by the sectarian system maneuvering to better their collective social and economic positions. The war then mutated into a series of intersectarian and intrasectarian struggles. This situation was made even more complex by the many outside powers that became involved directly and indirectly. A partial list of these actors includes Syria, Israel, Iraq, Libya, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, Iran, the United States, France, Italy, and the Soviet Union. Finally, in 1990 Syria, with the acquiescence of the United States, France, and Israel, imposed a settlement through the Taif Agreement that amended, but did not abolish, the sectarian formula established in 1946.

The First Intifada and the First Gulf War

In 1987, the intensification of Israeli occupation tactics and a lack of basic services such as electricity and water finally exploded into a major uprising of the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza; it has become known as the *intifada* (this literally means “shaking off,” but it is also used to mean “insurrection”). The uprising began spontaneously after a traffic accident at an Israeli army checkpoint. Soon, Palestinians were boycotting Israeli products, engaging in mass strikes and demonstrations, and cheering groups of stone-throwing youth confronting heavily armed Israeli troops. The *intifada* signaled the emergence of new grassroots leaders in the occupied territories. The PLO leadership had moved to Tunis after the 1982 withdrawal from Beirut, and many saw them as remote and unresponsive to the situation in the West Bank and Gaza. The PLO leadership tried to make itself relevant after the outbreak of the revolt, but the *intifada* continued to be guided by local leaders in so-called popular committees.

The *intifada* resulted in about one thousand Palestinian and fifty-six Israeli deaths. Tens of thousands were injured and arrested. The uprising was also a public relations disaster for the Israelis as the prime minister announced a series of brutal policies, such as the intentional breaking of bones by Israeli soldiers of anyone suspected of throwing stones. The Israelis also began to give passive support to a local offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood by allowing the group to receive funding from the Gulf states. Israel hoped that the religious activists associated with this group would be less troublesome than the secular nationalists of the PLO. In this, they were badly mistaken. Even if at first the plan seemed to work, as Hamas (the Islamic Resistance Movement) activists criticized secular nationalists and attacked female political leaders of the PLO, they soon became an even bigger problem for Israel.²⁵ The *intifada* lasted from 1987 until 1993, and it demonstrated in excruciating detail to many Israelis the high moral and economic costs of the occupation. Israeli soldiers in heavy battle gear riding in tanks and

armored personnel carriers seemed to be locked in never-ending battles with defiant stone-throwing Palestinian youths, while Israel's economy suffered from labor shortages and other problems caused by the intifada. Given all of this, it is not surprising that the first Israeli-PLO agreement, the Oslo Accords of 1993, came about as a direct result of the intifada.

One of the most significant events of the 1990s in Middle Eastern history came on the heels of the end of the Lebanese civil war and the Palestinian intifada. In 1991, Saddam Hussein's armies invaded and occupied Kuwait. Fearing for the West's access to the region's oil, the United States cobbled together a broad coalition to remove the Iraqis. The Gulf War, which lasted just one hundred hours, pitted the United States against Iraq only three years after the two nations had been allies during Saddam Hussein's war on Iran that lasted from 1980 until 1988.

During the Gulf War, the United States set up a number of military bases in the Arabian Peninsula. These bases eventually became a rallying point for anti-American Islamist militants led by Osama bin Laden, who demanded that these bases be closed. The coalition victory over Iraq in 1991 left Saddam Hussein in power but brought eleven years of severe economic sanctions on Iraq. Hussein and the United States never reconciled, and in 2003, the United States invaded Iraq to remove Hussein from power.

The Oil-Producing States

An important feature of Middle East history during the past century was the emergence and rising importance of the Middle Eastern oil-producing states such as Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Algeria, Libya, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Qatar.

The oil-producing states of the Persian Gulf are sometimes referred to as “rentier states.” This essentially means that their revenues are derived from sources other than taxation of the local population. In such circumstances, the state has a propensity to become a dispenser of patronage. Instead of developing a governing consensus, the state merely pays the population—or, more likely, an important constituency—for its loyalty. Because there is little need for rulers to respond to the demands for greater openness, rentier states have a strong tendency to be undemocratic. This general framework more or less describes a number of the oil-producing states in the Persian Gulf: They have vast oil wealth, provide extensive subsidies and material support to key populations, have very little governmental transparency and few democratic institutions, and are ruled by small oligarchies.

Through most of the twentieth century, international oil companies worked in the region through the consortium model. With this approach, a group of companies would pool their resources under a single name; Aramco of Saudi Arabia was the best known of the consortia. Consortia bought the rights to exploit oil fields for terms of a half-century or more. Over time, they came to control the entirety of oil drilling and production in the region. They paid the oil states rent in exchange for monopoly rights over exploration and production. These consortium (and the earlier concessions) agreements enabled the largest of the oil companies, the so-called seven sisters, to control the industry prior to 1973.

Persia granted the first oil concession to Britain in 1901. William Knox D’Arcy, a British explorer, gained the right to “obtain, exploit,

develop, carry away and sell” petroleum and petroleum products from Persia in exchange for £40,000 as well as 16 percent of the annual profits to be paid to the Qajar monarchs. The British government bought the concession from D’Arcy and created the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) that eventually became British Petroleum or BP. The agreement was extremely profitable. By 1923, BP was receiving upward of £40 million per year in revenue while the Iranian government received around £5 million. D’Arcy’s agreement with the Persian monarchy became the model for subsequent oil concessions. Local rulers, often put in power and sustained by British and later US support, granted a number of these concessions.

During the 1950s and 1960s, some states attempted to amend the concession agreements under which multinational oil companies and their consortia controlled the oil wealth in the region. Saudi Arabia and Iran were able to gain 50 percent of profits in the 1950s; however, full local control did not come until much later. Iraq was the first state to successfully nationalize its petroleum sector in 1972.

Oil Politics and Neoliberal Reforms

During the 1960s, Nasser-inspired Arab nationalists savaged the Saudis and the other oil states in the Gulf. They accused the monarchs of being backward, regressive tools of Western imperialism. Domestic support in their countries for Nasser and other radical voices convinced these rulers of the need to counter these attacks. Accordingly, they began to take a higher profile in diplomatic questions concerning the entire Arab world. This approach entailed fostering anti-Nasserist political movements and sentiments whenever they could. The mutual antagonism played out in the 1962 to 1970 Yemeni civil war where Saudi Arabia and Egypt became directly involved on opposite sides. The criticism of the Gulf oil states as pawns of the West became even more acute with the radicalization of Arab politics after Arab defeat in June 1967. One of the ways they sought to quiet their critics was through providing generous financial support to the more moderate elements in the PLO. The other way was through supporting conservative religious movements throughout the region.

The prominence of the oil-producing states grew exponentially after the October 1973 War. The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC; the cartel made up of many of the world's oil-exporting states) had sought to raise prices long before the October War, and Western support for Israel became a convenient pretext for a dramatic price increase. The Arab members of OPEC then began a five-month oil embargo to protest the US airlift of military supplies to Israel that not only resulted in long gasoline lines on Main Street USA but was also a financial windfall for the oil exporters. At about the same time, the monarchies of the Gulf began to emphasize their Islamic bona fides, actively portraying themselves as the guardians of Islam. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait encouraged Islamic missionary activity, emphasizing conservative religious thought throughout the Arab and wider Muslim worlds. The effect of this has been manifest in the growth of the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood and the rise of "salafist" or ultraconservative groups. The United States saw this as a positive development because it viewed such religious activity

as nonpolitical; moreover, seen through the lens of the Cold War, religious activism seemed to provide a popular platform for anticommunism.

Outside of the oil-producing states, the optimism of the early 1960s gave way to stagnation and decline by the mid-1970s. The Nasserist Arab socialism and regionwide state-capitalist programs had run out of steam. An inefficient and nepotistic management culture ruled over a huge public sector of increasingly alienated workers. Middle Eastern governments could no longer promise a decent living to quickly expanding populations, and real incomes decreased rapidly. The resultant discontent manifested itself in an invigorated Left that called for greater social justice and more democratic political institutions, as well as in energized Gulf-supported Islamism that began to proclaim that “Islam is the solution.” At the same time, a number of regimes took steps toward liberalizing their economies. These policies entailed cutting back on spending for social programs and food subsidies upon which people had come to depend. Liberalization failed to stem the tide of inflation, underemployment, and economic hardship that was quickly bankrupting the middle classes. This was an explosive combination, and eventually, something had to give.

Egypt’s experience illustrates this process. In the mid-1970s, Anwar al-Sadat, Gamal Abdel Nasser’s successor, put an end to the quasi-socialist policies of his predecessor. He enacted a series of reforms intended to move the Egyptian economy toward capitalism. Sadat, hoping to spur economic growth and create new jobs for a rapidly growing population, opened the economy to foreign investment. He also hoped to parlay his economic liberalization plans into new loans from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to help reduce Egypt’s huge foreign debt. Collectively, these reforms were known as *infitah*, or opening.

Egypt’s path toward liberalization included the privatization of state-owned companies (which often led to the dismissal of large numbers of workers) and cutbacks on food subsidies in an effort to decrease

government spending. These policies created great resentment because they resulted in intense inflation and gave rise to a group of investors who profited handsomely from their insider position within the ruling elite. Real wages did not keep up with rising prices, and much of the salaried middle class (formerly one of the main bases of support for the regime) was forced to work at several jobs to make ends meet. The dire economic situation engendered new forms of petty corruption that increased the general feeling of disorientation. It seemed as if anything and everything was for sale at the right price. Discontent rose, and unrest spread around the country. In 1977 after the government slashed subsidies for basic food staples, President Sadat sent the army into the streets in Cairo and other cities to quell a series of violent confrontations between protesters and the police.

Islamic Militancy, 9/11, and the Second Gulf War

In the 1970s and 1980s, increasing numbers of people gravitated toward a diverse genre of political activism, often analytically abridged under the rubric of “Islamism.” On one level, the roots of these trends recall the nineteenth-century Islamic modernist movement’s emphasis on the importance of adopting a critical stance toward the practice of Islam and on reforming society through education. At the same time, some Islamist movements also bear a family resemblance to twentieth-century ideologies that emphasize anti-imperialism, mass social and political engagement, and, in some cases, calls to violence. Events such as the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran and the US-organized anti-Soviet insurgency in Afghanistan were seminal events in the history of Islamism and its transformation into a significant part of the region’s political imagination.

In 1970s Iran, Mohammad Reza Shah (along with his friends in the West) was oblivious to the many signs of widespread discontent. The last decade and a half of the shah’s rule was defined by a series of hard-to-fathom missteps in the face of building dissatisfaction and opposition. His regime became more, not less, autocratic. In 1975, for example, in the face of budding hostility and calls for greater political freedoms, the shah eliminated the two legal political parties and established a one-party state. At about the same time, he declared himself the “spiritual leader” of Iran and in so doing seemed to be engaging in a frontal assault on the powerful clergy who protested vociferously, claiming the shah was seeking to “nationalize” religion. Meanwhile, the merchants from the traditional markets or bazaars, who were allied with the clergy, also felt threatened by the shah’s moves to impose new laws and labor regulations that used what they saw as draconian methods. By 1977, demonstrations and protests were spreading throughout the country. Then inexplicably in January 1978, a government newspaper ran an editorial insulting the most popular cleric, the exiled Ayatollah Ruhallah Khomeini, which resulted in anti-shah demonstrations and the police use of deadly force. This began an escalation against the

regime that eventually led to the shah's ouster. Over and over, anti-shah demonstrators were met with deadly force by security forces, and then mourners for the slain would organize even bigger marches that were shot at, resulting in more deaths, and so on. In early December 1978, massive demonstrations and a general strike against the shah sealed his fate. Millions of anti-shah protestors in the streets of Tehran were proof that the military had lost its appetite for killing Iranian civilians, that the urban middle classes had abandoned the shah, and that court patronage had become meaningless. The shah departed Iran in January 1979 for a "vacation," and Khomeini returned from more than twenty years of exile about two weeks later.

In April 1979, nearly 99 percent of the Iranian electorate approved a referendum to replace the Pahlavi monarchy with an Islamic Republic. Ayatollah Khomeini became Iran's first postrevolutionary leader. The success of what became known as the Islamic Revolution inspired like-minded activists around the world who saw it as a victory for both Islam and anti-imperialism. The shah had seemed to be among the most secure leaders in the whole region. The Iranian military was powerful, well trained, and seemingly loyal to the head of state. But popular discontent resulting from extremely uneven economic development, the shah's perceived aloofness from ordinary Iranians, and his ostentatious lifestyle quickly overwhelmed the regime. In the end, Muhammad Reza Shah's pride and joy, the military, stood by as the Iranian people forced him into exile.

Iran was not the only state that grew more autocratic in the 1970s. Regimes throughout the region silenced domestic opposition, especially those objecting to economic liberalization. Rulers from North Africa to the Persian Gulf were simultaneously committed to opening their economies and shutting down political dissent. They viewed the Left, which appealed to large segments of the population (especially youth), as a threat. In response, some encouraged Islam-inspired political movements as a counterweight. At the outset, Islamic activists seemed more interested in preaching and in the minutiae of religious questions than in the politics of economic

liberalization. In addition, they attacked secular leftists for “aping” the communist atheism of the West.

This approach turned out to be misguided as Islamist militants turned on their sponsors throughout the region. In Egypt, an Islamist militant organization, hoping to ignite a general uprising, tried to seize a military school in Cairo in 1974. Then in 1977, another group kidnapped and killed a former Egyptian government minister. In 1979 in Saudi Arabia, in an event that shocked the Muslim world, Islamist militants opposed to the Saudi monarchy seized the Grand Mosque in Mecca. Saudi troops regained control after nearly three weeks of ferocious fighting with the help of advisers from the French special forces Groupe d’Intervention de la Gendarmerie Nationale.²⁶ In 1981, an Islamist militant organization infiltrated the Egyptian army and assassinated President Sadat at a military parade. Meanwhile in Syria after several years of a violent Islamist insurgency, the government, with the help of Soviet advisers, launched an all-out assault on the insurgent stronghold in the city of Hama in 1982. Some have estimated that as many as thirty thousand people died in the assault.

These events did not seem to dampen US support for Islamic militancy in the period before and just after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Under President Jimmy Carter, the United States began the biggest covert operation in its history, funneling money and arms and providing training through Pakistan to Afghans fighting the Soviet invaders. The United States even commissioned the writing of a booklet to encourage “freedom fighters” to travel to Afghanistan and join in the jihad against the “atheist communist” regime. Throughout the 1980s, US funding for the insurgency grew enormously. Governments in Egypt, Syria, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, and the Gulf states saw the campaign against the Soviets as a golden opportunity to encourage troublesome malcontents to travel to Afghanistan to fight against the infidel invaders. A wealthy Saudi Arabian named Osama bin Laden helped facilitate the travel and training of some of the fighters. These young men gained valuable fighting experience that they would later put to use against their own

regimes as well as against the United States in the 1990s and 2000s.

Just as Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979 energized Muslim militants around the region, so too did the insurgency against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. The US-funded campaign succeeded in forcing the Soviet Union to withdraw from Afghanistan in 1989. After an extended period of internecine fighting, a group sponsored by Pakistani military intelligence—the Taliban—triumphed over its rivals and established a government in Kabul in 1996. The Taliban government was toppled by the United States after the attacks of September 11, 2001; yet even after nearly twenty years of war in Afghanistan, the United States has not succeeded in defeating the movement. After the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, many of the radicalized fighters, the so-called Afghan Arabs, also returned to their home countries. These hardened fighters often joined Islamist militant insurgencies in the 1990s in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, and Jordan.

In the midst of the turmoil and social dislocation caused by the combination of economic liberalization, these Islamist insurgencies, and government-led counterinsurgency campaigns, there emerged an important cultural phenomenon that its devotees sometimes called the Islamic awakening, or *al-Sahwa al-Islamiya*. Some analysts view this complex social and cultural movement and Islamist militancy as a single phenomenon, using terms such as *Islamic fundamentalism* or *political Islam*. However, by lumping together a large number of tendencies and groups with diverse orientations, aims, and national histories, such terms obscure much more than they illuminate. Indeed, depending on how one defines *fundamental*, the term *Islamic fundamentalists* could include almost all who consider themselves practicing Muslims. The neologism *political Islam* is equally fraught because much of the activity of the Islamic awakening was not primarily oriented toward creating an Islamic political entity. For example, many of those participating in Islamic piety movements understood themselves endeavoring to

make society more Islamic through the reform of everyday practice of individual believers.

To be sure, there is also a wide array of Islamist political groups, but one should be very wary of labeling legal political parties and extremist militant organizations under the same rubric *political Islam*. The Muslim Brothers in Jordan and Egypt, the Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria, Hamas in Palestine, and Hizballah in Lebanon all participated successfully in electoral processes in their countries. A more useful criterion would distinguish between reformist groups working within the legal framework of the state and those employing violent tactics and terrorism to achieve their aims. Of the latter, there are roughly two types: those seeking to establish an Islamic state or to change the political orientation of a particular national state, such as the Islamic Group in Egypt during the 1990s, and those, such as al-Qa'ida, that seek to undermine the entire global sociopolitical economic regime.

In the 1990s, this latter type, many of whom were associated with the anti-Soviet insurgency in Afghanistan, came to the fore. These militants viewed their victory as a historic turning point, the significance of which became manifest only a few years later when the Soviet Union fell apart. Not without reason, they connected their US-supported guerrilla war to the demise of a superpower. This idea continues to inspire those in the fight against the United States, hoping for a similar outcome. Using their Afghanistan experience as a model, instead of mobilizing large numbers of followers in a revolutionary tide to topple a national government, they formed themselves into small and unattached units and employed violent tactics to bring about what they hoped would be the collapse of the entire international system. Thus, in the mid-1990s they began to strike the main pillars of the international system, the United States and its allies. A series of attacks followed against US interests in Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and the United States in New York in 1993 and again in New York and Washington, DC, in 2001.

Like the US-backed jihad against the Soviet Union in the 1980s, the US response to the attacks of September 11, 2001, fomented another even-more-violent manifestation of Islamic extremism. After 9/11, the United States launched military operations in Afghanistan and removed the Taliban government because it refused to hand over the al-Qa'ida leaders responsible for the attacks. Then, in what the US government at the time claimed was a further response, President George W. Bush authorized a US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. The fighting ended quickly, but the mismanaged occupation created a power vacuum in which violent anarchy reigned supreme and multiple insurgencies raged across much of Iraq. Evolving out of the ensuing chaos, the group that became ISIS (or, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria) adopted a hybrid form of Islamist extremism. Like al-Qa'ida, ISIS rejected any semblance of conformity to the international order, but its disdain for national borders was merely a step in its quest to establish a "caliphate" that would eventually encompass the entire Muslim world.

Eventually, the so-called Caliph Abū Bakr al-Baghdadi (Ibrahim Awad Ibrahim al Badr), based in Raqqa, Syria, "recognized" at least nine other "provinces" from Libya to the North Caucasus to Southeast Asia. Is this ISIS-type hybrid a flash in the pan born out of the disaster of the Iraqi invasion, or is its determination to erase national borders to create a larger political entity a whole new phase of extremism? Only the future will tell whether or not this becomes commonplace in the long run.

Rebellions, Civil Wars, and US Intervention

Surprising experts and laypeople alike, 2011 and 2012 saw masses of protesters pouring into the streets across the Arab world, demanding fundamental change. Despite the shock at the time, such phenomena were not unprecedented in the Arab world. For example, in 1985 massive protests in Sudan led to the overthrow of its autocratic ruler Jafar Numayri. However, the difference in 2011 was how these popular protests and their slogans moved across borders so quickly. In case after case, entrenched rulers, taken by surprise and unaccustomed to domestic opposition, refused to grant major concessions. Their intransigence only hardened the resolve of demonstrators in the streets, and soon, calls for revolution replaced those for reform. The sobriquet *Arab Spring* referred not so much to a particular season of the year but rather to the hope for long-delayed political transformation and social and cultural renewal. In actual fact, many of the seminal events of the Arab Spring occurred in the winter of 2010 to 2011.

The spark that set the Arab world on fire emerged from the most unlikely of sources: a desperate individual act in a provincial town in what was thought of as one of the most stable countries in the region. On December 17, 2010, in Sidi Bouzid, a dusty town of forty thousand in central Tunisia, a street vendor named Muhammad Bouazizi set himself on fire in front of the town hall. Fed up with constant police harassment and despondent about his bleak future prospects, Bouazizi acted out of frustration and anger. Solidarity protests broke out immediately in Sidi Bouzid and soon engulfed the entire country. Muhammad Bouazizi's life and death became potent symbols for a whole generation constrained by repressive political systems and meager economic prospects. Within days, Tunisia was in open, peaceful revolt, with increasing numbers of demonstrators standing steadfast in the face of police violence. On January 14, 2011, a little over a month after Bouazizi's self-immolation, Tunisia's president Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali fled with his family to Saudi Arabia. Almost simultaneously, protests broke out from the Maghreb to the

Persian Gulf as protesters in one country after another borrowed the most popular chants of the Tunisian revolutionaries: *al-sha'ab yurid isqat al-nizam*—"The people want to bring down the regime"—and *silmiya, silmiya*—"Peaceful, peaceful."

Mass protests began in Egypt during the last week of January 2011. Egyptian police forces responded with violence, killing nearly a thousand demonstrators. The besieged Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak called the army into the streets, but as was the case in Tunisia, the army declared its neutrality and did not shoot demonstrators. Finally, after weeks of sustained protest that included occupying major public spaces such as Cairo's Tahrir Square, Mubarak stepped down, and the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces announced that it would govern temporarily until elections could be held.

The jubilation of the first months of 2011 gave way to uneasiness and then despair. Fast-moving events across the region did not augur well for a democratic transition, and regional and international intervention often undermined prospects for democracy as well. For example, when huge protests threatened the absolute monarchy in Bahrain, a Persian Gulf state that houses the US Naval Forces Central Command and the US Naval Fifth Fleet, its embattled king (whose forebears have ruled for more than two hundred years) invited the Saudi Arabian armed forces to invade the country and crush the peaceful antigovernment demonstrations. At almost the same time, the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi rebelled against the Tripoli-based government of Muammar al-Qadhafi and declared itself "liberated." With Libyan forces bearing down on the city, NATO initiated an air campaign, ostensibly to protect civilians. Whatever its initial purpose, the air campaign soon became a full-scale assault on the Libyan armed forces and was the decisive factor in the end of Qadhafi's rule and the collapse of his government. Unfortunately, the Obama administration and its European allies had not learned the lessons of the 2003 Iraq fiasco, and without any proper postwar planning, Libya soon fell into a state of violent, febrile anarchy, punctuated by murderous score-settling, collective punishment, and

attacks on those whose skin color was evidence enough of their support or opposition to some faction or another. Libya has all but ceased to exist as a centralized state, with several governments claiming legitimacy and fractious militia politics generating disorder, constant fighting, and great bloodshed among civilians.

That brings us to the civil wars in Yemen and Syria. In 2011, huge demonstrations in Yemen called for the end of the thirty-three-year rule of Ali Abdallah Salih. Saudi Arabia and the United States, fearing greater instability in a notoriously unstable country, began to press Salih to transfer power to one of his deputies. After months of foot-dragging, Salih's vice president, Abdo Rabbuh Mansur al-Hadi, became president, "winning" a single-candidate election. Many of Yemen's youthful rebels and some political factions, including the Houthi Movement from the Sa'dah Governate, refused to recognize al-Hadi. The Houthis mobilized in response to what they alleged was al-Hadi's collusion with the forces of al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), who were now attacking Houthi rebels, and their long-running rebellion in the North that was spreading across the country. The situation became more complex as the deposed president Ali Abdallah Salih denounced his successor and joined the Houthi rebellion. The Houthis took the two largest cities, the capital Sana'a and Aden, from Yemeni forces loyal to al-Hadi, who was eventually forced to flee to Saudi Arabia. In spring 2015, Saudi Arabia, accusing the Houthis of receiving Iranian support, forged together a military coalition of nine Arab states (with the United States providing intelligence and logistical support) and began an air campaign in support of al-Hadi's exiled government. Subsequently as the Saudi-led coalition blockaded Yemen by land, sea, and air, the situation for civilians in the poorest country in the region became desperate, with millions threatened with starvation and disease. As the fighting raged on and civilian casualties mounted, the Saudi military campaign gained little momentum, and coalition spokespeople were often hard-pressed to explain the logic of their operations and to outline their exit strategy.

Meanwhile, in 2011 an armed rebellion broke out in Syria after security forces in the city of Daraa killed a number of demonstrators opposed to the more-than-four-decade rule of the al-Asad family. There were three factors that set the Syrian revolt apart from the others at the time: (1) Syria's proximity to Israel, (2) its role as part of the "resistance" to the United States and its main Middle Eastern allies (Israel and Saudi Arabia), and (3) the rise of ISIS and its success in exploiting the vacuum created by civil war to take over large swaths of the country. From the outset, regime opponents drew on the first two factors to lobby for outside military intervention, calling for what some called the "Libyan Option" at the United Nations. However, with two allies of Syria's president Bashar al-Asad (Russia and China) on the Security Council, this strategy seemed to accomplish little more than to pull Syria inexorably toward the abyss. Indeed, the situation in Syria quickly devolved from a civil war and into a regional and global proxy war, with the Saudis, Qataris, Turkey, the CIA, and the US Defense Department all backing different factions. For all intents and purposes, the only opposition consisted of Islamist militias, many of whom were of the extremist variety, including al-Qa'ida's local franchise, the Nusra Front (now known as Hay'a Tahrir al-Sham [HTS], or Organization for the Liberation of the Levant). For a time, there was talk of building a "Free Syrian Army" as a secular alternative to the Islamists; despite huge sums spent by the United States and others, these efforts came to naught. The entry of ISIS into the situation in Syria added even more intensity to a conflict already marked by wanton cruelty on a mass scale and with the scope of violence increasing exponentially. With so many external opponents underwriting a plethora of opposition groups and with Turkey openly facilitating the movement of fighters across the border into Syria, there were many questions about whether the Syrian government would survive. However, the war took a decisive turn in the regime's favor when in September 2015 Vladimir Putin committed the Russian military to propping up the teetering Asad government. The Syrian army, backed by Russian airpower and Iran-supported militias from Lebanon and Iraq, turned the tide of the war over the next three years, methodically recapturing rebel-held territories in a vicious war

of attrition. If current trends continue, it seems inevitable that the regime will regain sovereignty on its entire territory. What kind of polity and society might emerge out of this catastrophe is anyone's guess.

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, one of the primary factors in the history of the Middle East over the past thirty years or so has been the unrivaled power of the United States to impose its will militarily and otherwise on regional actors. Large US military interventions began with the First Gulf War of 1990 and continued after 9/11—first in Afghanistan and subsequently in the Second Gulf War of 2003. The United States justified its invasion and occupation of Iraq by alleging that Saddam Hussein's government had contact with the perpetrators of the attacks on New York and Washington, DC, and that the Iraqis had resumed their weapons of mass destruction (WMD) program. Because of the unsubstantiated nature of these assertions, the United States was unable to convince some of its major allies and the UN to approve the Iraq invasion (both of the allegations turned out to be false). Thus, the United States—without UN approval and with limited support around the world—invaded Iraq and deposed Saddam Hussein.

This proved to be the easiest part of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The country soon descended into chaos, as the US occupation authority was ill-prepared to carry out its mission. The Coalition Provisional Authority, as the occupation authority was known, acted in ad hoc and ill-conceived ways. One of its most glaring mistakes was disbanding the Iraqi army without warning and thereby depriving one hundred thousand armed men a living. Not surprisingly, a very violent anti-US insurgency soon developed, as did a horrifying sectarian bloodbath replete with a campaign of ethnic cleansing that eliminated areas with mixed Sunni/Shi'i Muslim populations, to say nothing of mass exodus of Iraqi Christians from the country.

In the wake of the occupation, Iraqi leaders wrestled with the United States to hand over power, and after protracted negotiations, the United States finally relented and organized elections. Post-invasion

Iraqi politics devolved into deadlock, and each round of elections brought on a governmental crisis resolved temporarily through promises that were never meant to be kept by most of the major players. After eight years of occupation, the United States withdrew most of its military forces, leaving a country riven by political paralysis in which near-daily bombings and other terrorist outrages killed thousands of innocent civilians. Making matters worse, in the midst of slaughter and political chaos in the capital, ISIS swept across northern Iraq. The vastly outnumbered ISIS militants captured huge amounts of territory from an Iraqi army that offered almost no resistance. In 2014, Falluja fell first and then Tikrit, Mosul (Iraq's second-largest city), followed by towns and cities across northern Syria. At its height, ISIS controlled territory equal to more than half the size of Syria that contained nearly eight million inhabitants.

The Iraqi army, supported by sectarian militias and backed with US airpower, began to roll back ISIS in 2016. The US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, the predominately Kurdish militias, did the same across the border in Syria, capturing the de facto ISIS capital Raqqa in October 2016. But all of this hardly seems like an end to conflict. Nearly two decades later, the end of US military campaigning in the region and beyond is not in sight. On the contrary, US operations continue to expand from the Middle East into South Asia, East Africa, and, most recently, the Sahel region of Africa. Each new entanglement seems to metastasize into another apparently endless series of operations involving small numbers of American boots on the ground and the use of drones and other airpower. Ultimately, the violence and political upheaval across the region from Libya to Iraq to Yemen to Syria to East and Central Africa (and South Asia) has had ripples across the globe, creating the worst refugee crisis in Europe since World War II and driving the rise of anti-immigrant, right-wing politicians across the continent and beyond.

Can the United States continue to wield the power it has over the past three decades in the Middle East? Donald Trump was elected president, promising to scale back US military involvements abroad. The early signs were that his administration would more or less

continue the policies of its predecessors, with some exceptions. First, the American president has been very receptive to the most adventurous initiatives undertaken by the de facto King of Saudi Arabia, its young Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud (popularly known as MBS). Trump has responded positively to the Saudi involvement in the Yemeni and Syrian civil wars and has stood by MBS in the latter's confrontation with Iran. Trump declared that he would no longer honor the 2013 so-called Iran Nuclear Agreement that the Saudis have vociferously criticized, and he has endorsed the de facto alliance between the Saudis and Israeli government. Second, with respect to the Palestine Question, Trump—despite some campaign rhetoric to the contrary—was quick to endorse some of the most right-wing positions ever adopted by an Israeli government. Soon after moving the American Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, Trump cut off funds to the Palestinian Authority and then later to the UN organization tasked with caring for Palestinians refugees, UNRWA. It still remains unclear when, and if, his administration will make good on producing a “deal” that all parties in this seventy-year-old conflict will accept. However, if one were to take the policies of the Trump administration as a backdrop to accumulated ill-will of nearly twenty-five years of fruitless negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians, the early signs are not encouraging.

Conclusion

No one can deny that the history of the Middle East for the past two centuries was profoundly affected by the rise of Western European economic and military power. The Ottoman Tanzimat and the more equivocal reforms of the Qajar shahs were, at least in part, driven by unease about the burgeoning hegemony of Europe. The rise of the West, however, is not the entire story. Events largely driven by internal dynamics, such as Mehmet Ali's short-lived Egyptian empire, come to mind. Important cultural movements such as the Nahda and Islamic modernism, too, have roots that reach back to the region's precolonial history. Even the long-term consequences of events authored in Europe, such as the cataclysm of World War I, played out on social, cultural, and economic fields already well established. For example, the creation of new states in the region, such as Iraq and Syria, did not erase extant social and historical dynamics; it merely reoriented their trajectories. The old regimes did not simply disappear; they blended into the new contexts.

That said, the redrawn post–World War I map of the region, anticolonial nationalist movements, and the emergence of independent states during the course of the first half of the twentieth century ushered in a new Middle East. Elites and charismatic figures armed with new kinds of political ideologies appealed to populations within and without these individual political entities. Arab nationalism, Arab socialism, Islamism, and a myriad of local nationalisms vied for the loyalty of the region's peoples. Top-down reform promulgated by individual strongmen such as Mustafa Kemal or Reza Shah Pahlavi as well as authoritarian military regimes became the norm—so too did inter-Arab rivalries or cold wars involving Nasserist Egypt; Hashemite Jordan; and Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Syria. The establishment of the state of Israel and the subsequent Arab-Israeli conflict produced momentous events with long-term consequences. The 1948 Arab-Israeli war, the 1956 Suez Crisis, the June 1967 War, the October 1973 War, the Egypt-Israel peace treaty, and the

question of a Palestinian state all continue to weigh on the region in some way.

The founding of the stridently secular Turkish Republic in 1923 raised the question of the public place of Islam in unprecedented ways. The issue did not disappear over the course of the century. It achieved new relevance beginning with the rise of Islamist militancy in the 1970s, the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, and the blossoming of the Islamic awakening of the past two decades. It has come to the fore even more in the immediate aftermath of the Arab Spring, in which Islamist-oriented parties and movements played a major role. In postrevolutionary Tunisia's budding democracy, the Islamist Ennahdha Party has participated in coalition governments since 2011 and has shown itself very adept at working with secular parties within the parliamentary system. Egypt elected Mohammad Morsi, the Muslim Brothers' Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) candidate, to the presidency in 2012, although he was deposed in a military coup in 2013. His party was also soon outlawed and its leaders and cadres jailed amid a massive crackdown on all political activity. By some measures, since the military's seizure of power in 2013 Egypt has become more repressive than it has ever been in modern times. In Turkey, the neo-Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has used its overwhelming electoral dominance to amend the constitution and steer the Republic away from its strict secular origins. In a controversial referendum in 2017, Turkey scrapped its parliamentary system and put in its place a strong presidential system that was supposed to be initiated in 2020. However, fearing growing economic problems, the AKP called for elections a year and a half early, and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was elected president. Despite whatever economic difficulties come to pass, it is hard to say whether Erdoğan's AKP base would ever consider pushing Turkey back toward Kemalist secularism.

Finally, the last few decades brought great frustration with the lack of economic opportunity and the near absence of the right to free political expression in many countries in the region. This goes a long way toward explaining the Arab Spring and its subsequent civil wars

and the call for social and economic justice and free political expression. These frustrations, combined with the increasing violence largely perpetrated or encouraged by outsiders that has marked the region's history for decades, may offer us a vantage point from which to make sense of the emergence of extreme militant groups such as ISIS and the horrifying violence that has shattered a number of states in the region and set millions of refugees on the move. Perhaps this same calculus offers a more optimistic imagining of the future. For despite the fact that even if one were to go back to the Mongol invasion of 1258, there simply is no precedent for the scope and intensity of violence and bloodletting raging across the Middle East. Many, if not most, of the region's inhabitants still believe that collectively they have the capacity to shape their own destiny.

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2 The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Mark Tessler¹

Many assume, quite mistakenly, that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a centuries-old feud based on ancient religious antagonisms between Jews and Muslims. This is not correct. The circumstances of Jews in Muslim lands were for the most part proper; indeed, Muslim-Jewish relations were often cordial and friendly. There were instances of hostility or even violence directed at Jewish minorities, but these were the exception; in general, Jews fared much better in the Muslim world than they did in the Christian West. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict did not take shape until the end of the nineteenth century. Slow to emerge even then, it resulted from claims to the same territory by competing nationalist movements.

Emergence of the Conflict

In making the case for a Jewish national home in Palestine, Zionists begin by pointing to the existence of Jewish kingdoms in the territory during biblical times. Biblical record and archaeological evidence indicate that the Jews conquered and began to settle Palestine, known in the Bible as the land of Canaan, during the thirteenth century before the Christian era (BCE). Moses had given the Israelites political organization and led them out of Egypt, bringing them to the country's borders. Thereafter, under Joshua, they initiated a prolonged military campaign in which they gradually took control of the territory and made it their home. By the twelfth century BCE, the period of Judges, the Jews were firmly established in ancient Palestine, and the area of their control included substantial tracts of territory on both sides of the Jordan River. This was the center of Hebrew life until the Jews were driven from the territory by the Romans in the first century of the Christian era (CE).

Religious Zionists add that their claim reflects not only the national history of the Jewish people but also a promise by God to one day return the Jews to Eretz Yisrael, the historic Land of Israel. This belief that an ingathering of the exiles is part of God's plan is the foundation of classical religious Zionism, which has animated the prayers and aspirations of believing Jews since the Romans destroyed the Second Jewish Temple in Jerusalem and drove the Jews from the country. As expressed by one modern-day Zionist, "The Jewish people has never ceased to assert its right, its title, to the Land of Israel. This continuous, uninterrupted insistence, an intimate ingredient of Jewish consciousness, is at the core of Jewish history."² Similarly, as another maintains,

Despite the loss of political independence and the dispersion of the Jewish people, the true home of the Jews remained Jerusalem and the Land of Israel; the idea of

eventual return from the four corners of the earth was never abandoned.³

Zionists insist that this historic national consciousness and belief that Palestine was the Jewish homeland gives Jews political rights in present-day Palestine. According to one Zionist writer, "If ever a right has been maintained by unrelenting insistence on the claim, it was the Jewish right to Palestine."⁴

Palestinians, by contrast, insist that they are the indigenous population of the country and that their superior political rights to the territory derive, at least in part, from their uninterrupted residence in the disputed territory. They claim descent from the earliest-known inhabitants of the territory, the Canaanites and the Philistines, the latter having given Palestine its biblical name. It is believed that the Canaanites entered the area around 3000 BCE. Palestinians therefore assert that the country belongs to them, not to the Jews. They argue that the Jews, whatever might have been their experience in biblical times or the beliefs to which they clung "in exile" during the postbiblical period, cannot suddenly reappear after an absence of almost two thousand years and announce to the people who have been living in Palestine during all that time that they, the Jews, are the country's rightful owners. The following statement is a typical expression of this assertion of Palestinian rights. It was given by Palestinian officials to the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry established in 1946, prior to Israeli independence, in response to the escalating conflict between Arabs and Jews in Palestine:

The whole Arab people is unalterably opposed to the attempt to impose Jewish immigration and settlement upon it, and ultimately to establish a Jewish state in Palestine. Its opposition is based primarily upon right. The Arabs of Palestine are descendants of the indigenous inhabitants of the country, who have been in occupation of it since the

beginning of history; they cannot agree that it is right to subject an indigenous population against its will to alien immigration, whose claim is based upon a historical connection which ceased effectively many centuries ago.⁵

There was little conflict as long as Jewish political thought was animated by *classical religious* Zionism. Believing that their return to the Land of Israel would take place with the coming of the Messiah, Jews viewed themselves as needing only to wait patiently and faithfully for the unfolding of God's plan. The Jewish posture was thus one of passivity, or patient anticipation, the only requirement being that Jews keep the faith and reaffirm a conviction that they were a people living in exile and would eventually be reunited and restored to their land. Accordingly, prior to the modern period, most Jews did not believe it was appropriate to initiate steps toward the reconstruction of their national home in Palestine. On the contrary, such action would indicate a loss of faith and the absence of a willingness to wait for the Creator's plan to unfold in its own divinely ordained fashion, and this, as a consequence, would rupture the covenant between God and the Jewish people and make illogical and illegitimate any proclamations of Jewish nationhood or any assertion of a continuing tie between Diaspora Jewry and the Land of Israel. The most Jews might do would be to live in a fashion pleasing to the Creator in the hope that this might hasten the onset of the Messianic age, if in fact the Day of Redemption was not preordained and was thus amenable to modification. Thus, as notes a prominent Israeli scholar, the Jews' link to Palestine, for all its emotional and religious ardor,

did not change the praxis of Jewish life in the Diaspora. . . . The belief in the Return to Zion never disappeared, but the historical record shows that on the whole Jews did not relate to the vision of the Return in a more active way than most Christians viewed the Second Coming.⁶

These classical Zionist conceptions provided little motivation for a Jewish return to Palestine. As explained, it would have been heretical for Jews to arrogate unto themselves the work of God, to believe that they need not await the unfolding of the divine plan but rather could take into their own hands the fulfillment of a destiny for which they considered themselves chosen by the Creator. Thus, although there was an unbroken Jewish presence in Palestine from the destruction of the Second Commonwealth until the modern era, and although there were also periods of renaissance among the Jews in Palestine, during the early years of Ottoman rule in the sixteenth century, for example, the number of Jews residing in Palestine after the second century never constituted more than a small proportion either of the country's overall population or of world Jewry. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, there were roughly five thousand Jews in the territory of present-day Palestine, which had a total population of perhaps 250,000. Most of these Jews lived in Jerusalem, with smaller numbers in Safed, Tiberius, and Hebron. These communities were populated by religious Jews who viewed their presence in the Holy Land as having spiritual but not political significance; most had no thought of contributing to the realization of political or nationalist objectives. Nor were these communities self-sufficient. They were supported in substantial measure by donations from Jews in the Diaspora.

Given their small numbers and apolitical character, there was little conflict between these Jews and the larger Muslim and Christian Arab populations of Palestine. This quietism was also a reflection of the traditional character of Palestinian society. From the rise of Islam in the seventh century and for the next five hundred years, Palestine was incorporated sequentially into the Umayyad, Abbasid, and Fatimid empires, which ruled their vast territories from Baghdad, Damascus, and Cairo, respectively. Palestine was a peripheral region in these larger structures, without a unified administration or a clear and overarching political identity. This continued to be the situation following the fall of the Fatimid Empire in the late twelfth century. First under the Ayyubis and then the Mamluks, Egypt and the Fertile Crescent were governed from Cairo until the Ottoman

Turks took control of most of the Arab world, including Palestine, early in the sixteenth century. Palestine remained part of the Ottoman Empire, ruled from Constantinople, until the end of World War I.

During all of this period, or at least until the late nineteenth century, Palestinian society was largely immobilized; it was on the political, economic, and intellectual periphery of larger empires, by which it was for the most part neglected, and thus, overall, a relative backwater. Moreover, the country suffered not only from the neglect of its absentee governors but also from the absence of progressive local leadership and an indigenous reform movement. As discussed in [Chapter 1](#), modernist and proto-nationalist movements did emerge in a number of Arab countries, the most important of which was Egypt, early in the nineteenth century. Moreover, the development that these movements introduced involved changes in many fields, including military affairs, government, taxation, agriculture, industry, and, above all, education. As a British journalist in Alexandria wrote in 1876, "Egypt is a marvelous instance of progress. She has advanced as much in seventy years as many other countries have done in five hundred."⁷ But many Arab societies were largely untouched by these developments, and Palestine was among these. In contrast with Egypt, Tunisia, and western Syria, where these modernist currents were most pronounced, Palestine, like many other Arab lands, did not until much later witness the emergence of significant indigenous efforts at economic development, educational innovation, or administrative reform.

The situation began to change during the latter years of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth century. Although slowly at first, relations between Jews and Arabs in Palestine became more complex during this period, and they eventually became much more difficult. In part, this reflected the diffusion of political and social currents from neighboring Arab countries, which in turn contributed to the gradual emergence among Palestine's Arab population of new social classes, of institutions dedicated to development and reform, and, a few years later, of

debates about the country's political identity and future. Of even greater significance, however, was the emergence of *modern political* Zionism, which slowly displaced classical religious Zionist thought with the view that the Jewish people need not wait for the Creator to act but should themselves organize the return to the Holy Land and establish the Jewish national home in Palestine.

Modern political Zionism began as an intellectual movement in Europe, stimulated by the broader currents of emancipation and reform that emerged first in western Europe and later in Russia and eastern Europe during the course of the nineteenth century. As a result of these developments, many European countries extended to Jews political rights and economic opportunities that had previously been denied, and this in turn produced new intellectual currents and passionate debates among Jews themselves. Some traditional Jews, fearing assimilation and a loss of faith, called on their coreligionists to reject the new opportunities and remain apart from mainstream European society. At the other end of the ideological spectrum were those who called for an unreserved embrace of the new currents, while still others, taking an intermediate position, sought compartmentalization, what some described as being a Jew inside the home and a European outside. The latter two trends welcomed the changing situation and sought to embrace, admittedly to varying degrees and in different ways, the political reforms they brought. The broader intellectual movement of which they were a part was known as the *haskalah*, or Jewish Enlightenment.

In this intellectual climate, there emerged a number of writers who placed emphasis on the national and political aspects of Jewish peoplehood and who thus became the ideological precursors of modern political Zionism. It is not always possible to associate *maskalim*, as adherents of the *haskalah* were known, with a particular normative position. The movement had no unifying organization or structure, and it incorporated different schools of thought and varying points of view about the issues of the day. As one scholar notes, "The ideas current among, and promoted by, adherents [of the *haskalah*] were rarely formulated with consistency

and were often mutually exclusive.”⁸ Nevertheless, there were Jewish intellectuals who clearly articulated modern Zionist themes during this period. These men for some time remained a small minority among the educated and middle-class Jews who addressed themselves to the concerns of a new age. Furthermore, they reaped scorn from more orthodox and traditional Jewish leaders, who condemned their political brand of Zionism as heresy and who insisted upon the Jews’ historical understanding that the return to Zion was a destiny to be fulfilled by God and not by man. But there were, nonetheless, Jewish writers of prominence who proclaimed that the Jews were a nation in the modern sense, who called on the Jewish people to assert their national rights, and who saw the reconstruction of Jewish society in Palestine as the key element in a nationalist program of action. Articulating these themes, they added modern political Zionism to the expanding range of Jewish responses that were called up by the revolutionary character of the times.

The first wave of Jewish immigration to Palestine began in 1882. It was organized by a student group in Kharkov, Russia, that took the name *Bilu*, derived from the passage in Isaiah that reads, “Bet Yaakov lechu ve nelcha” [O House of Jacob, come ye, and let us go]. The group was motivated not only by the intellectual currents of the day but equally, if not more so, by the anti-Semitism that reappeared in eastern Europe during the latter part of the nineteenth century. Virulent anti-Jewish pogroms broke out in 1881, bringing disaster to hundreds of thousands of Jews and dashing the illusions of Jewish intellectuals who had been inclined to view anti-Semitism as a vestige of an earlier era, grounded in a lack of education and in religious fanaticism and destined to slowly fade away as European society continued to evolve. The impact of the pogroms and the devastation they brought as well as the positive attraction of the modern Zionist idea, and the connection between the two, are reflected in the manifesto issued by the Bilu group:

Sleepest thou, O our nation? What hast thou been doing until 1882? Sleeping and dreaming the false dream of assimilation. . . . Now, thank God, thou art awakened from thy slothful slumber. The pogroms have awakened thee from thy charmed sleep. . . . What do we want . . . a home in our country. It was given to us by the mercy of God; it is ours as registered in the archives of history.

A key event during this period was the publication by Theodor Herzl of *The Jewish State*, which set forth the case for modern political Zionism and called upon Jews to work for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Herzl, a highly assimilated Jew from Vienna, was a journalist stationed in Paris, and he became increasingly disturbed about the growth of anti-Semitism in France toward the end of the century. The critical episode in Herzl's conversion to Zionism was the trial and conviction of Alfred Dreyfus, a Jew who had risen to a position of importance in the French army and who, in 1894, was falsely accused of spying for Germany. This event, and the angry mob that greeted Dreyfus's conviction with shouts of "Down with the Jews," confirmed Herzl's growing belief that if anti-Semitism could rear its head even in France, the center of European progress and enlightenment, it would never fully disappear, and, therefore, assimilation was never truly an option for the Jews.

Following publication of *The Jewish State* in 1896, Herzl worked to pull together disparate Zionist groups and create an international structure to support Jewish colonization in Palestine. The First Zionist Congress, convened at Herzl's urging and held in Basel, Switzerland, in 1897, was attended by more than two hundred individuals, some representing local Jewish communities and Zionist societies in various countries. The meeting resulted both in the adoption of a formal program and in the establishment of the Zionist Organization, thereby initiating the transformation of modern political Zionism from a diffuse and disorganized ideological tendency into an

international movement with a coherent platform and institutional structure. As explained by one Zionist historian,

Prior to the Congress the spectacle is largely one of disunity, incoherence, painfully slow progress—or none at all—confusion of ideas, dearth of leadership, and, above all, no set policy and no forum in which a set policy can be hammered out and formally adopted. Before the Congress there is, as it were, proto-Zionism.

By contrast, after the Basel meeting, “there is Zionism proper.”⁹ Other Zionist congresses followed, held at regular one- or two-year intervals. Among the other Zionist institutions created during this period were the Jewish Colonial Trust and the Jewish National Fund. The former, established in London in 1899, became the first bank of the Zionist Organization. The latter, created in 1901 at the Fifth Congress of the Zionist Organization, was devoted to purchasing and developing land for Jewish settlement in Palestine.

Waves of Jewish immigration to Palestine, known as *aliyot* from the Hebrew word for ascent, continued during the ensuing decades. At the turn of the century, there were almost fifty thousand Jews in Palestine, most of whom came from Russia and eastern Europe; by the outbreak of World War I in 1914, the number had increased to roughly eighty-five thousand; and by 1931, according to the census of that year, the population of Palestine was about one million, including 175,000 Jews, 760,000 Muslims, and 89,000 Christians.¹⁰ Agriculture was the backbone of the new community, partly reflecting a drive for Zionist self-sufficiency, but there were also efforts to create a modern urban population and an industrial base. The city of Tel Aviv was founded in 1909 as a garden suburb of Jaffa, and by 1931, only 27 percent of Palestine’s Jews lived in communities classified as rural.

The Jewish community in Palestine, known as the *yishuv*, also established a wide range of institutions designed not only to serve

but also to unite its expanding population. In 1904, for example, a Hebrew-language teacher-training institute was opened in Jerusalem, and in the same year, the Jewish Telegraph Agency and the Habimah Theater were established. Bezalel School of Art opened in Jerusalem two years later; several Hebrew-language daily newspapers began publication in 1908; and construction began on a technical university in Haifa, to become the Technion in 1912. At a meeting of Palestine Jews in Jaffa in 1918, agreement was reached on governing the *yishuv*. There would be an elected assembly of delegates, Asefat Hanivharim, and a national council, Va'ad Leumi. In 1920, the general union of Jewish workers in Palestine, the Histadruth, was established; and within a decade, the union's sick fund was maintaining clinics in five cities and thirty-three rural centers and operating two hospitals and two nursing homes. In 1925, Hebrew University was founded in Jerusalem. As a result of these developments, the *yishuv* soon possessed virtually all of the institutions and agencies that would later provide the infrastructure for the Israeli state. And with its growing population and increasing complexity and sophistication, the *yishuv* gradually displaced Europe as the center of Zionist activity.

Although the proportion of Jews among Palestine's population rose steadily during the first half of the twentieth century, the Arabs remained the overwhelming majority. In 1930, they still constituted over 80 percent of the country's inhabitants, and as late as 1940, they accounted for almost 70 percent. Moreover, the absolute size of the Arab population grew steadily during this period. In part as a result of improvements in health care, the Palestinian Arab population grew at an annual rate that averaged almost 3 percent between 1922 and 1945, enabling it to nearly double during these years. In many respects, especially during the first part of this period, Palestinian Arab society remained traditional. Residing in approximately 850 small villages, peasants made up nearly two-thirds of the population. At the other end of the socioeconomic spectrum was a small corps of wealthy, extended Muslim families. These powerful clans dominated the country's political economy and constituted a kind of Palestinian aristocracy; based in the major

towns but with extensive landholdings, they sat atop a national pyramid of patron-client relationships. It is estimated that in 1920 the estates of these upper-class urban families occupied nearly one-quarter of the total land in Palestine.

Palestinian society nevertheless experienced important changes during the first decades of the twentieth century. New newspapers, journals, and political associations appeared in the years before World War I, showing that Palestine was to at least some degree affected by the same intellectual and political forces that were associated with the Arab awakening elsewhere. While the country continued to lag far behind Egypt and a few other centers of modernization and nationalist agitation, there was a clearly visible rise in political consciousness and concern about the future. Between 1908 and 1914, five new Arabic-language newspapers appeared, including *al-Quds*, published in Jerusalem, and *al-Asma'i*, published in Jaffa. The latter frequently criticized Zionist settlers, resentful, in particular, of the privileges that foreign immigrants enjoyed under the legal capitulations granted by the Ottoman Empire. Among the organizations that sprang up during the same period were the Orthodox Renaissance Society, the Ottoman Patriotic Society, and the Economic and Commercial Company. Few of these associations possessed more than limited institutional strength. They met only intermittently, had a short radius of influence, and ultimately proved to be short-lived. Nevertheless, the presence of these organizations was another indication of the Arab awakening inside Palestine. In addition to concerning themselves with business matters or sectarian affairs, their programs represented, as did articles in the new newspapers, early expressions both of local Arab patriotism and nationalist sentiment and of a growing anti-Zionist orientation. Indeed, although Palestinian opposition to the expanding Jewish presence did not emerge as a full-blown phenomenon but, instead, grew incrementally during this period, almost all of the Arab arguments against Zionism that were later to become familiar were expressed in Palestine in the years before World War I.

Developments of this sort accelerated in the years following World War I. The first Western-style union, the Palestine Arab Workers Society, was founded in Haifa in 1925, and a few years later, it opened branches in Jaffa and Jerusalem. New middle-class organizations were established as well, including various Arab chambers of commerce and the Palestine Arab Bar Association. There were also Arab women's societies in Jerusalem, Jaffa, Haifa, and a few other cities. Led by the wives of prominent political figures, these societies' programs and activities sought to help the needy, to promote educational and cultural advancement, and to build support for Palestinian political causes. The first Palestine Arab Women's Congress was convened in Jerusalem in 1929. All in all, thirty to forty clubs sprang up in Palestine after World War I, two of which were of particular political importance. One was the Muslim-Christian Association, which was led by older politicians associated with the most notable families of Arab Palestine and had branches in a number of cities. Among the planks in its political platform was firm opposition to Zionist immigration and to the creation of a Jewish national home in Palestine. The other was the Supreme Muslim Council. Led by al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni, the mufti of Jerusalem, the council's declared purpose was the supervision of Muslim affairs, especially in matters pertaining to the administration of religious trusts and shari'a courts. In addition, however, it soon became an important vehicle for the articulation of Palestinian opposition to the Zionist project.

The political map of Palestine changed after World War I. The Ottoman Empire was dismantled following the Turkish defeat in the war, with most of its provinces in the Arab Middle East divided between the British and the French; this involved three significant and interrelated developments concerning Palestine. First, despite Arab objections, Britain established itself as the colonial power in the country and was granted a "mandate" in Palestine by the League of Nations in 1922. Palestinians had hoped that independence would follow the end of Ottoman rule, even as they debated among themselves whether or not this should be as a province in an independent Syrian Arab state. In November 1918, for example, six

patriotic and religious societies and more than one hundred prominent individuals addressed a petition to British military authorities in which they proclaimed their affinity with Syria.¹¹ In February 1919, delegates at a meeting of the Jerusalem and Jaffa Muslim-Christian societies adopted a platform that not only expressed opposition to Zionism but also called for unity with Syria, stating, "We consider Palestine as part of Arab Syria as it has never been separated from it at any time."¹² But postwar diplomacy produced neither Palestinian independence nor unity with Syria nor even Syrian independence as the French became the colonial power in that country. Mandatory arrangements were nonetheless conceived as transitional, to be in place while the country prepared, presumably with British assistance, for its eventual independence. The relevant provision from the league's resolution, adopted in July 1922, stated,

Certain communities formerly belonging to the Turkish Empire have reached a stage of development where their existence as independent nations can be provisionally recognized subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory power until such time as they are able to stand alone.

The second significant development was the incorporation of the Balfour Declaration into the mandatory instrument. The declaration was issued in 1917 by Lord Balfour, the British foreign secretary, and its key provision stated,

His Majesty's Government view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in

Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.

Issued in response both to Zionist lobbying in Britain and to Britain's own war needs and strategic calculations, the declaration was strongly denounced by Palestinians and other Arabs. Not only did it indicate British support for Zionism; it also contravened a promise to support Arab independence after the war that the British had made two years earlier. This promise was recorded in an exchange of letters in 1915 between Hussein, the sharif of Mecca and an important British ally during the war, and Sir Henry McMahon, the British high commissioner in Egypt. In this correspondence, McMahon stated that "Great Britain is prepared to recognize and support the independence of the Arabs in all the regions within all the limits demanded by the Sharif of Mecca." Although Britain attempted to explain away the contradictions between its various statements, the situation was clarified after the war, and Palestinians were disturbed not only that the promise of independence had not been honored but also that the Balfour Declaration, reflecting Britain's sympathy for the Zionist project, had been reaffirmed through its inclusion in the preamble of the mandatory instrument for Palestine. The preamble also contained language giving explicit recognition "to the historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine and to the grounds for reconstituting their national home in that country." Among the various articles of the mandatory instrument was a provision declaring that "the Administration of Palestine . . . shall facilitate Jewish immigration under suitable conditions and shall encourage . . . close settlement by Jews on the land, including State lands and waste lands not required for public purposes."¹³

The third development was the fixing of Palestine's borders and, specifically, the creation of separate mandates for Palestine and Transjordan (see [Chapter 1](#), [Map 1.4](#)). Under its general mandatory authority and with approval from the League of Nations, Great Britain established Transjordan as a semiautonomous state on the east side

of the Jordan River. The British hoped by this action to reduce opposition from the Arabs, and for this purpose, too, they recognized Abdallah ibn Hussein, a son of the sharif of Mecca, as leader of this state. This established the Hashemite dynasty in Transjordan, later to become Jordan. Unlike other British policies, these actions were bitterly denounced by the Zionists, whose territorial aspirations included land to the east of the river, and the Jews were particularly angry when Britain closed Transjordan to Jewish immigration and settlement. Although the Zionists claimed that the Balfour Declaration recognized their right to construct a national home on both sides of the Jordan River, the terms of the mandate specified that the provisions of the Balfour Declaration, and of other clauses supportive of Zionism, need not apply in the territory east of the river. These developments led to the creation in 1925 of a new Zionist party, the Revisionist Party, which took its name from the party's demand that the mandate be revised to recognize Jewish rights on both sides of the Jordan River. Labor Zionists had been and remained the dominant political faction in Zionist politics. But the emergence of the Revisionist Party, led by Vladimir Jabotinsky, added a new and more militant element to the Zionist political map.

Consolidation of the Conflict

Against this background, conflict between Palestinian Arabs and the country's growing Jewish population was probably inevitable, and not long after the war, there were indeed significant confrontations and disturbances. Clashes between the two communities resulted in violence as early as 1920. In April of that year, there was an Arab assault on Jews in Jerusalem. After two days of rioting, five Jews had been killed and more than two hundred had been injured, while four Arabs had been killed and twenty-one had been injured. In May 1921, much more serious and widespread disturbances took place. Anti-Jewish riots began in Jaffa and were followed by attacks in Rehovoth, Petach Tikva, Hadera, and other Jewish towns. Forty-seven Jews were killed and 140 wounded; Arab casualties were forty-eight dead and seventy-three wounded, mostly caused by British action to suppress the rioting. After a period of relative calm, there was new violence in August 1929, beginning with an Arab attack on Jews shouting nationalist slogans at the Western Wall in Jerusalem and followed by clashes elsewhere in the city and in other Palestinian towns. The worst violence took place in Hebron and Safed, with sixty-seven Jews killed in Hebron and eighteen killed in Safed. Overall, these events resulted in the deaths of 133 Jews and 116 Arabs, with 339 Jews and 232 Arabs wounded. Most Jews were killed by Arabs, while most Arabs were killed by security forces under British command. In each case, Jews pointed out, correctly, that the violence had begun with unprovoked attacks by Arabs. Arabs responded, understandably from their perspective, that the focus should not be on the immediate episodes but rather on the root causes of the disturbances and that these involved the steadily expanding and increasingly unwelcome Jewish presence in Palestine.

Map 2.1 Jewish Land Ownership in Palestine, 1947



The most important issue fueling Arab anger at this time was Jewish immigration. Zionists point to five identifiable waves of immigration, beginning, as noted, with that of the Bilu group in 1882. Each wave was larger than the preceding one, with the last beginning in the 1930s and composed primarily of those who were able to escape the growing Nazi menace in Europe. By 1945, approximately 550,000 Jews lived in Palestine, constituting roughly 31 percent of the

country's population. Jewish land purchases were a related Arab complaint. The total amount of land acquired by the Jews was limited. It constituted no more than 7 percent of mandatory Palestine on the eve of Israeli independence in 1948. Furthermore, much of the land, often of poor quality, was purchased from willing absentee Arab landlords, sometimes at inflated prices. Nevertheless, some of these sales resulted in the displacement of Arab tenant farmers and contributed to a growing class of landless and embittered Palestinian peasants. Land acquisition thus reinforced the Arab concerns about Jewish immigration, leading many to conclude that their country was in danger of being taken over by the newly arrived Jews.

The contribution of these concerns to the violence in Palestine was documented by a British commission of inquiry following the disturbances of May 1921. Directed by Sir Thomas Haycraft, the chief justice of Palestine, the commission placed the blame on anti-Zionist sentiment among the Arabs and also on a widespread belief among the Palestinians that Great Britain was favoring the Jews and according them too much authority. The report did denounce the Arabs as the aggressors. It also strongly criticized the police for failing to contain the violence. Nevertheless, the underlying problem on which the Haycraft Commission placed emphasis was of a different character. It concluded that "the fundamental cause of the Jaffa riots and the subsequent acts of violence was a feeling among the Arabs of discontent with, and hostility to, the Jews, due to political and economic causes, and connected with Jewish immigration."¹⁴

The Zionists, as expected, rejected these conclusions. They insisted Arab anti-Zionism, at least among ordinary Palestinians, was being deliberately fostered and manipulated by self-serving Palestinian leaders. The latter, they charged, were fearful that the introduction of modern and Western ideas would undermine the feudal social and political structure that supported their privileged positions. Although there may well have been a measure of accuracy in these contentions, the Haycraft Commission refused to draw from them any suggestion that the riots would not have occurred "had it not

been for incitement by the notables, effendis and sheikhs.” According to the commission’s report, “the people participate with the leaders, because they feel that their political and material interests are identical.”¹⁵

Despite the deteriorating situation, interpersonal relations between Arabs and Jews in Palestine were not uniformly hostile during this period. Some leaders and intellectuals in the two communities carried on personal friendships. It was also common for Arabs and Jews in rural communities to visit one another and attend weddings, circumcisions, and so forth in each other’s villages; and even after the violence of 1929, such relationships did not entirely disappear. A British commission investigating these disturbances observed in 1930, for example, that “it . . . is very noticeable in traveling through the villages to see the friendliness of the relations which exist between Arab and Jew. It is quite a common sight to see an Arab sitting on the veranda of a Jewish house.”¹⁶ Nevertheless, such relationships became increasingly rare over the course of the interwar period as the incompatibility of Arab and Zionist objectives in Palestine, and the fact that the two peoples were on an apparently unavoidable collision course, became steadily more evident and eroded any possibility of compromise.

As institutions and enterprises that brought Jews and Arabs together became increasingly rare and for the most part marginal within both communities, two essentially separate societies emerged in Palestine. Both developed and became more complex, with the *yishuv* continuing to grow in numbers and becoming increasingly modern and self-sufficient, and Palestinian society, despite the persistence of traditional leadership patterns, becoming more mobilized, integrated, and politically conscious. But with each community evolving according to its distinct dynamic and rhythm, all of the momentum pushed toward continuing confrontation and violence.

A new and more sustained round of disturbances began in 1936, starting with a call by Arab leaders for a general strike “until the

British Government introduces a basic change in its present policy which will manifest itself in the stoppage of Jewish immigration.”¹⁷ Six Palestinian political factions formed the Higher Arab Committee at this time to coordinate strike activities, and this in turn brought endorsements from the Arab mayors of eighteen towns and petitions of support signed by hundreds of senior- and middle-level civil servants. Thousands of workers subsequently left their jobs, and numerous businesses were shut down. There was also considerable violence associated with these events. A demonstration in Haifa in May turned into a riot, for example, with demonstrators attacking police and security forces firing into the crowd and killing several persons. By the middle of June, the British reported that they had arrested more than 2,500 persons in connection with various disturbances. The general strike formally ended in October, but the country had by this time entered a period of prolonged disorder. Commonly known as the “Arab Revolt,” clashes continued intermittently until 1939, when interrupted by World War II. After the war, the pattern of civil conflict resumed.

These events brought increased visibility to the Palestinian cause. Despite the Zionist contention that popular anti-Jewish sentiment was for the most part manufactured and manipulated by Arab leaders, the Arab Revolt left little doubt that there was widespread opposition to Zionism among the indigenous inhabitants of Palestine. The cost-benefit ratio was not entirely favorable to the Palestinians, however. The disturbances were highly disruptive to the Palestinian economy and social order, and they succeeded neither in slowing Jewish immigration nor in bringing a change in British policy.

These disturbances led the British to establish another commission of inquiry—the Peel Commission, which submitted a comprehensive and balanced report in 1937. Among its major findings was the conclusion that the unrest of 1936 had been caused by “the desire of the Arabs for national independence” and by “their hatred and fear of the establishment of the Jewish National Home.” The report added, moreover, that these were “the same underlying causes as those which brought about the disturbances of 1920, 1921, 1929 and

1933,” and also that they were the *only* underlying causes, all other factors being “complementary or subsidiary.” The commission then offered a bold proposal for the future of Palestine. “An irrepressible conflict has arisen between two national communities within the bounds of one small country,” the commission report stated. “About 1,000,000 Arabs are in strife, open or latent, with some 400,000 Jews. There is no common ground between them.”¹⁸ Therefore, the mandate should be terminated and, in order that each national community might govern itself, the territory of Palestine should be partitioned. More specifically, the Peel Commission proposed creation of a small Jewish state. The territory suggested for this state included the coastal plain, though not the port cities of Jaffa, Haifa, and Acre, and most of the Galilee. The remaining territory, with the exception of a corridor from Jaffa to Jerusalem, which was to remain under British control, would be given over to the Palestinians. The commission also envisioned an exchange of populations in connection with partition, which for the most part would involve the resettlement of Arabs living within territory proposed for the Jewish state.

Although partition was a logical response to the deepening conflict, the Peel Commission’s report was rejected by the protagonists. Zionists judged that their state would possess an inadequate amount of territory, and they also refused to accept the loss of Palestine’s most important cities. The Twentieth Zionist Congress, held in Zurich in August 1937, thus passed a resolution declaring that “the scheme of partition put forward . . . is unacceptable.” The congress did not reject the principle of partition, however, and in fact welcomed the Peel Commission’s recognition that creation of a Jewish state was desirable. Wisely choosing to regard this critical aspect of the commission’s recommendations as an important opportunity, it empowered the Zionist executive “to enter into negotiations with a view to ascertaining the precise terms of His Majesty’s Government for the proposed establishment of a Jewish State.”¹⁹ In contrast to the careful and politically calculated response of the Zionists, the Arab Higher Committee rejected the Peel Commission’s proposal totally and unequivocally. Al-Hajj Amin, head of the committee, as

well as other Palestinian spokesmen proclaimed that Britain had neither the authority nor the right to partition Palestinian territory. Faced with this opposition, Britain allowed the Peel Commission proposal to die after a year of unproductive negotiations.

Communal conflict diminished during the war but thereafter resumed with more intensity than ever, leading the British, who were increasingly unable to keep order, to formally and publicly acknowledge in February 1947 what had long been evident: that it was not within London's power to impose a settlement in Palestine. The British government then announced that it would turn the matter over to the United Nations, the successor to the League of Nations on whose behalf Britain was, in theory at least, exercising the mandate. The UN accepted the return of the mandate, and in May, the world body established an eleven-member Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) to assess the situation and make recommendations.

The UNSCOP submitted its report at the end of August. It contained both a majority and a minority proposal. The majority endorsed the idea of partition but added several new features. First, the division of territory differed from that proposed by the Peel Commission, giving more territory to the Jews but with each state having three noncontiguous regions that many considered impractical. Second, the majority proposed that the two states establish by treaty a formal economic union and then added that the independence of neither state should be recognized until such a treaty had been signed. Finally, this proposal envisioned the establishment of an international enclave surrounding Jerusalem and extending as far south as Bethlehem. The minority proposal derived its inspiration from the idea of binationalism and called for the Arab and Jewish political communities to be united within a federal political structure. Under this proposal, the federal government would have full powers in such areas as defense, foreign relations, finance, and immigration.

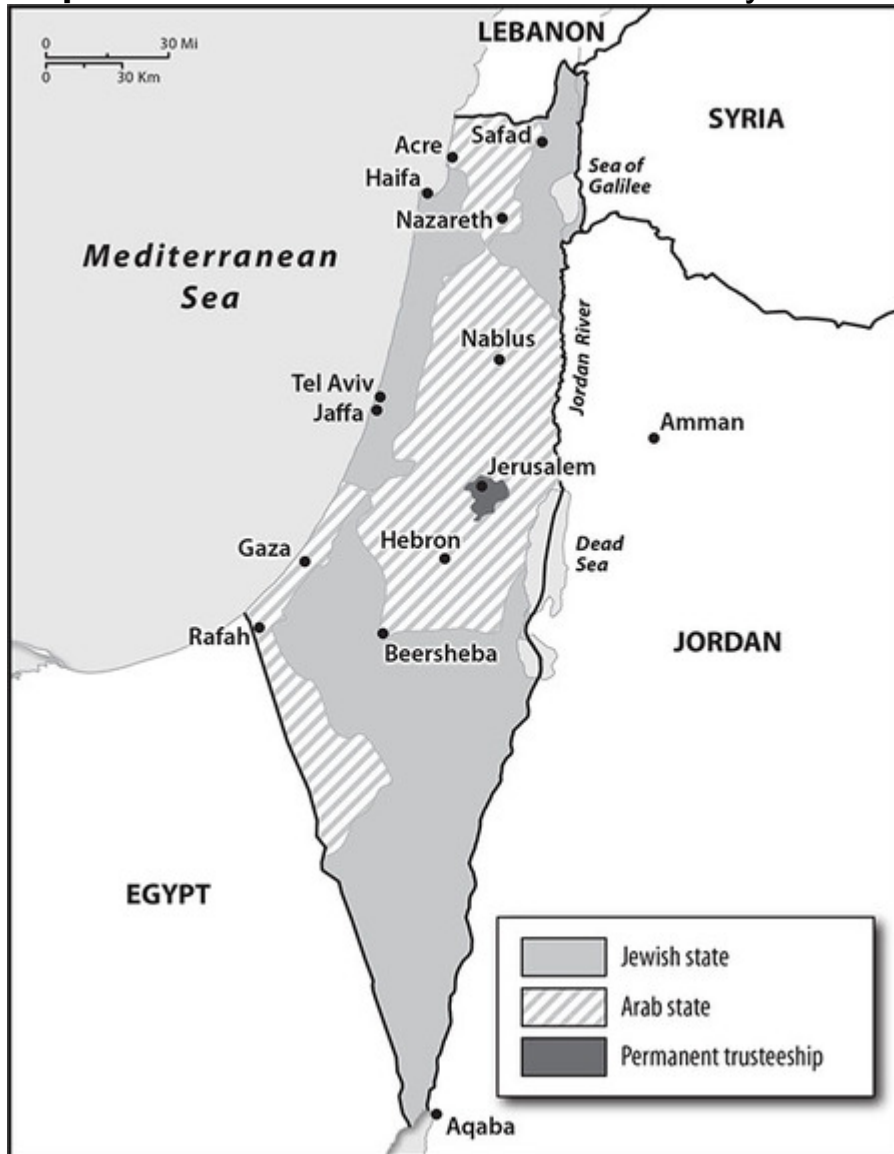
The Arabs rejected both of these proposals. They adhered to their long-held position that Palestine was an integral part of the Arab

world and that from the beginning its indigenous inhabitants had opposed the creation in their country of a Jewish national home. An image often presented by Palestinian spokesmen was that of an occupied house. Arguing that the Jews had entered and then occupied the house of the Palestinians, as it were, against the will of the Palestinians and with the aid of European colonial powers, they asked, rhetorically, how can someone pretend that he is reasonable because he is content to steal only half of another person's house, or label as *fanatic* the owner of the house who resists this theft? The Palestinians and other Arabs also insisted that the United Nations, a body created and controlled by the United States and Europe, had no right to grant the Zionists any portion of their territory. In what was to become a familiar Arab charge, they insisted that the Western world was seeking to salve its conscience for the atrocities of the war and was paying its own debt to the Jewish people with someone else's land.

The Zionists, by contrast, after initial hesitation declared their willingness to accept the recommendations of the majority. The Jewish Agency, which represented world Jewry in the effort to establish a Jewish national home in Palestine, termed the Zionist state that would be created by implementation of the UNSCOP proposals "an indispensable minimum," on the basis of which the Jews were prepared to surrender their claims to the rest of Palestine. In responding to Arab charges, Zionists insisted that Jews as well as Arabs had legitimate rights in Palestine, rights that derived from the Jewish people's historic ties to the land and that had in fact been recognized by the international community at least since the time of the Balfour Declaration. They also pointed out that their movement and its program neither began with the war nor derived their legitimacy from the Holocaust. Thus, they insisted, partition was a reasonable and fair solution—indeed, the only logical solution—to the conflict in Palestine. Adding that the conflict, whatever its history, had reached the point when compromise was essential and that there was no body more capable of taking the lead in this matter than the United Nations, the Zionist Organization deployed what political influence it possessed in support of the partition plan

recommended by the UNSCOP majority. The UN General Assembly endorsed the partition resolution, Resolution 181, on November 29, 1947.

Map 2.2 United Nations General Assembly Partition Plan, 1947



War broke out in Palestine almost as soon as the UN passed the partition resolution. Arab leaders declared that they considered the partition resolution to be “null and void” and that it would not be respected by the Palestinian people. Thus, with Britain preparing to withdraw its military forces from Palestine, the Palestinians raised a guerrilla army, which was soon augmented by the arrival of six

thousand to seven thousand volunteers from neighboring Arab countries. The Arab forces achieved a number of early successes, but the tide of the war had turned by April 1948, with the Zionist military force, the Haganah, scoring a succession of victories and gaining control of most of the territory allocated to the Jewish state by the United Nations. In accordance with the Haganah's master plan, *Tochnit Dalet* (Plan D), Jewish forces also launched operations that eventually brought control of some of the areas the UN had allocated for an Arab state in Palestine.²⁰

Map 2.3 The Armistice Lines of 1949



The mandate was to be terminated on May 15, and as the date approached, the Zionists assembled the provisional National Council. This body in turn elected a thirteen-member provisional government, with David Ben-Gurion as its prime minister and defense minister. On May 14, the council assembled in Tel Aviv and proclaimed the establishment of the state of Israel in that portion of Palestine that the United Nations had allocated for a Jewish state. The new country was immediately recognized by the United States, the Soviet Union, and others. With these events, the state of Israel came into existence.

The war nonetheless continued for another eight months, and by the time it ended, both the political map and the demographic character of Palestine had changed dramatically. First, the Palestine Arab state envisioned by the United Nations partition resolution did not come into existence. Much of the territory envisioned for the Palestinian state was occupied by Zionist forces and became a permanent part of the state of Israel. The largest remaining block, the West Bank, was held by Transjordanian forces at the end of the war and was formally annexed in 1950, at which point Transjordan became the kingdom of Jordan. What remained was the small Gaza Strip, which Egypt continued to occupy as a military district. These territorial arrangements became the permanent borders of the new Jewish state, on the bases of which Israel signed armistice agreements with its Arab neighbors in 1949. The division of Jerusalem was also part of the new territorial status quo. With Zionist and Transjordanian forces occupying different areas of the city at the end of the war, and thereafter separated by a strip of no-man's-land running north to south, East Jerusalem became part of Jordan, and West Jerusalem became part of Israel.

Second, the bulk of the Palestinian population left the country. Approximately 750,000 Arab men, women, and children either fled or were expelled from the country, making Jews the majority and transforming the Palestinians into stateless refugees. Although Jews and Arabs have long disagreed strenuously about the reasons for this exodus, which Palestinians call the *nakba*, or catastrophe, there

is little doubt that many Palestinians were deliberately removed by Zionist forces from areas that became part of the state of Israel, including those originally intended for the Palestinian state. The best evidence suggests that three phases may be used to describe this exodus.²¹ During the early months of the conflict, from the partition resolution through March or early April of 1948, it appears that Palestinians fled primarily in response to the fighting itself. Most were middle- and upper-class Palestinians who possessed the resources to support themselves while away from home and who almost certainly believed their absence would be temporary. They were not, for the most part, motivated either by Zionist intimidation or by Arab calls for them to leave but rather by a straightforward desire to distance themselves from wartime perils.

The refugee story became more complex after this period. Atrocities committed by Jewish forces, including a massacre at Deir Yassin in April, were an important stimulus to the intensifying Palestinian exodus. Although such episodes were relatively few in number, they contributed to Palestinian fears, especially as accounts of them were often embellished and then disseminated by the Arabs themselves. The Palestinian departure during this phase was also a consequence of Zionist military offensives. The first goal of these operations was to block the advance of armies from neighboring Arab states. Yet the Israeli military's Plan D also provided for the expulsion of civilian Arab populations in areas deemed to have strategic significance. This was not a consistent and coordinated Zionist policy. By summer 1948, however, Israeli leaders seem to have become consciously aware of the benefits that would result from the departure of the Palestinians, and, accordingly, decisions and actions by mainstream Zionist leaders were sometimes taken with the explicit intent of driving Palestinians from their towns and villages. This is illustrated by a campaign in July 1948 to expel the Arabs of Lydda and Ramleh.

During the concluding phase of the conflict in the fall of 1948, there appears to have been a more widespread and explicit understanding that it was in Israel's interest to facilitate the Arabs' departure. Thus,

military operations in the southern part of the country, conducted in October and November, left almost no Palestinian communities in place behind the advancing Israeli lines. This was not always the case, even at this late date. For example, Arab villages in the Galilee, conquered in late October, were left intact. In addition, more generally, the Palestinian exodus had by this time assumed its own dynamic, and strong-arm tactics were often unnecessary; the mere arrival of Jewish forces was sometimes sufficient to provoke Arab flight. In any event, as a result of these developments during 1947 and 1948, celebrated by Jews but described by Palestinians as *al-naqba*, the catastrophe, Palestinians emerged from the war as stateless refugees. Most took up residence, usually in refugee camps, in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Lebanon, Transjordan, and Syria. Only about 160,000 remained in Israel, becoming non-Jewish citizens of the new Jewish state.

The Arab State Dimension

The situation that prevailed following Israeli independence in 1948 defined the character of the Arab-Israeli conflict for the next two decades. Having no state and dispersed among neighboring Arab countries, the Palestinians were no longer a significant political force. Opposition to Israel was thus spearheaded by the Arab states, for a time transforming the Zionist-Palestinian conflict inside Palestine into a regional, interstate Israel-Arab conflict. With leadership provided by Egypt, the Arabs refused to recognize Israel and continued to deny its legitimacy, proclaiming that only Palestinian Arabs have national rights in Palestine. They also demanded that Palestinian refugees be allowed to return to their homes in the territory from which they had been evicted. Israelis rejected these arguments and demands, of course. They reaffirmed the right of the Jews to a homeland in Palestine, emphasizing their historic and religious ties to the land. With respect to the refugee question, they argued that they bore little responsibility for the Palestinian exodus, especially since, they insisted, there would have been no exodus had the Palestinians accepted UN General Assembly Resolution 181 instead of going to war. Their contention, understandable from the Zionist perspective, was that the return of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to what was now Israel would undermine and perhaps destroy the Jewish character of the state. Compensation and resettlement was the only realistic solution to the refugee problem, they insisted.

With no agreement on these two basic issues—Israel's right to exist and the Palestinian refugee problem—the Arab-Israeli conflict settled into a familiar pattern of charge and countercharge during the 1950s and 1960s. There were also armed confrontations during this period. In 1956, following an Egyptian blockade of Eilat, Israel's port city on the Red Sea, Israel, with help from Britain and France, attacked Egypt and scored a military if not a political victory in what became known as the Sinai-Suez War. It is notable that the Egyptian president, Gamal Abdel Nasser, had initially sought to explore the possibilities for peace with Israel in order that the energy and resources of his government might be devoted without distraction to

domestic development.²² Indeed, there were private contacts between Egyptian and Israeli officials during the first part of 1954. Any possibility that these contacts might have led to a breakthrough soon disappeared, however, as a result of events in Israel, in Egypt, and in the Egyptian-controlled Gaza Strip.

The Israeli action that did the greatest damage to hopes for an accommodation was a sabotage scheme planned in secret by Defense Ministry operatives and put into operation in July 1954. The plan was to use Israeli agents and about a dozen locally recruited Egyptian Jews to plant bombs and set fires at various public buildings in Cairo and Alexandria, including libraries of the United States Information Service. The purpose was to create anti-Egyptian sentiment in the United States at a time when Nasser's government was seeking arms and assistance from Washington and was also hoping to enlist US support in negotiations with Great Britain over military bases in the Suez Canal Zone. The plot was uncovered, however, and the majority of the participants were captured and tried. Surprised and angered by this Israeli action, Egypt immediately terminated its contacts with the Jewish state. In Israel, the episode was known as the "Lavon Affair," after the name of the defense minister, Pinhas Lavon, and it was followed by a bitter and politically disruptive argument about responsibility for the operation in Egypt.

Other events heightened tension between Israel and Egypt. Britain had long maintained troops along the Suez Canal, but in October 1954, Cairo and London reached agreement that these British forces would be withdrawn by the summer of 1956. Israeli ships had not been permitted to pass through the canal; but Israeli officials, who had been insisting on their country's right to use the waterway, worried that Egypt would oppose this more vehemently than ever and also that the British evacuation might bring new restrictions on the passage of non-Israeli ships bound for the Jewish state. Thus, in September, the Israeli government decided to test Egypt's intentions by sending a ship, the *Bat Galim*, into the Suez Canal, whereupon it was seized by Egyptian authorities. Coming in the wake of the

Israeli-sponsored sabotage operation in Egypt, this pushed Egypt and Israel further along the road toward armed confrontation.

The Gaza Strip provided the arena for a third set of developments leading to the Sinai-Suez War. Palestinian guerrillas had for several years occasionally crossed into Israel from refugee camps in Gaza in order to commit acts of sabotage and harassment. Pipelines were cut and roads were mined in typical operations. Israelis blamed Palestinians for these attacks, but some also argued that Egypt's control of Gaza made Cairo at least partly responsible. There was disagreement at the time, even in Israel, about both the extent of these guerrilla raids and the degree to which they were abetted by Egypt. Nevertheless, insisting that the pattern of infiltration was intolerable, the government in Jerusalem adopted a deterrent strategy based on retaliatory strikes that were far more severe than the original provocations. The most massive Israeli strike occurred in February 1955; during the operation, Israeli forces ambushed an Egyptian military convoy and, according to Cairo, killed thirty-eight Egyptians and wounded sixty-two others. This brought to a definitive end whatever remained of the possibility for a rapprochement between Nasser's government and leaders of the Jewish state.

Determined to resist what it considered to be extremism and provocation on Israel's part, Cairo undertook to respond in kind. In the summer of 1955, it began to organize and equip squads of Palestinian commandos, known as *fedayeen*, and to send these units across the Gaza border into Israel. Guerrilla raids were often aimed at civilian targets. In addition, in September 1955 Egypt used its control of Sharm al-Shaykh at the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula to close the Strait of Tiran, which leads into the Red Sea, to all shipping in and out of the southern Israeli port of Eilat. This was a *casus belli* as far as Israel was concerned, and in response, the government in Jerusalem prepared for war. Israel found willing allies in Britain and France, each of which had its own reasons for opposing some of Nasser's policies. On October 29, 1956, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) invaded Sinai and attacked positions of the Egyptian army. The next day, France and Britain vetoed Security

Council resolutions calling upon Israel to leave Egypt without delay, and the day after that, French and British planes dropped bombs on Egyptian airfields. By early November, Israel had occupied the Gaza Strip and strategic locations throughout the Sinai Peninsula, including Sharm al-Shaykh, while France and Britain landed paratroopers and occupied the Suez Canal Zone. The confrontation, usually known as the Sinai-Suez War, ended in a complete military victory for Israel and its allies. For Egypt, which was forced to accept a ceasefire with foreign troops occupying large portions of its territory, the war was a humiliating military defeat.

Despite its military victory, Israel's political situation after the war was far from advantageous. On the one hand, the terms under which Israel withdrew its forces from the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza Strip were skewed in favor of Egypt. The United Nations established an international peacekeeping force, the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF), to take up positions in the territory from which Israel withdrew and to act as a buffer between Israel and Egypt. But the arrangement specified that the UNEF could remain in place only as long as Egypt agreed and that it must be composed of troops from countries acceptable to Cairo. Furthermore, the Israeli withdrawal was not accompanied by a nonbelligerency agreement, as Israel had sought. Israeli calls for assurances that the withdrawal of its troops would not be followed by new Egyptian provocations were for the most part brushed aside by UN officials. On the other hand, the Suez Canal remained closed to Israeli shipping. Egypt's nationalization of the canal also enabled Nasser to claim that he stood up to British and French imperialism and brought an end to the last vestiges of colonialism in Egypt, thereby increasing his prominence and influence in inter-Arab and third-world circles. All of this left Jerusalem with little to show for its military victory, whereas significant political gains had been realized by Egypt and Nasser.

Another legacy of the war was Egypt's determination to rebuild its army in order to confront Israel from a position of strength should there be military conflict in the future. Despite the Israeli withdrawal, Egyptian officials worried after the war that Jerusalem might have

expansionist impulses. They noted with concern, for example, that Ben-Gurion had declared after the invasion of Sinai that “our forces did not infringe upon the territory of the land of Egypt” and that the Sinai Peninsula “has been liberated by the Israeli army.”²³ The Egyptians were therefore eager to prepare for whatever confrontations the future might bring, and in this, Cairo found a willing ally in the Soviet Union. The delivery of Soviet arms soon brought a considerable increase in the strength of Egypt’s military forces. These developments, too, helped to shape the political order that emerged in the Middle East after the Sinai-Suez War—an order, as it turned out, that a decade later brought a new war between Israel and its Arab neighbors: the June 1967 War.

The decade between 1957 and 1967 saw Syria emerge as another important element in the Arab-Israeli equation. Syria joined with Egypt in February 1958 to form the United Arab Republic; and although the experiment in political unification lasted only until September 1961, Damascus became an increasingly important player in inter-Arab politics and in the Arab-Israeli conflict. In contrast to the border between Israel and Egypt, where 3,400 UNEF troops were assigned to keep peace, the frontier between Syria and Israel was the scene of frequent clashes. Syria sometimes fired on Israeli farmers working land claimed by the Arabs, for example, and Jerusalem periodically launched retaliatory strikes. Israeli and Syrian forces also sometimes traded fire directly across the demilitarized zone.

The regime in Damascus became increasingly militant and ideologically opposed to compromise with Zionism during this period, and from the Israeli point of view, this was the major cause of the tension along the Israeli-Syrian border. From the Syrian perspective, however, Israeli provocations were the source of the problem. Damascus charged that while Israel cultivated land in the demilitarized zone between the two countries, it frequently employed border police to prevent Arabs from doing the same. Syria also charged that Israel was illegally denying use of the Sea of Galilee to Syrians and Palestinians. Although the lake lies wholly within the

Jewish state, its northeastern shore defines the border between Israel and Syria; and Damascus claimed that Arabs living along the sea were therefore entitled to fish in the lake without interference from Jerusalem. Finally, in what eventually became the most important source of tension, Syria objected vehemently to an Israeli plan to draw large quantities of water from the Sea of Galilee for irrigation and industrial development inside the Jewish state. This plan was of concern not only to Syria but to other Arab states as well, and in 1960, the Arab League called it “an act of aggression against the Arabs, which justifies collective Arab defense.”²⁴

Various Palestinian organizations also appeared on the scene about this time and involved themselves in both inter-Arab politics and the conflict between the Arab states and Israel. There were a number of clandestine and small-scale guerrilla movements, the most important of which was Fatah, led by Yasir Arafat. Fatah is an acronym for the Palestinian National Liberation Movement [*Harakat al-Tahrir al-Filastini*], the order of the initials being reversed. In addition, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was established during this period. The PLO was actually a creation of the Arab states, established at the January 1964 Arab summit meeting in Cairo in order not only to demonstrate support for the Palestinians but also, and equally, to co-opt the Palestinian resistance movement and prevent the guerrilla organizations from drawing the Arab states into a war with Israel. Fatah and other Palestinian groups were thus extremely cautious in their dealings with the PLO, rightly regarding it as an agent of Nasser and other Arab leaders rather than an independent voice for the Palestinian cause.

Although it would play a critical role after 1967 when the Palestinian dimension returned to center stage in the Arab-Israeli conflict, the PLO was not an important participant in the Arab struggle against Israel during the first years of its existence. It did establish a Palestine Liberation Army, with units based in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, but the force was kept under tight control and was not a major factor in the escalating tension. By contrast, Fatah and other Palestinian guerrilla groups began to carry out raids against Israeli targets. By

the end of 1964, they had decided to break with the PLO; and during 1966 and the first months of 1967, operating primarily from Jordan but with active Syrian support, Fatah carried out commando operations against the Jewish state. Damascus also sponsored guerrilla raids against Israel by other Palestinian commando groups.

By themselves, these raids were no more than a minor irritant for Israel. But reinforced by occasional Syrian military actions and a steady barrage of propaganda emanating from Damascus, guerrilla raids fostered a climate of uncertainty in the Jewish state. Many Israelis became convinced that Syria was laying the foundation for a full-scale guerrilla war, and as public concern mounted, the government in Jerusalem debated the pros and cons of a major attack against Syria. In the meantime, driven by what one analyst called “a nearly irresistible determination to react,”²⁵ Israel carried out a number of strikes in response to Fatah raids launched from Jordan. In November 1966, for example, Israeli forces invaded the West Bank in the region south of Hebron and carried out a major attack on the towns of as-Samu, Jimba, and Khirbet Karkay. This large-scale military operation, the most extensive since the Sinai-Suez War, resulted in the deaths of several Jordanian civilians and a larger number of Jordanian military personnel, as well as extensive property damage.

Against this background, Egypt signed a mutual defense pact with Syria in November 1966. Cairo entered into the agreement largely in hopes of restraining Damascus and reducing the chances of a major Arab-Israeli confrontation. But the Syrians would not permit Egyptian troops to be stationed on their soil, thus leaving Cairo with only limited ability to control Syrian behavior. Moreover, the agreement gave Damascus the ability to control Egyptian behavior. By sufficiently provoking Israel, the Syrians could elicit a military response from Jerusalem, and this in turn would drag Egypt into a war with the Jewish state.

Continuing Fatah raids against Israel added to the tension in early 1967, as did clashes between Israel and Syria. In April, for example,

a conflict over the cultivation of disputed lands in the Israeli-Syrian demilitarized zone led to a major engagement. Following an exchange of fire between forces on the ground, Israel and Syria both sent planes into the air, and six Syrian MIG aircraft were shot down in a dogfight over Mount Hermon. Each side blamed the other for initiating the incident, and Syria also condemned Egypt for failing to come to its aid.

In another critical development, the Soviet Union informed Syria and Egypt on May 13 that its intelligence assessments indicated the presence of Israeli troops massing near the Syrian frontier. This information turned out to be false, raising questions about Soviet motivation.²⁶ A common view is that the Russians knowingly and deliberately passed false information to the Arabs. According to one assessment, the Soviets wanted Nasser to commit his forces in Sinai in order to deter the Israelis from attacking the regime in Damascus.²⁷ Alternatively, some analysts suggest that the Russians may have believed the reports they delivered. In any event, the reports were taken seriously by the Arabs and helped to solidify their conviction that an invasion of Syria was imminent.

The final act in the drift toward war opened on May 16, when Egyptian authorities declared a state of emergency and instructed the UNEF to withdraw from Sinai in order that its positions might be occupied by the armed forces of Egypt. Because Cairo was fully within its rights in ordering the UN force out of Egyptian territory, the UN complied three days later, removing the buffer that had separated Egypt and Israel since 1956 and instantly transforming the Israeli-Egyptian border into a second focus of concern. Regardless of what may or may not have been Jerusalem's prior intentions, the prospects for an armed conflict between Israel and Egypt, as well as between Israel and Syria, increased significantly with the departure of the UNEF.

There was little disagreement that Nasser's government was acting with proper authority; the UNEF's presence in Egypt had from the beginning been subject to the approval of the government in Cairo.

But many, especially in Israel, argued that the UN secretary-general, U Thant, should not have so speedily complied with the demand and should rather have temporized in order to provide time for a diplomatic intervention. Some argued, for example, that he might have insisted that he needed time to consult the Security Council about a possible threat to international peace.

There were also differing opinions about the intentions of Nasser himself. Pro-Israeli and some other sources assert that the Egyptian leader was eager to confront Israel, both to avenge the military defeat his country had sustained in 1956 and also to solidify his claims to leadership in the Arab world. Others, including many neutral as well as pro-Arab analysts, argue that the Egyptian president was for the most part overtaken by events and perhaps to a degree by his own rhetoric; he thus found himself moving inexorably toward a confrontation he in fact would have preferred to avoid. As one student of Egypt suggests, "It is very probable that Nasser himself believed he would have more time to think out his next move and was surprised by U Thant's quick compliance."²⁸

After the UNEF departed, Egyptian troops moved up to the frontier. They were also now in unrestricted control of Sharm al-Shaykh at the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula, and Nasser on May 23 used his forces there to close the Strait of Tiran to Israeli shipping. Those who believe Cairo was not seeking war assert that Nasser took this step without the guidance of a master plan, or even careful premeditation, having in effect been pressured to do so by the escalating tension in the region more generally. As leader of the most powerful Arab state, however, he could hardly refrain from imposing a blockade on Israel at a time when Jerusalem was thought to be planning an attack on his Syrian allies, to whose defense he was committed by formal treaty obligations. Yet in taking this step, Nasser and other Egyptian leaders understood that it would be considered a *casus belli* by Israel. Indeed, a number of senior Egyptian officials rightly concluded at the time that closing the strait to Israel made war inevitable.

The Israeli cabinet met in emergency session in response to these developments, agreeing that closure of the Strait of Tiran could not be tolerated but initially considering diplomatic as well as military options for reopening the waterway. Then, on June 5 Israel carried out a devastating strike against its Arab neighbors. With awesome precision, Israeli planes attacked the airfields of Egypt and other Arab states. More than 350 Arab bombers and fighter planes were knocked out within the first two days of the war, along with several dozen transport aircraft. On the ground, Israeli forces pushed into Sinai and Gaza on the Egyptian front and into East Jerusalem and the West Bank on the Jordanian front. The main battles with the Syrians were fought on the Golan Heights, overlooking the Upper Galilee. Despite stiff resistance in some areas, the Israelis pushed forward on all fronts and were soon in control of large stretches of Arab territory.

The war was a crushing defeat for the Arabs, and by June 10, Egypt, Syria, and Jordan had all agreed to ceasefire arrangements. Some sources put the number of Arab soldiers killed as high as twenty thousand, although estimates vary widely. There were 766 soldiers killed on the Israeli side.

The impact of the June 1967 War cannot be overstated. It introduced critical new elements into the Arab-Israeli conflict, including a revival of concern with its central Palestinian dimension. Since Israel's victory left it in possession of land that had previously been part of Egypt, Jordan, or Syria, or controlled by Egypt in the case of the Gaza Strip, the most immediate result of the June 1967 War was a change in the territorial status quo.

The area under Israeli control at the end of the fighting included five Arab territories: the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights. Two of these territories, the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip, were captured from Egypt. The Sinai is a vast region but is sparsely populated, owing primarily to its inhospitable mountainous and desert terrain. Unlike Sinai, Gaza was not an integral part of Egypt but rather a portion of Palestine that had

come under Cairo's administrative control as a result of the 1947 to 1948 war. Small and densely populated, the precise opposite of Sinai, its landmass is only 140 square miles, but in 1967, the tiny territory was home to a population of about 360,000, almost 90 percent of whom were Palestinian refugees from the 1947 to 1948 war.

Another territory that came under Israeli control as a result of the June 1967 War was the West Bank, which some Israelis prefer to call by the biblical names of Judea and Samaria. The West Bank, which is about one-quarter as large as pre-1967 Israel, was left in Jordanian hands at the conclusion of the 1947 to 1948 war. It was formally annexed by the Hashemite kingdom in 1950, and Israeli officials insist that it would have remained a part of Jordan had King Hussein not entered the June 1967 War in support of Egypt and Syria. Capture of the West Bank, along with Gaza, gave Israel control over all of the territory that had been allocated for Jewish and Palestinian states under the United Nations partition resolution of 1947—the territory between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River from which the international community had once sought to carve both a state for Jews and a state for Palestinian Arabs.

As in the case of the Gaza Strip, Israel's capture of the West Bank had demographic as well as territorial implications. It not only extended the Jewish state's control over the land of Palestine; it also placed hundreds of thousands of additional Palestinian Arabs under Israeli military administration. In 1950, the population of the West Bank was composed of about 400,000 indigenous Palestinians who had not left their homes as a result of the 1947 to 1948 war and approximately 250,000 more who were refugees from other parts of Palestine. By June 1967, the West Bank's population had grown to approximately 900,000, but about one-quarter of this number fled eastward across the Jordan River during and shortly after the fighting, many becoming refugees for the second time. This meant that after the war not only did Israel control all of the land that had been allocated for a Palestinian state but also that more than one

million Palestinians were living in the territories Israel had recently captured and now occupied.

Map 2.4 Israel and Occupied Territories



East Jerusalem was an integral part of the West Bank prior to 1967, but Israel almost immediately gave the city a legal status different

from that of other occupied territories and took action to separate it from the rest of the West Bank. Although a number of foreign powers, including the United States, spoke out against any permanent change in the legal and political circumstances of the occupied territories, Israel was determined that there should be no return to the status quo ante in East Jerusalem. Thus, without debate, the Knesset (parliament) empowered the minister of the interior to apply Israeli law and administration “in any area of Palestine to be determined by decree,” and the next day, the government used this power to proclaim the unification of Jerusalem. The Israeli and Jordanian sections of the city were merged into a single municipality under Israeli control, and the borders of the new municipality were enlarged to include Mount Scopus, the Mount of Olives, and several adjacent Arab villages. All of the barriers and military installations that had separated the two halves of the city since 1948 were thereafter removed.

The Golan Heights, captured from Syria, is the final piece of territory that Israel occupied as a result of the war. The Golan is a forty-five-mile-long plateau that lies immediately to the east and rises sharply above Israel’s Upper Galilee. An integral part of Syria, the Golan had a population of about 120,000 before the war, the vast majority of whom were Syrian citizens. Not being a part of Palestine, the Golan Heights, like the Sinai Peninsula, derives much of its significance for the Arab-Israeli conflict from its potential strategic value in any future armed conflict. From an elevation averaging two thousand feet, the Golan dominates the entire northern “finger” of Israel stretching up to the border with Lebanon.

The June 1967 War gave the world community new determination to address the Arab-Israeli conflict, and international efforts at mediation, centered principally at the United Nations, began within days of the cessation of hostilities. On July 4, responding to Israel’s annexation of Jerusalem, the General Assembly passed a resolution declaring any alteration of the city’s status to be without validity and calling on the Jewish state to rescind the measures it had already taken. On June 30, a draft resolution was circulated by a group of

Latin American countries. It called for Israeli withdrawal from Arab territories captured in the war, an end to the state of belligerence, freedom of navigation in international waterways, and a full solution to the Palestinian refugee problem. Both Israel and the United States opposed the resolution because it did not call for Arab recognition of the Jewish state.

Diplomatic activity resumed in the fall, with the United Nations Security Council becoming the principal arena. Slow to start, the political bargaining became increasingly intense and complicated in October and November, with various draft resolutions presented and debated. The compromise resolution that was finally adopted on November 22, 1967, was UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 242; and despite the important disagreements it papered over, reflecting what is sometimes described as “constructive ambiguity,” it became and has remained the most significant UN resolution pertaining to the conflict after the UN partition resolution of 1947. Emphasizing the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war, the key provisions of UNSCR 242 call for (1) the withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict; (2) the termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for and acknowledgment of the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political independence of every state in the area; (3) the guarantee of freedom of navigation through international waterways in the area; and (4) a just settlement of the refugee problem.

Although UNSCR 242 was endorsed by Israel, Egypt, and Jordan, and eventually by Syria as well, the parties had different interpretations of what had been agreed to and how the resolution should be implemented. The Arab states believed that implementation must begin with Israel’s withdrawal from the territory it had captured, whereas Israel said it could not be expected to relinquish territory until the Arabs had ended the state of belligerency and recognized Israel. Distrustful of each other, each side argued that it would not be the first to surrender the elements that gave it leverage since its adversary would then have little incentive to fulfill, or to fulfill completely, its part of the bargain.

Even more important were the competing interpretations of the provision calling for Israel to withdraw from “territories” occupied in the recent conflict. The Arabs pressed, unsuccessfully, for language stating that Israel should withdraw from “all territories,” or at least “the territories,” which would have made it clear that the UN was calling for a full withdrawal—a withdrawal to the borders prevailing before the war. The United States would not agree to this, however, and so the Security Council resolution spoke only, and ambiguously, of “territories.” The Arabs and many other observers claimed that the intent of the resolution was nonetheless clear: that Israel was indeed expected to surrender all of the Arab territory it had captured in the June 1967 War—that this was the price, and a fair price, for peace with the Arabs. Yet as Israeli spokespersons pointed out, the Arabs had sought to have this made explicit in the resolution and, having failed, agreed to endorse it nevertheless. As expressed by Abba Eban, at the time the Israeli foreign minister, “For us, the resolution says what it says; it does not say that which it has specifically and consciously avoided saying.”²⁹

Subsequent diplomatic efforts aimed to break the impasse, including efforts that focused on a step-by-step approach and reciprocal confidence-building measures. The thought was that despite their differing interpretations, both sides had agreed on the principles; therefore, the constructive ambiguity of UNSCR 242 might be the basis for productive negotiations. The most important of these efforts was the mission of Gunnar Jarring, a seasoned Swedish diplomat with prior experience in the Middle East, and Jarring’s efforts did narrow the political distance between Israel and its Arab neighbors. For example, Egypt and Jordan abandoned their insistence that Israel withdraw from captured Arab territory before peace talks could begin, and they accepted the idea that the exchange of peace for land envisioned in UNSCR 242 could be carried out simultaneously, rather than in stages that had to begin with an Israeli withdrawal.³⁰ The Jarring mission nevertheless did not achieve a breakthrough, and it came to an end in April 1969, having made no real progress. Although constructive ambiguity had temporarily papered over the gap between the positions of Jerusalem on the one hand and those

of Cairo and Amman on the other, thus enabling the passage of UNSCR 242, critical differences between the parties came to the fore as soon as negotiations began.

Reemergence of the Palestinian Dimension

The Palestinian question in the late 1960s was generally perceived as a refugee issue, as a problem involving displaced individuals in need of relief and rehabilitation; thus, consistent with its reliance on constructive ambiguity, UNSCR 242 had contented itself to call in the vaguest possible terms for a just settlement of the refugee problem. To the Arabs, however, and especially to the Palestinians themselves, the problem was one of statelessness. Even those who supported other aspects of UNSCR 242, as they interpreted these provisions, called this the “greatest fallacy” of the resolution.

The absence of help from the international community notwithstanding, Arafat and other Fatah activists continued their grassroots organizational efforts. They made little headway in the West Bank, thwarted in part by a local leadership class with ties to the Hashemite regime in Amman and, even more, by Israel’s tough and effective security apparatus. By contrast, they were able to establish a political presence in the towns and especially in the refugee camps of the East Bank.³¹ Swelled by new recruits attracted by the activism of the Palestinians in the wake of the crushing defeat of the Arabs in the June 1967 War, Fatah established a political department to coordinate its activities and to produce newspapers and booklets for distribution through its growing network of local committees. The movement also undertook to provide an expanding range of social services, establishing, for example, a number of clinics and health care projects. Although their scope and effectiveness should not be overstated, these activities helped to mobilize the Palestinian population and gave substance to the guerrillas’ claim that they alone were working on behalf of the Palestinian cause.

Led by Fatah, the guerrilla organizations were now in a position to challenge the existing leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization. They charged, correctly, that the PLO was the artificial creation of Arab governments seeking to prevent meaningful resistance and that its leadership had been selected not for their nationalist credentials but for their subservience to Nasser and other Arab heads of state. At the fourth Palestine National Council (PNC), held in Cairo in July 1968, Fatah and the other guerrilla movements obtained almost half of the 100 seats on the council. Fatah easily dominated the fifth PNC and emerged from the meeting with control of the PLO's key institutions, completing the guerrilla groups' capture of the organization. In effect, a new, more representative, and more authentic PLO had been created. The Executive Committee was dominated by Fatah and its sympathizers, as there remained only one holdover from the old PLO. Yasir Arafat was elected chairman of the committee.

The institutional development of the PLO was accompanied by an important evolution of the organization's ideology. Despairing of effective assistance from Arab governments and determined that the Palestinian people should in any event speak for themselves in international affairs, the PLO's immediate concern was to make clear that the Palestinians required more than "a just settlement of the refugee problem," as UNSCR 242 had stated, and that there could be no resolution of the conflict with Israel without an end to Palestinian statelessness.

Beyond this core principle, Palestinians aligned their ideology with that of radical Arab intellectuals who, in the wake of the defeat in the June 1967 War, were questioning religious, cultural, and political traditions and calling for far-reaching reform. These areas, they argued, were at the root of Arab weakness and Israeli strength. According to one prominent Arab scholar, the Arabs were defeated because they lacked "the enemy's social organization, his sense of individual freedom, his lack of subjugation, despite all appearances, to any form of finalism or absolutism."³² According to another,

We must realize that the societies that modernized did so only after they rebelled against their history, tradition and values. . . . We must ask our religious heritage what it can do for us in our present and future. . . . If it cannot do much for us we must abandon it.³³

Secularism was a key plank in the revolutionary platform of these intellectuals, and the concept appealed to the Palestinians for several reasons. With a substantial Christian minority in its ranks, the conduct of politics without reference to religion would both promote the unity of the Palestinian people and encourage the emergence of political processes that were progressive and truly egalitarian. The notion might also have public relations value, especially in the secular West, while at the same time shining a light on what Palestinians regarded as the discrimination, if not indeed the racism, inherent in Israel's character as a Jewish state. Accordingly, the Palestinians advanced what is sometimes called the "de-Zionization" proposal: that the Jewish state of Israel be replaced by a secular and nondenominational state in which Jews and Palestinian Arabs would all be citizens and live together as equals.

In January 1969, the Central Committee of Fatah adopted a declaration proclaiming that "the final objective of its [Fatah's] struggle is the restoration of the independent, democratic State of Palestine, all of whose citizens will enjoy equal rights regardless of their religion." Several months later, Fatah's chairman, Yasir Arafat, repeated these points, saying that the PLO offered an enlightened alternative to the Jews in Palestine:

The creation of a democratic Palestinian state for all those who wish to live in peace on the land of peace . . . an independent, progressive, democratic State of Palestine, which will guarantee equal rights to all its citizens, regardless of race or religion.

Israelis and supporters of the Jewish state responded to the PLO's de-Zionization proposal in a predictable manner. Many argued that the Palestinians were not sincerely committed to their vision of Arab-Jewish rapprochement but rather had deliberately devised a strategy of propaganda and public relations calculated to appeal to Western audiences. Many also asserted that the PLO vision was fraught with ambiguities and contradictions, making it, whether put forth with sincerity or not, an unsatisfactory foundation for thinking about peace. Among other things, supporters of Israel argued that it was for Jews, not Palestinians, to determine the character of their political community: If the PLO were sincere in its insistence that every people has a right to self-determination, which was the basis for its repeated claim that this right could not be denied to the Palestinians, then surely it was for Jews themselves to define the political requirements of the Jewish people and to answer any questions that might arise about the relationship between Judaism and Zionism. Palestinians might reasonably complain that as a consequence of Zionism their own political rights had been abridged, but many Israelis argued that Palestinians could not plausibly assert that they know better than the Jews how Jewish political life should be structured or that they, the enemies of Zionism, have the right to determine whether the concepts of Jewish nationalism and Jewish statehood are or are not legitimate. Such an assertion would run directly counter to the principle of self-determination, in whose name the PLO had rejected not only Israeli efforts to deny the legitimacy of Palestinian nationalism but even attempts by the United Nations to specify the just requirements of the Palestinian people.

These institutional and ideological developments within the ranks of the PLO did not move the Arab-Israeli conflict nearer to a solution or convince many Israelis that the road to peace lay in the creation of a democratic and secular state. They did, however, alter international perceptions of the conflict in significant ways. They returned the attention of diplomats and would-be peacemakers to the Palestinian dimension of the conflict and forced an awareness, and ultimately an acceptance, of the Palestinians' demand that they be represented by men and women of their own choosing. These developments also

contributed to a modified perception of the Palestinians themselves, who, as the PLO intended, were now increasingly viewed as a stateless people with a legitimate political agenda rather than a collection of displaced individuals requiring humanitarian assistance. This important evolution in the way the world saw the Arab-Israeli conflict can be traced directly to the political and ideological transformations that took place in the Palestinian community after the June 1967 War.

Although the restructuring of the PLO and the organization's ideological evolution brought growing recognition that the Palestinian problem formed the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the confrontation between Israel and the Arab states remained a pressing concern in the aftermath of the June 1967 War. Particularly significant were the hostilities between Israel and Egypt during this period, with dozens of armed exchanges and Nasser publicly acknowledging that his country had initiated a "war of attrition" against Jerusalem.

Egypt's declared objective in the war of attrition was to destroy the defensive fortifications that Israel had built on the eastern side of the Suez Canal, at the edge of the occupied Sinai Peninsula. The war dragged on from fall 1968 through summer 1970 as Israel responded with harsh retaliatory actions and Egypt then appealed to the Soviet Union for assistance. Early in 1970, approximately 1,500 Soviet personnel arrived in Egypt with advanced antiaircraft equipment, including new SAM-3 missiles, and the momentum of the conflict for a time shifted in favor of Egypt. In March, April, and May of 1970, sixty-four Israelis were killed, 155 more were wounded, and six were taken prisoner. Then in mid-June, the United States proposed to Israel, Egypt, and Jordan that they accept a ceasefire. The US administration hoped that a reduction in hostilities between Egypt and Israel would check the growing Soviet influence in the region, and by including Jordan, the United States hoped to commit King Hussein to putting an end to raids by Palestinian guerrillas who opposed any settlement based on UNSCR 242. President Nasser accepted the US proposal after consulting with the Russians, and

shortly thereafter, Israel agreed to the plan as well, bringing an end to the costly and prolonged war of attrition.

Additional tension during this period resulted from Palestinian commando raids launched against Israel from the East Bank. According to one Israeli source, these raids represented almost half of all the hostile acts carried out against the Jewish state in 1968 and 1969.³⁴ Israel responded with retaliatory strikes, and this put pressure on Jordan to confront the Palestinians and put an end to the attacks, including attacks on Israeli targets abroad that were planned from Palestinian strongholds in Jordan. There was an even more important dimension to the growing conflict between the Jordanian government and the Palestinians, however. Many of the social and political institutions set up by the reorganized PLO had their headquarters in Jordan, and the Palestinian organization took control of many of the refugee camps in the country. In addition, not only did the PLO assume responsibility for organizing and administering life in the camps, but well-armed militia units patrolled the streets of Amman where, in order to demonstrate the power and independence of the guerrilla groups, they stopped pedestrians to examine identity papers and sometimes even directed traffic. Steadily encroaching on the prerogatives of the Jordanian state, the Palestinians were described by one analyst as “appealing to the people over the head of the government.”³⁵

King Hussein for a time seemed uncertain about how to respond to this challenge from the PLO. Throughout 1969 and the first half of 1970, his government avoided an all-out military confrontation with the Palestinians, but this came to an end in September. Led by the leftist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Palestinians dramatically escalated the stakes in what had been a war of relatively low intensity. PFLP agents made two unsuccessful attempts to assassinate the king early in September. A few days later, the same organization carried out a spectacular series of four airline hijackings. In an act intended as a symbolic attack on Jordanian sovereignty, two of the planes, one American and one Swiss, were flown to a little-used airstrip in the Jordanian desert,

where their crew and passengers were held for four days. The Jordanians then responded with an assault designed to put an end to the challenge from the PLO. With their light weapons, the Palestinians had no chance against the disciplined, tank-backed troops of the Jordanian army, and the result during eleven days of fighting was a bloody and disastrous rout for the Palestinians, thousands of whom were killed. The official Jordanian estimate was 1,500 killed, although this figure is almost certainly too low. The fighting finally came to an end on September 27, when, in response to the PLO's desperate situation, Nasser persuaded King Hussein to accept a ceasefire. Sometimes described as the civil war in Jordan, Palestinians often refer to this deadly month as "Black September."

The military defeat handed to the PLO by the Jordanian army left the Palestinian organization in disarray. Although it still had a solid base of operations in Lebanon, from which it gradually rebuilt itself and eventually assumed a position of prominence on the international diplomatic stage, there was a possibility in the early 1970s that the resistance movement might disappear altogether. Palestinian leaders acknowledged that the PLO was on the verge of collapse during this period. "Not only were its military units defeated and fragmented," one of them wrote, but "the political and social work of the previous three years was practically destroyed."³⁶ This situation reduced Israeli concern about an external challenge from the PLO and allowed Jerusalem to focus its thinking about the Palestinians on the occupied West Bank and Gaza, territories that had been administered by Israel since the war of June 1967 and that in the early 1970s were inhabited by 700,000 and 350,000 Palestinians, respectively.

But even as Israel was formulating its policy toward the occupied territories and debating their future, the country received a severe shock from an unexpected quarter, one that indicated that the Palestinian dimension of the Arab-Israeli conflict had not yet made the attitudes and behavior of the Arab states a secondary consideration. On October 6, 1973, which was Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the holiest day in the Jewish calendar, Egypt and

Syria launched coordinated attacks on Israeli positions in the Sinai Peninsula and on the Golan Heights, taking the IDF completely by surprise and scoring important victories in the early days of the fighting. Thus began what Israelis call the Yom Kippur War, which is often called the Ramadan War by the Arabs because it occurred during Ramadan, the holiest month in the Islamic calendar and a month of fasting. The success of the Egyptian and Syrian attacks reflected careful and effective planning and coordination between the two Arab countries, as well as the skill and bravery with which both Egyptian and Syrian soldiers fought. Also, on both fronts, Arab fortunes were significantly enhanced by the failure of Israeli intelligence to give advance warning and, in some instances, by the complacency and inadequate organization that characterized Israel's forward bases.

Although these Arab military accomplishments were without parallel in any of the previous Arab-Israeli wars and were a justifiable source of pride to the Egyptians and the Syrians, the IDF was able to contain the threat on both fronts within several days and thereafter initiate a series of successful counterattacks. Many Israeli soldiers displayed bravery and even heroism during the difficult early days of the fighting. In addition, Israel was aided during the critical early stage of the war by Egypt's decision to consolidate its positions in western Sinai rather than to advance eastward, which enabled the IDF to use more of its resources against the Syrians on the Golan. The Syrian attack was accordingly broken on October 9, and thereafter, it was the Israelis who were moving forward. After this point, with Syria on the defensive, Israel was also able to concentrate more of its forces in the Sinai Peninsula, eventually knocking out hundreds of Egyptian tanks and routing the Egyptian army. Israel also received critical assistance from the United States in the form of a full-scale airlift of military equipment, and this, too, played a major role in the eventual outcome of the October 1973 War.

While the war left Israel in an advantageous military position, the country was nonetheless badly shaken. The intelligence failures of

the IDF and associated battlefield losses during the first days of the fighting raised deep doubts about the country's military establishment. Furthermore, the somber mood in the Jewish state was greatly intensified by the heavy casualties that had been sustained. Much public anger was directed at Golda Meir and Moshe Dayan, prime minister and defense minister, respectively, and these sentiments were clearly visible during the Knesset elections that took place in December. The long-dominant Labor Party of Meir and Dayan was aggressively challenged by the right-wing Likud Union, which included in its platform the permanent retention of the West Bank and Gaza. Likud and two smaller opposition factions increased their representation by 50 percent in the balloting, capturing 39 of the assembly's 120 seats.

The mood in the Arab states was different. Despite their military defeat, they—not the Israelis—reaped the political benefits of the war. Recognition of this apparent anomaly was yet another factor contributing to the gloom in Israel. Political gains were made in particular by Anwar al-Sadat, Nasser's vice president who had become president of his country following the Egyptian leader's death in 1970. Prior to the 1973 war, Sadat, like other Arab leaders, had been derided for inaction and charged with a failure to end the humiliation imposed on his country by its disastrous defeat in the war of June 1967. During and after the 1973 war, by contrast, the Egyptian president was hailed at home for taking action to end the lethargy and defeatism that had reigned in Arab capitals since 1967. In the months that followed, Sadat was also welcomed on the international scene as an effective political strategist who had designed and implemented a plan to break the deadlock in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

It also soon became apparent that Sadat had carefully related his military actions to political objectives and that, from the Egyptian point of view, the October 1973 War had been part of a more elaborate plan that at its core was political and diplomatic. The Egyptian president had never intended more than a limited military operation; he had sought only to recapture enough Egyptian territory

to show the Israelis that their forces were not invincible and, accordingly, that the Jewish state's security lay not in maintaining a territorial buffer but in seeking good relations with its neighbors. It is for this reason that Egyptian troops had not sought to drive eastward after their successful invasion of Sinai. Sadat continued this strategy in the immediate postwar period by improving relations with the United States and by working with the Americans to secure a partial Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula, hoping to obtain through political action the breakthrough he had failed to achieve by military means. Having emerged from the war as a man of initiative and vision—a world statesman—he sought to consolidate and further enhance his new political status by demonstrating that his strategy would produce movement in the direction of an Israeli return to the pre-1967 borders.

The major international diplomatic initiative of the mid-1970s was undertaken by Henry Kissinger, at the time both the US secretary of state and President Richard Nixon's assistant for national security affairs. Having received signals that Egypt and Syria were now ready for compromise, and reasoning that Israel's postwar political troubles might lead Jerusalem to be more flexible on the issue of territorial withdrawal, Kissinger undertook an extended mission that subsequently came to be known as "shuttle diplomacy."

Tirelessly traveling back and forth between Jerusalem, Cairo, and Damascus, Kissinger eventually secured limited Israeli pullbacks in Sinai and the Golan Heights in return for a reduction in Egyptian and Syrian belligerency toward the Jewish state. Under agreements signed by Cairo and Jerusalem in January 1974 and September 1975, Israel relinquished a significant portion of Sinai. In return, the disengagement agreement specified that nonmilitary cargoes destined for or coming from Israel would be permitted to pass through the Suez Canal. Israel also obtained from Kissinger a promise that the United States would not recognize or negotiate with the PLO unless that organization explicitly accepted UNSCR 242 and thereby recognized the Jewish state's right to exist. The agreement with Syria was signed in May 1974. In return for Israeli

withdrawal from a portion of the Golan Heights, the Syrian president, Hafiz al-Asad, promised to prevent Palestinian guerrillas from using Syrian territory to attack Israel.

An even more significant development, and one that again had Anwar al-Sadat occupying center stage, occurred two years later. Moreover, this development brought a new relationship between Egypt and Israel and solidified the evolution of the conflict from one in which the Arab state dimension had become preeminent to one in which the relationship between Israel and the Palestinians was again recognized as the core issue. This evolution was already well underway, of course, notwithstanding the war of attrition and the war of October 1973; and during this period, it was also pushed forward by developments both among Palestinians and within Israel.

Following its defeat in the civil war in Jordan, the PLO rebuilt its base in Lebanon, and by the mid-1970s, it had established a strong political and institutional foundation and initiated an increasingly successful international diplomatic campaign. Both the Arab League and the Organization of the Islamic Conference recognized the PLO as the “sole legitimate representative” of the Palestine people at this time. This was significant, in part, because it meant that the PLO, rather than King Hussein, was held to represent Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, almost all of whom were Jordanian citizens. The Non-Aligned Movement also adopted a resolution recognizing the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinians, indicating that the PLO’s campaign was bearing fruit beyond Arab and Islamic circles, and the movement also called on members to break off diplomatic relations with Israel. Yet another important accomplishment was Arafat’s official visit to the Soviet Union in August 1974, during which the Soviets, too, agreed that the PLO alone represented the Palestinians. The culmination of this diplomatic campaign came in November, when Arafat was invited to address the United Nations General Assembly. The decision to invite the PLO to participate in the assembly’s deliberations of the Palestine question was approved by a 105 to 4 vote, with twenty abstentions.

There was also an evolution of the PLO's ideological orientation during this period. Although it did not formally renounce the democratic secular state proposal, the twelfth PNC meeting, held in Cairo in 1974, adopted a ten-point program calling for the Palestinian revolution to be implemented in stages, which was widely understood to mean the PLO would now set as its immediate objective the creation of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This was the first official expression of a willingness to accept anything less than the liberation of all of Palestine, leading many to conclude that a basis for compromise had been established. Indeed, observers pointed out that the phrase "liberation of Palestine," so prominent in the PLO's National Charter, had been replaced in the text of the program by the much more ambiguous "liberation of Palestinian land." In addition, in another significant departure from earlier PLO thinking, the 1974 PNC meeting accepted the possibility of political dialogue between a Palestinian state in the liberated territories and progressive- and peace-oriented forces in Israel.

Most Israelis dismissed these changes as distinctions without differences. They insisted that the idea of stages showed the PLO to be as committed as ever to the destruction of the Jewish state, and some Palestinian leaders who had supported the ten-point program declared that the establishment of a democratic state over the whole of Palestine did indeed remain their long-term objective. The impression that a change in PLO thinking had taken place nonetheless persisted, with many Palestinians and others arguing that what was declared to be an intermediate stage today might well be accepted tomorrow as the basis for a permanent solution.

These moderating trends were more prominently in evidence at the thirteenth PNC meeting, convened in March 1977. Although the details were left unspecified, the program represented a clear victory for Fatah and its supporters, including mainstream nationalists in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and a defeat for the more uncompromising factions of the Palestinian left. These moderate and nationalist elements favored the pursuit of Palestinian goals through

political rather than military action, placed emphasis on the establishment of an independent state alongside Israel, and even suggested that this state might form political alliances with progressive elements in Israel. As for the idea of a democratic secular state in all of Palestine, the proposal was not repudiated but was increasingly understood by Palestinians as a distant objective that would only be achieved, if at all, through natural, historical evolution. Thus, as summarized by one analyst, the significance of the thirteenth PNC meeting is this:

After a three-year struggle, it was the “moderates” who had won in the PLO. By agreeing to participate in the peace process and endorse the idea of a Palestinian state [alongside Israel], the PLO appeared to be taking its full place in an international search for a settlement of the conflict.³⁷

Ideological developments and gains in the international diplomatic arena were matched by an evolution of the political situation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Despite Israeli and Jordanian efforts to limit its influence, the PLO was growing steadily more popular among the Palestinian inhabitants of the occupied territories. Moreover, in the West Bank a new generation of pro-PLO political leaders emerged to rival the class of notables tied to Jordan, who had been dominant before 1967.

These trends were encouraged by Israeli policies that restricted the activities of Palestinian officials in order to prevent the emergence of an all–West Bank leadership. They were also encouraged by the expansion of quasi-political associations, such as labor unions and student movements, outside the control of the traditional elite. Each of these developments provided opportunities for the emergence of new and more nationalist-oriented political forces. Finally, and equally important, the expansion of opportunities for Palestinians to work in Israel weakened the position of established notable families. By 1974, approximately one-third of the West Bank labor force was

employed in Israel; and, whatever the balance of benefits and disadvantages of such employment for individual workers, an important consequence was a reduction in their dependence on West Bank landowners and businesspeople, the backbone of the traditional political class. The magnitude and significance of the political shift taking place among Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza were reflected in the West Bank municipal elections of April 1976, in which pro-PLO candidates defeated incumbents and gained control of the mayor's office and the Municipal Council in Nablus, Hebron, Ramallah, and eleven other towns.

As a result of these developments, the position of the PLO was radically different from what it had been only five or six years earlier. It had been possible to argue in 1970 and 1971, in the wake of the Jordanian civil war, that the revival of the Palestine resistance movement after June 1967 had run its course and that the PLO would now return to the periphery of the Arab-Israeli conflict. By 1976 or 1977, and probably as early as 1974 or 1975, it was evident that such assessments had been extremely premature. The PLO had achieved wide recognition in the international diplomatic arena, and a new generation of political leaders identified with the Palestinian organization had emerged in the West Bank and Gaza. The PLO had also built a formidable political infrastructure in Lebanon, effectively governing the large Palestinian population in that country and presiding over what some described as an autonomous ministate.

The evolution of the conflict was also shaped by Israel's policies toward the territories it had captured in the June 1967 War, particularly the West Bank and Gaza, which are part of historic Palestine. Israel maintained that its acquisition of the West Bank, Gaza, and other territories had been the result of a war forced on it by Arab belligerency; it was not, Israel insisted, the consequence of any deliberate plan to expand the borders of the Jewish state. Yet the government took steps almost immediately to alter the territorial status quo. First and most important, there was a deliberate effort to divide East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank, of which it had

been an integral part prior to the June 1967 War. The part of the city formerly belonging to Jordan was merged with West Jerusalem shortly after the war, creating a unified municipal administration governed by Israeli law, and the borders of the new municipality were then expanded to the north, east, and south. The government also began to construct Jewish neighborhoods in former Arab areas, some of which were explicitly designed to give newly acquired sections of the city a more Jewish character and some of which were intended to create a physical barrier between East Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank.

Israeli actions in the other captured territories were much more limited, and they were also the subject of disagreement among Israelis. Beginning in 1968, small Israeli paramilitary settlements were established in the Jordan Valley along the eastern perimeter of the West Bank. They were constructed for the purpose of preventing Palestinian commandos from infiltrating from the East Bank, and presumably, they could be dismantled should conditions later permit Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories in return for peace. Over time, however, the Jordan Valley settlements developed a solid economic foundation based on commercial agriculture, which provided a rationale for their maintenance and expansion that transcended the military objectives that had led to their creation.

Settlement activity after the June 1967 War was also undertaken by Israelis who were committed to permanent retention of the West Bank and Gaza. These Israelis referred to the former territory by the biblical designations of Judea and Samaria, terms chosen for the deliberate purpose of asserting that the territorial claims of the Jews predate those of the Arabs. In contrast with the Jordan Valley settlements, which were established for purposes relating to military security, these civilian communities were constructed by Israeli civilians with the intention that they would create a Jewish demographic presence in the occupied areas and lead eventually to the exercise of Israeli sovereignty over Judea, Samaria, and Gaza. The first initiative of these Israelis, who are often described as the

“settler movement,” was the construction of Qiryat Arba, a religious community adjacent to the West Bank city of Hebron.

These two sets of settlement activities reflect a division of opinion about the occupied territories, particularly about the West Bank and Gaza, that emerged after the June 1967 War and became one of the most important and contentious issues in Israeli politics during the 1970s. The centrist and politically dominant Labor Party endorsed the “land for peace” principle in UNSCR 242. There were debates within the party and among its supporters about whether Israel should relinquish all or simply most of the West Bank and Gaza, but the Labor-led government never argued that all or even most of the territory should be retained permanently by the Jewish state. The country’s official position was that the UN resolution gave Israel international justification for maintaining its control of the territories, but only as long as the Arab governments persisted in their refusal to make peace. According to a report prepared by the Ministry of Defense, UNSCR 242 “confirmed Israel’s right to administer the captured territories [but only] until the cease-fire was superseded by a ‘just and lasting peace’ arrived at between Israel and her neighbors.”³⁸

As noted, the Likud Union had become the most important opposition party in Israel, especially after the December 1973 election, and Likud and its supporters took a very different approach to the West Bank and Gaza. Aligned with the settler movement and various factions on the political right, Likud argued that the West Bank and Gaza were part of the historic “Land of Israel” and should be permanently retained by the Jewish state, even if the Arabs offered the country peace in return. Likud’s improving political fortunes in the mid-1970s were helped by the blame for losses in the 1973 war that much of the public placed on the Labor government and its leaders. Likud also benefited greatly from demographic changes taking place in Israel. Jews whose families had emigrated from Middle Eastern countries during the decade following Israeli independence had become an increasingly significant proportion of Israel’s Jewish population, and these “Afro-Asian” Israeli Jews

increasingly gave their votes to Likud. The partisan attachments of this segment of the population were shaped by a variety of factors, but prominent among these was a belief that they or their families had been poorly treated by the Labor government at the time of their arrival in Israel.³⁹ Accordingly, although predisposed in many cases to be sympathetic to Likud's foreign policy positions, these Israelis were often casting their votes against Labor as much as for Likud.

The culmination of Likud's ascent came in the Israeli election of May 1977. Likud won 43 seats to Labor's 32, and the party's leader, Menachem Begin, then formed a cabinet and assumed the premiership. This was the first time since the founding of the state that the government had not been under the control of Labor, leading some to describe the election results as a political earthquake. During the electoral campaign, Likud had issued a straightforward call for retention of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, whereas Labor, as in the past, had reaffirmed its commitment to UNSCR 242 and championed the principle of territorial compromise. Likud emphasized the strategic significance of the West Bank and Gaza, discussing the Sinai Peninsula and Golan Heights in this context as well and stating that its approach to all of the occupied territories was guided by Israel's need for secure and defensible borders. But its attitude toward the West Bank and Gaza also reflected other considerations—ones that were central to the party's ideology. Affirming that Judea and Samaria and the Gaza district were integral parts of the historic Land of Israel, Likud also justified its insistence on retaining these territories on historical and religious grounds and rejected returning to the Arabs even those regions with no military value. The party maintained that foreign (meaning "non-Jewish") sovereignty should not be reestablished over any part of the West Bank and Gaza, adding as a corollary that the right of Jews to live in any part of these territories was not a subject for negotiation.⁴⁰

Consistent with this ideological commitment, the new Likud-led government set out almost immediately to establish a vastly expanded network of Jewish settlements and interests in the West Bank and other occupied territories. Critics of the policy often

described this as “creating facts,” meaning that the political and demographic situation in the territories was deliberately being transformed in order to establish a new set of realities, to create a situation that would reduce, and possibly eliminate, any chance of an Israeli withdrawal in the future. Prime Minister Begin proclaimed in this connection that there would never again be a political division between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea.

There had been settlement activity under previous Labor governments, of course, primarily in the Jordan Valley, but on a limited scale in other areas as well. At the time Likud came to power in May 1977, approximately four thousand Israeli Jews were living in the West Bank, excluding East Jerusalem. By the end of 1977, more than five thousand Jewish settlers lived in the West Bank, and the number rose to 7,500, 10,000, and 12,500 during the following three years, with the actual number of settlements more than doubling by the end of 1980. The numbers also increased for the other occupied territories. By late 1980, there were twenty-six Jewish settlements on the Golan Heights, with about 6,500 people; thirteen settlements in northern Sinai, with approximately six thousand people; and seven hundred Israelis in three settlements in the Gaza Strip. In addition, the Begin government expanded the geographic locus of its settlement activities in the West Bank. Whereas Labor had deliberately discouraged the construction of Jewish communities in the central hilly areas where most Palestinians live, Likud made the heavily populated highlands the principal focus of its colonization efforts.

The Israeli election was not the only earthquake of 1977. In November of that year after several months of behind-the-scenes negotiations, Egypt’s president, Anwar al-Sadat, traveled to Jerusalem and in a speech to the Knesset offered the Israelis a formula that he considered to be the basis for a fair and lasting end to the conflict. As president of the largest and most powerful Arab country, which only four years earlier had launched a surprise attack and inflicted heavy casualties on the Jewish state, al-Sadat was making a dramatic gesture and offering a potential breakthrough as

he spoke to the most important political body in Israel. He told the Israelis that Egypt was ready for peace. He added, however, that his country did not seek a separate peace with Israel and that a resolution of the conflict would require complete withdrawal from Arab territories captured in 1967. Al-Sadat also emphasized the centrality of the Palestinian dimension of the conflict, stating that peace would be impossible without a solution to the Palestinian problem, even if peace between Israel and all the confrontation states were achieved. In one passage, he told the Israeli assembly that “it is no use to refrain from recognizing the Palestinian people and their right to statehood.”

Al-Sadat’s visit to Jerusalem set off a new round of diplomatic activity, in which the United States as well as Egypt and Israel were heavily involved, and that eventually led to the historic summit meeting at Camp David in September 1978. With continued prodding from the US president, Jimmy Carter, Anwar al-Sadat and Menachem Begin and their respective teams engaged in difficult and often-tense negotiations for almost two weeks. They eventually agreed on two “frameworks,” which were then signed in a public ceremony. The first, the “Framework for the Conclusion of a Peace Treaty between Egypt and Israel,” set forth a detailed formula for resolving bilateral issues and arriving at a peace treaty between the two countries. The second, the “Framework for Peace in the Middle East,” dealt with the rights of the Palestinians and the future of the West Bank and Gaza. This framework offered only a general blueprint; it was characterized by broad guidelines, deferred decisions, and language amenable to differing interpretations, at best reflecting the kind of constructive ambiguity that in the past had failed to provide a basis for productive negotiations.

Despite some sticking points, bilateral relations between Egypt and Israel evolved satisfactorily following the Camp David summit. The two countries signed a formal peace treaty in March 1979, and during the next two years, Israel dismantled its settlements in northern Sinai and completed its withdrawal from the peninsula. There was also progress during this period on the normalization of

relations. As early as the summer of 1979, Egypt was visited by delegations of Israeli business leaders, university professors, and others. The first group of Israeli tourists also traveled to Egypt at this time, and they were met upon their arrival by welcome signs in Hebrew. Travel in the other direction brought Egyptian businesspeople, industrialists, and senior government officials to Israel; in addition, the two countries coordinated tourist exchanges and made plans for several joint ventures. These were stunning accomplishments, and despite some continuing problems and misunderstandings between Egypt and Israel, they constituted a significant, indeed revolutionary, development in the Arab-Israeli conflict, further reducing the importance of the Arab state dimension and focusing attention even more sharply on the conflict's core Palestinian dimension.

Israel and the Territories

Unfortunately, the story of the Camp David framework dealing with the West Bank and Gaza is unlike that of the framework dealing with peace between Egypt and Israel. The framework called for negotiations about the final status of these territories to be based on the provisions and principles of UNSCR 242 and specified that the solution resulting from these talks must recognize the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and their just requirements. The framework also envisioned a transitional period, not to exceed five years, during which time the final status of the West Bank and Gaza would be determined. During this period, inhabitants of these territories were to have “full autonomy,” with the Israeli military government and its civilian administration being withdrawn as soon as “a Self-Governing Authority (Administrative Council)” could be freely elected by the inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza. Jordan would be invited to join with Egypt and Israel in negotiating these arrangements, it being specified that the delegations of Jordan and Egypt could include Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza or other Palestinians as mutually agreed.

These “autonomy talks,” as they were informally known, soon reached an impasse; and after waiting three months, consistent with Israel’s interpretation of what had been promised at Camp David, the Begin government resumed the construction of new settlements in the West Bank and Gaza. In October 1978, the World Zionist Organization presented a plan, accepted by the government in Jerusalem as a guide to its own action, for raising the number of Jewish settlers in the West Bank to one hundred thousand by 1983. This would involve approximately twenty-seven thousand families, approximately ten thousand to be accommodated through the expansion of existing settlements and the remainder to be located in some fifty new settlements specifically proposed by the plan. In response to these developments, as well as the failure to reach agreement on any substantive or even procedural issues pertaining

to the West Bank and Gaza, al-Sadat unilaterally suspended the autonomy talks in May 1980.

With Egypt's increasing disengagement from the conflict, the most important events of the 1980s involved the political and diplomatic competition and also the violent confrontations between Israel and the Palestinians. The PLO continued its diplomatic campaign from its base in Lebanon, where it had also become a key player in Lebanese domestic politics. Palestinian officials repeated their readiness for a political settlement based on compromise and, focusing on Israeli settlement activity, insisted that the Jewish state was the intransigent party. For their part, Israeli representatives insisted that the PLO remained a terrorist organization dedicated to the destruction of the Jewish state. They pointed to the 1968 PLO charter and other early hard-line documents that had not been formally repudiated, stating as well that Arafat and other Palestinian leaders often said different things to different audiences. There was validity to the arguments and interpretations advanced by both Israeli and PLO spokespersons, but international diplomatic opinion nonetheless increasingly lined up on the side of the Palestinian organization. In European diplomatic circles, for example, criticism of Israel's settlement drive increased, and many judged the evolution of PLO thinking to be more significant than a failure to remove all ambiguities and conditionalities from its recent declarations. Also persuasive, apparently, were Palestinian claims that hard-line statements by Fatah and other mainstream PLO leaders were increasingly rare and, in any event, designed only to fend off extremist critics and create room to maneuver.

Developments among Palestinians in the occupied territories lent additional credibility to the PLO's claim to be ready for a political settlement and also to the PLO's insistence that it was the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza were now being led by a new generation of men with an explicitly nationalist orientation, men who openly identified with the PLO and who declared their opposition to both the Israeli occupation and the autonomy scheme that had emerged from

the Camp David summit. At the same time, many stated without hesitation that they were prepared to accept the existence of Israel—and, specifically, Israel as a Jewish state—in return for the exercise of Palestinian self-determination and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel. As noted, some of these men had come to power in the relatively democratic election of 1976, which gave them an important measure of legitimacy and made it possible to gauge the political preferences of Palestinians in the territories more generally.

Standing in opposition to the PLO and the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza was the Israeli government, led by Likud and actively supported by other nationalist and religious factions on the right side of the political spectrum. No matter how vigorous might be Palestinian resistance and no matter how plausible in the eyes of outside observers might be the political solution for which Palestinians and other Arabs now claimed to be ready, these Israelis were determined that the future of the West Bank and Gaza would be shaped exclusively by their own ideological vision. Furthermore, they were in the midst of an intense campaign to transform the political, economic, and demographic character of the West Bank and Gaza, and from their point of view, they were having considerable success in their drive to translate vision into reality.

Not all Israelis shared this vision. Indeed, the country was deeply divided on questions relating to the West Bank and Gaza. Many leaders and supporters of the centrist Labor Party, as well as those affiliated with other centrist and leftist political factions, argued, often passionately, that permanent retention of the West Bank and Gaza was not in Israel's interest and that, in fact, it would be extremely detrimental to the Jewish state. Not only would this make more remote, and possibly remove permanently, any chance of peace with the Arabs; it would also leave Israel with a large non-Jewish population, whose existence was likely to force the country to choose, impossibly and with no acceptable outcome, between its Jewish character and its democratic character.

This choice could be avoided if most Palestinians in the territories could be induced, or forced, to leave the West Bank and Gaza for other Arab lands, a policy of “transfer” that was advocated by some groups on the extreme political right. But transfer, with its implications of ethnic cleansing, was strongly rejected on both moral and political grounds by the overwhelming majority of Israelis. Thus, retention of the West Bank and Gaza and the extension of Israeli sovereignty to these territories would require Israel to decide whether to grant citizenship to the Palestinian inhabitants of the territories. If citizenship were not awarded, so that these Palestinians became “subjects” with only local-level political rights, the country would cease to be a democracy. Israeli Jews and those Palestinians who were citizens of pre-1967 Israel would possess political rights denied, legally and by official design, to the West Bank and Gaza Palestinians who now lived in “greater Israel.” Alternatively, if these Palestinians were granted citizenship in order to preserve the country’s democratic character, non-Jews would be a large part of the country’s citizenry; and given the higher birthrate among Arabs compared with the birthrate among Jews, non-Jews within a generation might constitute the majority of the population and be in a position to pass legislation that would abolish the laws and policies that institutionalize Israel’s connection to Judaism and Jews throughout the world. Israeli opponents of retaining the territories called this the “demographic issue.”

Although the political weight of Labor and other domestic opponents of the Likud-led government was considerable, Likud retained its supremacy in the Israeli election of June 1981, albeit by a narrow margin, and this brought an acceleration of Israeli settlement activity. Menachem Begin appointed Ariel Sharon, a hard-line former general, as minister of defense. As minister of agriculture in the previous Begin cabinet, Sharon had emerged as a powerful force within the government and played a leading role in formulating and implementing Israel’s policies in the occupied territories. Now, at the Defense Ministry he was able to dominate the army as well as government policy, and this gave him responsibility for the Israeli military government that ruled the West Bank and Gaza.

Bitter confrontations between Israelis and Palestinians in the territories emerged in this environment, and Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights in December 1981 contributed further to Arab anger. The Golan had been captured from Syria in the June 1967 War; and although the territory had no ideological significance for the Jewish state as it is not considered part of the historic Land of Israel, it was judged to be of major strategic importance. Both Labor and Likud governments had built settlements in the territory. A motivation for the Begin government's annexation of the Golan was to defuse criticism from right-wing elements that were pressing the prime minister to renege on his promise to relinquish those portions of the Sinai Peninsula that Israel still controlled. Whatever the motivations, the extension of Israeli law to the Golan Heights added to the tension. In addition to the understandable condemnation from Syria and other states, a general strike was called by Syrian Druze residents of the Golan. The Israeli military's use of coercion and collective punishment in an effort to break the strike and to force the Druze to accept Israeli identification cards only exacerbated the situation.

The most important confrontations were in the West Bank and Gaza, where Palestinian resistance and Israel's response brought broad and sustained disturbances in spring 1982. These began when an Israeli official was beaten by Palestinian students at Birzeit University near Ramallah in February, after which Israeli authorities closed the school for two months, and protest demonstrations were then organized at other West Bank universities. Agitation grew more intense in the weeks that followed, and in addition to demonstrations and protest marches, there were general strikes in many areas, including East Jerusalem, and incidents in which young Palestinians threw stones at Israeli soldiers and Jewish civilians traveling in the occupied territories. The clashes that erupted during this period were the most intense and prolonged of any that had occurred since Israel took control of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967.

Both the Israeli and Palestinian press provided vivid accounts of these clashes, giving attention not only to Palestinian activism but

also to the forceful and sometimes lethal response of the Israeli military. Regular features in April and May were articles with titles such as “Boy Dies as Violence Sweeps Gaza, W. Bank,” “Two Arabs Killed as Troops Disperse Riots,” “Youth Shot after Stonings in Bethlehem Area Village,” and “Girl Pupil Killed during Gaza Strip School Riot.”⁴¹ Describing the overall situation in a May 12 editorial titled “Road to Nowhere,” the *Jerusalem Post* wrote that “this little war has emerged as nasty, brutish and hopeless.” Another editorial, prompted by a press conference at which six Israeli reserve officers recounted their experiences while serving in the occupied territories, described the situation as “depressing when it was not hair-raising.” Thus with a scope and intensity unmatched during the previous fifteen years of Israeli occupation, the West Bank and Gaza exploded in the spring of 1982, making it all the more evident that even a positive evolution of relations between Israel and Egypt would not bring peace in the absence of a solution to the Palestinian dimension of the conflict.

The Israeli actions to which Palestinians were responding in the spring of 1982 included not only the settlement drive of the Begin and Sharon government but also the lawlessness and vigilantism of elements within the organized Israeli settler movement. Not only were there a number of incidents in which Palestinians were attacked by Jewish settlers, but the lenient treatment that Israeli authorities gave to the perpetrators was an additional source of Palestinian anger. In March 1982, for example, an Arab teenager from the village of Sinjal was shot and killed by an Israeli resident of a nearby settlement. The settler was detained briefly but released a few days later, and the case against him was subsequently dropped. According to an Israeli government inquiry into settler violence against Palestinians in the West Bank, headed by Deputy Attorney General Yehudit Karp, there were a total fifteen such incidents during April and May, all of which involved either death or injury as a result of shootings.⁴² There were also instances of Jewish settlers throwing hand grenades at Arab homes, automobiles, and even schools in several locations.

Israeli authorities responded to the unrest not only by confronting demonstrators in the streets but also by seeking to undermine Palestinian political institutions. This included the dismissal of a number of elected mayors of West Bank towns, beginning with Ibrahim Tawil of al-Bireh and followed by Bassam Shaka of Nablus and Karim Khalaf of Ramallah. Both Shaka and Khalaf were outspoken supporters of the PLO, and both had been wounded in 1980 in attacks carried out by an underground Jewish settler group calling itself "Terror Against Terror." The Israelis said that the mayors' refusal to cooperate with the civilian administration provided a legal basis for their removal, accusing them as well of helping to incite strikes and demonstrations.

A logical extension of Israel's campaign against PLO influence in the West Bank and Gaza was a desire to inflict damage on the PLO itself through an attack on the organization's base in Lebanon. Prime Minister Begin and Defense Minister Sharon, as well as others in the Likud government, considered the PLO to be the source of most of Jerusalem's troubles in the occupied territories. As a US State Department official put the matter at the time, "The Israeli government believes it has a Palestinian problem because of the PLO; not that it has a PLO problem because of the Palestinians."⁴³ The conclusion that Begin and Sharon deduced from their analysis was that if Israel could force the PLO to curtail its encouragement of resistance in the West Bank and Gaza, either by weakening the organization or by teaching it that its actions were not cost free, Palestinians in the territories would accommodate themselves to a political future in which the West Bank and Gaza were part of the Jewish state. To Begin and Sharon, suppressing Palestinian nationalism in the West Bank and Gaza and inflicting a military and political defeat on the PLO in Lebanon were thus two interrelated aspects of a single political strategy.

Israeli troops entered Lebanon in force on June 6, 1982. Amid charges and denials about whether PLO fighters in southern Lebanon had been shelling towns in northern Israel, Begin and Sharon had told the cabinet that the purpose of the invasion was to

establish a forty-kilometer security zone north of the Lebanon-Israel border. The IDF swept into southern Lebanon with a huge force of almost eighty thousand men and 1,240 tanks. There was fierce fighting in some areas, with the stiffest resistance to the invasion offered not by the PLO's semiregular units but by the home guard forces of a number of Palestinian refugee camps. The Israelis nonetheless reached their objective in less than forty-eight hours. On June 8, at almost the same time that Begin was repeating to the Knesset that Israel's objectives in Lebanon were limited, Israeli forces reached a line forty kilometers from the country's northern border.

But it turned out that Israel's objectives in Lebanon were not limited, and Israeli forces did not stop upon achieving the invasion's declared objective. Instead, the IDF pushed northward and eastward and encircled Beirut in the west. Sharon had kept the cabinet in the dark about his true intentions, but he now revealed that he had always planned to expand the operation and articulated two broad goals for the mission: the elimination of the PLO as a military and a political threat and the installation of a friendly, unified, and Christian-dominated government in Lebanon.

Beyond calling for the establishment of a new political order in Lebanon, an objective that was not achieved, supporters of the expanded operation argued that crushing the PLO was the key to reaching an accommodation with Palestinians. Israeli spokespersons had long maintained that PLO intransigence was the major obstacle to an expansion of the peace process begun at Camp David. Equally important, the Begin government blamed the PLO for the disturbances in the West Bank and Gaza in spring 1982, alleging that the PLO had directed resistance to the occupation and intimidated Palestinians interested in compromise. Israel's expanded operation in Lebanon was designed to change this. With its fighting forces either captured, killed, or dispersed and with its independent political base destroyed, the organization would no longer be able to carry out operations against the Jewish state. Nor, in the Israeli analysis, would the PLO be able to impose its will on the Palestinian

people and, most critically, on the inhabitants of the occupied territories.

Although some Israelis were persuaded by the government's case for an expansion of the war, others doubted the wisdom of such action; accordingly, a full-fledged political debate was raging in the Jewish state by the latter part of June 1982.⁴⁴ Critics raised two particular concerns: one relating to costs associated with the war and a second to the feasibility of Israel's expanded objectives. With respect to costs, the greatest preoccupation was the steadily growing number of Israeli casualties. With respect to feasibility, Likud's critics repeated what they had been saying for some time: Israel's policies, as much as or even more than PLO rejectionism, were what was producing unrest in the West Bank and Gaza. Without Israeli recognition of Palestinian rights, these critics asserted, resistance in the territories would continue, regardless of the outcome of the fighting in Lebanon. With such recognition, in contrast, many Palestinians would accept the principle of reconciliation with Israel, thereby making the war irrelevant in bringing mainstream Palestinians to the bargaining table.

As the expanded campaign evolved during July and August, Sharon ordered an escalation of the IDF's attacks on PLO positions in Beirut, which culminated with saturation bombing and shelling by the Israeli navy from offshore positions. Israeli firepower was directed not only at buildings used by the PLO in the center of Beirut but at Palestinian refugee camps as well. Casualty figures vary widely, but the number of Palestinians and Lebanese killed or wounded during the entire campaign is in the thousands—more than ten thousand by some estimates—with many more rendered homeless.⁴⁵ With the PLO defeated, Arafat left Lebanon at the end of August, departing by sea along with about eight thousand PLO guerrillas. Another six thousand fighters, including Syrian soldiers as well as members of the Palestine Liberation Army, left by land. The PLO then reestablished its headquarters in Tunis.

A tragic postscript to the Israeli-PLO war in Lebanon was written from September 16 to September 18. During this period, with Israeli knowledge and possibly approval, forces of the Lebanese Christian Phalange Party entered Sabra and Shatila, two large, adjacent Palestinian refugee camps on the outskirts of Beirut, and carried out a massacre of hundreds of civilians, many of them women and children.

An Israeli commission of inquiry established after the massacre, the Kahan Commission, found that Israeli authorities had permitted Phalange forces to enter Sabra and Shatila without giving proper consideration to the danger of a massacre, which, under the circumstances, they “were obligated to foresee as probable.” The commission also saw fit to make recommendations concerning responsibility and punishment, reserving its harshest judgments for Ariel Sharon. It charged the defense minister with “personal responsibility” because he had not ordered “appropriate measures for preventing or reducing the chances of a massacre.” It also called upon Sharon to draw “the appropriate personal conclusions,” meaning that he should resign, and it added that if he refused to do so the prime minister should consider removing him from office.⁴⁶ In the end, Sharon refused to resign, and, as a compromise, Begin relieved him of the defense portfolio but allowed him to remain in the cabinet.

The war in Lebanon was followed by a number of US and Arab diplomatic initiatives. On September 1, 1982, the day that the last PLO guerrillas departed from Beirut, the US president, Ronald Reagan, introduced a peace plan. It placed emphasis on continuing US support for Israel. In addition, however, in what appeared to be an important evolution in US policy, it also spoke of the “legitimate rights of the Palestinians,” specifying that these rights are political in character and acknowledging that the Palestinian problem is “more than a question of refugees.” This was quickly followed by a plan put forward by Arab leaders meeting in Fez, Morocco. Frequently described as the “Fez Plan,” it proposed a “two-state solution” based

on Israeli withdrawal from all Arab territories occupied in 1967 and removal of the Israeli settlements in these territories.

Although they gave rise to extended diplomatic activity, neither the Reagan plan nor the Fez plan produced any lasting agreements or led to any significant changes on the ground in the occupied territories. The Fez plan was nonetheless significant for its embrace of the notion of partition, committing Arab countries to the proposition that both a Jewish state and an Arab state should be established in Palestine. This reflected a continuing evolution and clarification, and also the moderation, of Arab thinking about the basis for an accommodation with Israel.

This evolving acceptance of a two-state solution was also present among Palestinians. While the PLO mainstream had been greatly weakened by the war in Lebanon and, hence, was more vulnerable to interference by Arab governments allied with Palestinian rejectionists, PLO losses in Lebanon dealt an even harsher blow to the rejectionist camp. One Palestinian scholar explained that, prior to the war, rejectionists within the PLO possessed something approaching a veto over PLO decisions, a power incommensurate with their actual size. But the demise of the PLO's independent base in Lebanon destroyed many of the institutional arrangements that had been the power base of radicals and leftists, reducing their ability to impose limits on the policies pursued by Fatah and the PLO mainstream.⁴⁷

The PLO's defeat in Lebanon also enhanced the political weight of the West Bank and Gaza in intra-Palestinian politics. At the grassroots level, Palestinians in the occupied territories became the PLO's most important and politically influential constituency, and this in turn brought greater support for the more moderate ideological orientation that had long been dominant among these Palestinians.

Also on the agenda in the aftermath of the war was the relationship between Israel and Lebanon. Israel attempted to persuade Lebanon to sign a peace treaty, and an accord ending the state of war

between the two countries and committing Israel to withdraw all of its armed forces from the country was signed in May 1983. The accord was stillborn, however. The withdrawal of Israeli troops was conditional upon removal of the Syrian forces in Lebanon, something that was not about to take place. Even more important, the agreement was denounced in Lebanon as the product of Israel's illegal and unjustified invasion and as an unacceptable reward for an aggressor that had brought death and destruction to the country. For this reason, the accord was never submitted to the Lebanese parliament for ratification.

Finally, there was the issue of the Israeli troops that remained in Lebanon after the war. With few gains and high costs, the war, or at least the expanded operation, had become highly unpopular in Israel. Moreover, Israelis continued to be killed and wounded in Lebanon, with losses now the result of attacks by Lebanese, not Palestinians. This led to limited pullbacks in 1982 and 1983 and to a significant redeployment in the summer of 1985. Israel kept forces in southern Lebanon, however, in order to police a narrow security zone immediately north of the Israeli-Lebanese border. Israel also created a local militia, the South Lebanese Army, to assist in this policing function. The situation thus settled into a tense status quo marked by Israel's continuing occupation of a portion of Lebanese territory.

None of this was a basis for celebration in Israel. On the contrary, the country's mood was unhappy and troubled, and this was reflected in the unexpected retirement of Menachem Begin. Late in August 1983, despondent over the country's losses in Lebanon as well as the death of his wife the preceding spring, Begin announced that he would step down as the country's prime minister; he formally submitted his resignation two weeks later. Moreover, he retired from public view as well as public life, remaining in his Jerusalem apartment, refusing all requests for interviews, and playing no part in the affairs of either the nation or the political party he had previously led. He was replaced by Yitzhak Shamir, a Likud stalwart who differed greatly from Begin in style and personality but was no less

committed to the expansion of settlements and the concept of greater Israel.

The Intifada

Diplomatic efforts continued during the mid-1980s but produced no results of consequence. Instead, while the diplomats talked, the situation continued to deteriorate for Palestinians in the territories. Israeli settlement activity in the West Bank and Gaza continued and intensified during these years. The number of Jewish settlers in the occupied territories stood at almost sixty thousand in the fall of 1986, whereas it had been about twenty thousand four years earlier. These figures do not include East Jerusalem. Moreover, numbers tell only part of the story. The government allocated approximately \$300 million for infrastructure projects in support of the settler movement.

Israel also continued its efforts to weaken those Palestinian institutions in the territories that it judged to be sources of opposition and resistance. Palestinian universities were frequently closed, for example, on the grounds that instead of pursuing their education, students were engaging in political activities and organizing opposition to the occupation. Other Israeli actions, which by summer 1985 were routinely described as an “Iron Fist” policy, included deportations, press censorship, and such forms of collective punishment as curfews and the demolition of homes. This was the situation when Israel was led by Labor as well as Likud. The 1984 elections had produced a virtual tie between Likud and Labor, and the two parties then formed a national unity government and agreed that the premiership should rotate between Shimon Peres of Labor and Yitzhak Shamir of Likud. Peres took the first term, and the defense minister at this time was Yitzhak Rabin of Labor; but although Peres, Rabin, and their party advocated territorial compromise and the exchange of land for peace, there was no appreciable change in Israel’s actions in the occupied territories.

Finally, growing tension in the West Bank and Gaza resulted not only from the actions of the Israeli government but also from confrontations between an increasingly frustrated and angry

Palestinian population and an increasingly emboldened and aggressive Jewish settler movement. In the spring of 1987, for example, there was a spiral of violence that began when a petrol bomb thrown at an Israeli vehicle in the West Bank town of Qalqilya resulted in the death of a Jewish woman. Settlers took revenge by carrying out a rampage through the town, breaking windows and uprooting trees in what the May 23, 1987, *Jerusalem Post* described as a “vigilante orgy.” In the weeks that followed, there were additional raids by Jewish settlers and numerous clashes between stone-throwing Palestinian youths and Israeli soldiers. By mid-1987, these confrontations had become so common that they almost ceased to be newsworthy.

All of this produced a steadily deteriorating and increasingly hopeless situation from the viewpoint of the 1.5 or 1.6 million Palestinians residing in the West Bank and Gaza. A careful Palestinian American scholar who visited the territories at this time offered the following description:

Gaza resembles a pressure-cooker ready to explode. In this “forgotten corner of Palestine,” one witnesses overcrowding, poverty, hatred, violence, oppression, poor sanitation, anger, frustration, drugs and crime. The Palestinian population is daily becoming more resentful and rebellious. The military occupation responds by becoming more insecure and oppressive.⁴⁸

The situation in the West Bank was only slightly less grim, with Israeli as well as Palestinian analysts reporting that the tension had become palpable. As expressed in October 1987 by a correspondent for the *Jerusalem Post*, “You can feel the tension. . . . Fear, suspicion and growing hatred have replaced any hope of dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians.”⁴⁹

Under pressure and in the absence of any prospect that diplomatic efforts by either the PLO, Egypt, Jordan, the United States, or Israeli

advocates of territorial compromise would bring an end to the occupation of their homeland, Palestinians were searching in 1987 for ways to change the political momentum and resist Israeli expansion. And then in December 1987, spontaneous and widespread protest demonstrations erupted throughout the territories. The spark that ignited the disturbances was an accident at the Israeli military checkpoint at the north end of the Gaza Strip. An IDF tank transport vehicle crashed into a line of cars and vans filled with men from Gaza who were returning home after a day of work in Israel, killing four and seriously injuring seven others. The funerals that night for three of the deceased quickly turned into a massive demonstration.

In the days and weeks that followed, there were protests and civil disobedience on a scale that exceeded anything seen in the territories since the beginning of the occupation in 1967. Moreover, spontaneous outbursts of anger and efforts at resistance rapidly coalesced into a coordinated uprising embracing virtually all sectors of Palestinian society, a rebellion that some compared to the revolt of 1936 to 1939 and that soon became known as the *intifada*, literally translated as the “shaking off.”

Map 2.5 Israeli Settlements in the West Bank, 1982



The intifada was marked by a new determination among Palestinians and by daring action on the part of youthful protesters taking to the streets in the West Bank and Gaza. According to one report based on two visits to Israel and the occupied territories during the first half of 1988,

Even Israelis with little sympathy for the Palestinian cause sometimes say they have a new respect for their

enemy . . . and one occasionally hears comments [from Israelis] to the effect that these are not the craven and cowardly Arabs described in our propaganda but young men with the courage of their convictions, willing to stand before our soldiers and risk their lives in order to give voice to their demands.⁵⁰

This new assertiveness was repeatedly displayed as protest activities expanded in both scope and intensity during the months that followed. Demonstrations began in the refugee camps but soon spread to major towns and thereafter to the roughly five hundred villages of the West Bank. Demonstrators chanted slogans, raised Palestinian flags, and threw stones at Israeli soldiers who sought to disperse them. Young Palestinians also frequently threw stones at Israeli vehicles, including those of Israeli civilians traveling in the occupied territories. Makeshift roadblocks were erected in a further attempt to disrupt normal circulation, especially at the entrances to villages or in urban neighborhoods that the Palestinians sought to prevent Israelis from entering. These roadblocks were constructed of rocks or, occasionally, of burning tires; and although they sometimes inconvenienced local inhabitants as much as Israelis, they represented an effort to wrest control of the streets from occupation authorities and were accordingly left in place.

Emerging patterns of organization and leadership constituted a particularly important feature of the intifada, and one that also helped to set the uprising apart from prior Palestinian efforts to arrest Israel's drive into the West Bank and Gaza. The political institutions that crystallized to give direction to the intifada and to deal with the problems and opportunities it created included both popular neighborhood committees and a unified national leadership structure. Furthermore, at both the local level and beyond, the new institutions were to a large extent led by the members of a new political generation.

As soon as they recognized the coordinated and sustained character of the Palestinian uprising, Israeli leaders declared their intention to suppress the intifada. Primary responsibility for achieving this objective fell to Yitzhak Rabin, the minister of defense in the national unity government that had been established after the parliamentary elections of 1984. In addition to detaining and deporting suspected activists, Israel undertook to suppress Palestinian protest demonstrations, and when necessary, it dispersed demonstrators by firing live ammunition. Rabin and most other Israeli leaders justified these actions by saying that the Palestinians had left them no alternative. Yet the intifada continued and, if anything, grew more intense, even as the number of Palestinian demonstrators shot by Israeli soldiers increased.

All of this violence was in addition to the severe administrative measures that Israel employed in its effort to contain the intifada. Universities were closed by Israeli authorities until further notice, for example, although several institutions managed to hold some classes in secret. Many primary and secondary schools were also shut for prolonged periods. Dozens of homes were blown up by Israeli troops, usually because it was believed that someone who lived there had thrown stones at Israeli soldiers. In addition, entire communities were placed under curfew, sometimes for a week or more, preventing people from leaving their homes at any time, even to obtain food. As with school closings and the demolition of homes, curfews are a form of collective punishment that falls heavily not only on protesters but also on men and women who have not taken part in protest-related activities. The fifty-five thousand residents of Jabaliya refugee camp in Gaza, for example, spent about two hundred days under curfew between the beginning of the intifada and June 1989. The continuing deportation of suspected activists was another administrative measure designed to suppress the uprising. Finally, thousands of Palestinians were arrested and detained, some for prolonged periods and the overwhelming majority without trial. In February 1989, Rabin announced that 22,000 Palestinians had been detained since the beginning of the intifada

and that 6,200 were being held in administrative detention at that time. Palestinian and some US sources put the figures even higher.

These measures were not uniformly applauded in Israel. Many Israelis, including some in the military, were disturbed by the tactics being employed to suppress the uprising. In one denunciation that received wide public attention, the prime minister was told by troops in January 1988 that they were very disturbed by the IDF's behavior. Shamir was inspecting IDF operations in the northern West Bank city of Nablus and stopped to talk to a group of soldiers who, to his consternation, told him in extremely strong terms that young Israelis were not raised on universal values and respect for human rights only to be sent to the occupied territories to commit violence unrestrained by the rule of law. The political and military establishments "have no idea what really goes on in the territories," one soldier told him, while another stated, with reporters present, that he had to "beat innocent people" every day.⁵¹

The Israeli government nonetheless remained determined to crush the uprising, and this determination did not diminish as the intifada entered its second and then its third year. "The nation can bear the burden no matter how long the revolt goes on," Rabin declared in December 1989. Furthermore, he specified that "we will continue with all the measures that we used for the first years, including the confrontations, the hitting, the arresting, the introduction of the plastic bullet, the rubber bullet and the curfews on a large scale."⁵²

Palestinians under occupation were seeking by the rebellion that began in December 1987 to send a message to Israel and the world. The content of this message, made explicit in the conversations between Palestinian intellectuals and the large number of foreign journalists who flocked to the region to report on the spreading disturbances, can be summed up simply: We exist and have political rights, and there will be no peace until these rights are recognized.

The Israeli public was the most important audience to which the Palestinians' message was addressed. In the debates and

discussions inside Israel, Prime Minister Shamir and others on the political right had frequently argued that most Palestinians in the occupied territories were actually content to live under Israeli rule. Asserting that the material conditions of most inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza had improved significantly since 1967, Likud leaders told the Israeli public that only a few radicals affiliated with the PLO called for Israeli withdrawal. The vast majority of the Palestinian population, by contrast, was said to recognize and appreciate the improvement in their standard of living that had accompanied occupation and accordingly, for the future, to seek no more than local or regional autonomy under continuing Israeli rule.

A related Likud claim was that continuing occupation of the West Bank and Gaza was without significant costs from the Israeli point of view. Shamir and like-minded Israelis insisted that the Palestinian inhabitants of these territories did not constitute a serious obstacle to developing these areas in accordance with the design of Israelis committed to territorial maximalism. Palestinian acquiescence, they asserted, meant there would be few burdens associated with the maintenance of order and little to prevent ordinary Israeli citizens from conducting themselves in the West Bank and Gaza as if they were in their own country.

The intifada was intended to show these assertions to be myths in a way that could not be explained away by apologists for the occupation. In other words, the Palestinian uprising sought to send the Israeli public a message to the effect that the parties of the political Right were either ignorant about the situation in the West Bank and Gaza or, more probable, deliberately seeking to mislead the people of Israel. Palestinians sought to leave no room for doubt about their implacable opposition to occupation and also to foster in Israel a recognition that the course charted by the country's leaders was a costly one, which was not in the interest of the Jewish state. This message was particularly important in view of the deep political divisions that existed within Israel, with the public bombarded by conflicting claims from Labor and Likud and with many ordinary

Israelis trying to determine which party's vision of the country's future was the wisest and most realistic.

Evidence that the Palestinians' message was having an impact in Israel was offered by a significant change in the way that most Israelis looked at the West Bank and Gaza after December 1987, a change often described as the resurrection of the "Green Line" in Israeli political consciousness. The Green Line refers to the pre-1967 border separating Israel from its Arab neighbors, and during the twenty years between the June 1967 War and the outbreak of the intifada, those parts of the Green Line running between the West Bank and Gaza on one side and Israel on the other had become nearly invisible to many Israelis. Israelis frequently traveled through the West Bank to get from one part of Israel to another or took their cars to garages in Gaza or drove to Jericho for a casual meal in one of the city's oasis restaurants. This gave many and perhaps most Israelis the sense of a natural connection between their country and these areas. Indeed, by the end of 1987 a majority of Israel's population was too young even to remember a time when the West Bank and Gaza were not under their country's control. As a result, while the West Bank and Gaza were not quite seen as Israel itself, neither did they appear to many Israelis to be part of another, foreign country.

The intifada transformed these perceptions, leading most Israelis to regard the West Bank and Gaza as zones of insecurity that should be avoided as much as possible. As Yitzhak Rabin himself explained in September 1988 when he was asked to comment on the fact that the number of Israelis killed in the territories had actually declined since the beginning of the uprising, "Jews simply don't visit the territories as they used to. No one's wandering around the garages of Gaza any more these days."⁵³ The resurrection of the Green Line was similarly evident in the effective "redivision" of Jerusalem. In the words of an authority on walking tours in the city, "Before the intifada, all the routes of the hikes I wrote about were over the Green Line. . . . [But] today the Green Line is my map of fear."⁵⁴ Thus in the judgment of yet another Israeli analyst, writing in December 1989,

Perhaps the most conspicuous result of the intifada has been the restoration of Israel's pre-1967 border, the famous Green Line, which disappeared from Israeli maps and consciousness as early as 1968. . . . [Today] the West Bank and Gaza are seen as foreign territories inhabited by a hostile population, whose stone-throwing youngsters are ready to die—and do—in their quest for freedom.⁵⁵

The intifada had an equally significant impact on political discourse in Israel. On the political right, some began to think about removal of the Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza, which was a disturbing but nonetheless logical response to the Palestinian uprising from the perspective of those committed to territorial maximalism. If Israel were indeed to retain the territories, and if it were the case, as the intifada itself proclaimed, that the Palestinians would never submit to Israeli rule, then it was not a very big logical leap to arrive at the view that the Palestinians should be pressured, or if necessary forced, to leave the occupied areas for a neighboring Arab country.

Of much greater consequence, however, was the degree to which the intifada strengthened the arguments of Israeli supporters of territorial compromise. With many Israelis reexamining commonly held assumptions about the costs and benefits of retaining the territories, the arguments of those who had long insisted that retention of the territories was not in Israel's interest were increasingly finding a receptive audience in the Jewish state. The new realism in debates about the West Bank and Gaza also led a growing number of Israelis to call for talks with the PLO, which was illegal at the time.

Moreover, in addition to the traditional arguments of the Center and the Left—that refusal to withdraw from the occupied territories removed what possibility might exist for peace with the Arabs, as well as the “demographic issue,” which pointed out that extending Israeli sovereignty to territories inhabited by 1.5 million Palestinians

would threaten either the country's Jewish character or its democratic character—doubts were now being raised, in military as well as civilian circles, about the strategic value of the West Bank and Gaza. Indeed, many suggested that the territories might be a security liability rather than a security asset. A May 1989 poll by the newspaper *Yediot Ahronot*, for example, reported that 75 percent to 80 percent of the IDF's reserve officers believed that withdrawing from the West Bank and Gaza involved fewer security risks than remaining in these territories.

The message that Palestinians sought to send by means of the intifada was addressed to a variety of audiences; in addition to Israel, these included US policymakers and the US public. Palestinians were disturbed by Washington's apparent indifference to the deteriorating situation in the occupied territories and hoped the uprising would force Americans to look at the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a new light. And with Americans seeing violent Israeli-Palestinian confrontations on their television sets virtually every evening, the intifada did appear to be having an impact on US public opinion. In January 1989, a *New York Times*-CBS poll found that 64 percent of the Americans surveyed favored contacts with the PLO, in contrast with 23 percent who were opposed. The same poll found that only 28 percent judged Israel to be willing to make "real concessions" for peace, whereas 52 percent did not think that Israel was genuinely interested in compromise.

The intifada also had something to say to the rulers of Arab states. By seizing the initiative and launching their own attempt to shake off the occupation, Palestinians were in effect declaring that the lethargy and self-absorption of Arab leaders left ordinary men and women with no choice but to take matters into their own hands. This message also reminded Arab leaders that Palestinians were not the only Arabs unhappy with the status quo. With many Arab countries ruled by inefficient, corrupt, or authoritarian regimes, and with many Arab leaders and elites largely preoccupied with their own power and privilege, or at least widely perceived to be thus preoccupied, the intifada demonstrated that there were limits to the patience and

passivity of the Arab rank and file and that it was not inconceivable that popular rebellions would break out elsewhere.

Among individual Arab states, Jordan was the most sensitive to developments in the occupied territories, and it was King Hussein who took the most dramatic action in response to the intifada. On July 31, 1988, the king made a televised address in which he officially relinquished his country's claims to the West Bank, declaring that "the independent Palestinian state will be established on the occupied Palestinian land, after it is liberated, God willing."

Beyond seeking to make the occupied territories difficult to govern and showing that Palestinians, not Israelis, controlled events on the ground, Palestinians sought to send a second message to the Israeli public, again going over the heads of the government, as it were. To show that territorial compromise not only was in Israel's interest but was in fact a viable option, the Palestine National Assembly, meeting in Algiers in November 1988, explicitly endorsed UN resolutions 181 and 242 and declared its willingness to resolve the conflict on the basis of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza living alongside Israel in its pre-1967 borders.

This declaration was aimed in particular at Israelis who might favor territorial compromise in principle but who doubted that this would in fact bring peace. And the message appeared to be having an impact. While Israeli government spokespersons insisted that the Palestinian organization was sincere neither about renouncing terrorism nor about recognizing Israel, support for a dialogue with the PLO continued to grow in the Jewish state. A March 1989 poll found that 58 percent of those surveyed disagreed with the proposition that Palestinians want a "Palestinian state plus all of Israel in the long run," meaning that much of the Israeli public believed there to be a basis for negotiating with the PLO; and, accordingly, 62 percent said they expected Israeli-PLO talks within five years.⁵⁶

The intifada continued with varying but essentially sustained intensity for the next two years, or even longer by some assessments. Toward

the end of this period, the uprising became less organized and lost much of its initial direction and discipline. There was even Palestinian-against-Palestinian violence in the final stages, with charges of collaborating with Israeli security forces sometimes used as a pretext for attacks that were in reality motivated by personal grievances and rivalries. Nevertheless, the intifada was a watershed event. On the one hand, it galvanized Palestinians, helped to foster a significant evolution of the PLO's official position, and consolidated a shift in the center of attention from Palestinian leaders in exile to on-the-ground Palestinians who had stood up to the Israelis and carried the uprising forward. On the other, it shifted the political center of gravity in Israel, not removing the country's sharp ideological divisions but strengthening advocates of territorial compromise and helping to lay a foundation for the peace process that would soon take shape. As explained in mid-1989 by Ze'ev Schiff, one of Israel's most highly regarded analysts of military and security affairs, the intifada "has shattered a static situation that Israel has consistently sought to preserve. . . . It has led to the unavoidable conclusion that there can be no end to the Arab-Israeli conflict without a resolution of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians."⁵⁷

The Oslo Peace Process

A number of diplomatic initiatives in 1989 and 1990 sought to capitalize on the momentum generated by the intifada and the PLO's endorsement of a two-state solution. These included a substantive dialogue between the PLO and the United States, which previously had refused to recognize or talk to the Palestinian organization, as well as peace plans presented by Egypt, the United States, and the Israeli government. None produced tangible results, however; and then in summer 1990, world attention abruptly shifted from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to a new crisis in the Persian Gulf. On August 2, 1990, Iraq under Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, and early in 1991, the United States led a massive and successful military campaign to oust Iraqi forces and restore the Kuwaiti monarchy. Many Palestinians supported Saddam Hussein in the war, in part because he represented an alternative to the political status quo in the region and in part because he championed the Palestinian cause and even fired missiles at Israel.

The Gulf War had an impact on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in at least two important ways. First, because most Palestinians had supported Iraq, Kuwait as well as Saudi Arabia and several other Arab states suspended the important financial and political support they had been providing to the PLO. This significantly weakened the Palestinian organization, which had been heavily dependent on the Gulf for its budget. Second, in part to show that its intervention on behalf of oil-rich Kuwait had not been motivated solely by petroleum interests, the United States launched a diplomatic initiative that moved the Palestine question back to center stage on the region's political agenda. In a speech before a joint session of Congress in March 1991, President George H. W. Bush coupled his declaration of an end to hostilities against Iraq with the announcement of a new US effort to achieve Arab-Israeli peace on the basis of UNSCR 242 and an exchange of land for peace.

The Bush administration quickly followed up, with Secretary of State James Baker making frequent trips to the Middle East in the spring and summer of 1991. Signaling a change in the pro-Israel policies of the Reagan years, Baker called on Israel to end the expansion of Jewish settlements in the occupied territories. Famously, he told the Shamir government that the administration would not support providing Israel with \$10 billion in loan guarantees for the absorption of immigrants from the former Soviet Union if the building of settlements continued.

The culmination of the US diplomatic initiative was the 1991 Middle East Peace Conference in Madrid, convened in late October with cosponsorship by the Soviet Union and usually known simply as the Madrid Peace Conference. The meeting was attended by Israeli, Egyptian, Syrian, and Lebanese delegations, as well as a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation in which the Palestinian team was essentially independent. Also present were the Saudi Arabian ambassador to the United States and the secretary-general of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The talks, begun at Madrid, continued in Washington and elsewhere throughout 1992 and the first half of 1993. Although no important agreements were reached, the fact that Israeli and Arab representatives were meeting and discussing substantive issues was itself a significant development. Particularly encouraging was the spectacle of Israeli officials negotiating with Palestinians from the occupied territories who were in direct contact with PLO leaders in Tunis.

Another important development that further changed the political landscape during this period was the Labor Party's victory in the Israeli parliamentary election of June 1992. Although narrow, reflecting the continuing political divisions within the Jewish state, Labor's victory was widely interpreted as giving Yitzhak Rabin, the new prime minister, a mandate to seek an accord with the Palestinians. Indeed, the June 1992 balloting is sometimes described as Israel's "intifada election," meaning that it was shaped in substantial measure by the messages directed at the Israeli public by the Palestinian uprising and the PLO peace initiative. Labor's

principal coalition partner in the government that now came to power was the peace-oriented Meretz bloc, with the relatively dovish Shas Party supplying the remaining votes necessary for a parliamentary majority.

This was the situation in August 1993 when the world learned that secret negotiations between officials of the Israeli government and the PLO had been taking place in Norway for several months. Even more dramatic was the news that the two sides had reached agreement on a Declaration of Principles, often called the “Oslo Accords,” that held out the possibility of a revolutionary breakthrough in the long-standing conflict. The declaration’s preamble recorded the parties’ hope for the future; it stated that it was time for Israelis and Palestinians to end “decades of confrontation and conflict, recognize their mutual legitimate and political rights, and strive to live in peaceful coexistence and mutual dignity and security to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace settlement and historic reconciliation.” The declaration was signed on September 13, 1993, at a ceremony at the White House in Washington. Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO chairman Yasir Arafat both spoke movingly, and Rabin then accepted the hand extended to him by Arafat.

Although important obstacles remained on the road to peace, the Declaration of Principles generated hope throughout the Middle East and beyond and introduced significant changes into the dynamic of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In line with agreed-upon interim arrangements, Israeli forces withdrew from Gaza and the Jericho area in May 1994, and Palestinians assumed administrative responsibility for the two territories. An Egyptian helicopter then flew Arafat from Cairo to Gaza, where he had decided to establish his permanent residence. Before departing, the Palestinian leader declared, “Now I am returning to the first free Palestinian lands.” After Arafat arrived in Gaza, while right-wing Israelis protested in Jerusalem, he delivered to a waiting crowd of two hundred thousand Palestinians a triumphant address from the balcony of the former headquarters of the Israeli military governor.

In addition to this “Gaza and Jericho First” plan, the interim accords outlined provisions for Palestinian self-rule in other parts of the West Bank. Specifically, it called for the establishment of a Palestinian Interim Self-Government Authority, which would take the form of an elected council and would govern during a transition period not to exceed five years. This council was to be elected no later than July 13, 1994, by which time the modalities of the balloting were to have been negotiated, as were structure, size, and powers of the council and the transfer of responsibilities from the Israeli military government and its civil administration.

Finally, the Israeli-PLO accords specified that negotiations to resolve final status issues should commence no later than two years after the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and Jericho, at which time the transition period would begin. These negotiations were to cover all outstanding issues, including Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, security, borders, and relations with other neighbors. The transitional period, which was not to exceed five years, would end with the conclusion of a “permanent settlement based on Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.” UNSCR 338, adopted during the war of October 1973, called on the parties to terminate all military activity and implement UNSCR 242 immediately after the ceasefire.

Many Israelis and Palestinians doubted the sincerity of the other side’s commitments. Many Palestinians also complained that the Declaration of Principles did not require a halt to Israeli settlement activity in the West Bank and Gaza. Nor did it explicitly promise that negotiations would lead to the creation of a Palestinian state. As expressed by one Palestinian leader from Gaza, who favored compromise but viewed the accords as one-sided and flawed, the agreement “is phrased in terms of generalities that leave room for wide interpretations. . . . It seems to me that we are trying to read into it what is not there.”⁵⁸

Despite this kind of skepticism, as well as the determined opposition of some Israelis and some Palestinians, there was unprecedented movement in the direction of peace during 1994 and 1995. Israeli-

Palestinian negotiations during this period culminated in Washington on September 28, 1995, with Arafat and Rabin signing the “Oslo Interim Agreement,” often described as “Oslo II.” Provisions of the agreement dealt in detail with the redeployment of Israeli military forces and the transfer of power and responsibility to the Palestinian Authority (PA) and subsequently to an elected Palestinian Council. With respect to deployment, the agreement delineated three categories of territory. In Area A, which included the major cities of the West Bank as well as Jericho and Gaza, Palestinians were to have both civilian and security control. In Area B, which included most smaller towns, villages, refugee camps, and hamlets, Palestinians were to exercise administrative authority, with Israel retaining overall security responsibility. In Area C, which included Israeli settlements, military bases, and state lands, Israel retained sole control over both civilian and military affairs. Areas A and B together constituted about 27 percent of the West Bank, exclusive of East Jerusalem, and gave the PA responsibility for about 97 percent of the Palestinian population of Gaza and the West Bank, again exclusive of East Jerusalem (see [Chapter 20](#), [Map 20.1](#)).

Oslo II also dealt with the institutions that would govern the areas over which Palestinians exercised authority. These included a Palestinian Council and an Executive Authority, with the council and the chairman of the Executive Authority, or president, constituting the Palestinian Interim Self-Government Authority. Both the council and the president were to be elected directly and simultaneously by the Palestinian people of the West Bank, Jerusalem, and Gaza Strip, and these elections took place on January 20, 1996. With turnout heavy and monitors pronouncing the balloting to be generally free and fair, the results were a decisive victory for Arafat and Fatah. The Palestinian leader received 88 percent of the vote for the post of chairman of the Executive Authority. Fatah, for its part, won 68 of the council’s 88 seats, 21 of these going to candidates who supported the faction but had run as independents.

The Israeli redeployment and the establishment of a Palestinian Interim Self-Government Authority were not the only important

accomplishments during the hopeful years of 1994 and 1995. There was also a significant change in Israel's relations with the broader Arab world. With Israel recognized by the PLO, a number of Arab countries were now willing to deal with the Jewish state, and new contacts were established almost immediately after the Declaration of Principles was signed. In October 1994, Israel and Jordan signed a peace treaty, making Jordan the second Arab country after Egypt to formally declare itself at peace with the Jewish state. Israel also established important cooperative relations or joint projects with Morocco, Tunisia, Qatar, and Oman at this time. In addition, Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries ended their boycott of Israel; more generally, the Arab states ended their practice of challenging Israeli credentials at the United Nations. Israel, for its part, supported Oman's bid for a seat on the UN Security Council, this being the first time Israel had supported an Arab country seeking membership on the council.

Nor was cooperation limited to state-to-state relations. In Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, in Arab capitals, and in Europe, Arab and Israeli businesspeople and others met to discuss a wide range of joint ventures and collaborations. A sense of the momentum that had been generated is conveyed in the following excerpt from a May 1994 *International Herald Tribune* article, titled "When Former Enemies Turn Business Partners":

Israel's transition from pariah to potential partner is most evident in the overtures to Israel by Arab governments and businessmen seeking potentially lucrative deals. Since September, Israeli officials have received VIP treatment in Qatar, Oman, Tunisia and Morocco. Qatar is studying how to supply Israel with natural gas. Egypt has launched discussions on a joint oil refinery, and officials talk of eventually linking Arab and Israeli electricity grids. . . . Millionaire businessmen from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain [are] jetting off to London, Paris, and Cairo to

meet Israelis, while Jordanians, Egyptians and Lebanese are rushing to Jerusalem for similar contacts.⁵⁹

While business and commerce were at the heart of most of these contacts, it was understood, especially in Israel, that the noneconomic benefits of business deals, joint ventures, and development projects were no less important. Of equal or perhaps even greater value was their contribution to the normalization of Arab-Israeli relations. Economic linkages and cooperative ventures would give each side proof of the other's good intentions, thereby contributing to the psychology of peace and accelerating its momentum. They would also establish a network of shared interests, thus discouraging any resumption of hostilities and interlocking the new economic and security regimes that appeared to be sprouting in the region.

This was not the whole story of this period, however. Against the hope and optimism generated by what became known as the Oslo peace process stood the continuation of Israel's settlement drive and a cycle of violence that usually began with attacks on Israeli civilians by Palestinian extremists opposed to an accommodation with the Jewish state, followed by harsh and sometimes excessive reprisals by Israel. With respect to settlements, while the number of Israelis living in the occupied territories (exclusive of East Jerusalem) had already grown to 105,000 by the beginning of 1993, settlement activity did not slow; if anything, it accelerated after the signing of the Oslo Accords. By spring 1996, there were 145,000 Israelis living in these territories. With respect to violence, Israelis were particularly disturbed by the growing number of suicide bomb attacks against civilian targets in Israel, for the most part carried out by Hamas (*H·arakat al-Muqāwamah al-'Islāmiyyah*), an Islamist political movement that had grown up in recent years. In 1994 and 1995, these and other attacks, including those directed at civilian and military targets in the West Bank and Gaza, killed 120 Israelis. Also contributing to the violence were attacks on Palestinians by Israeli settlers.

These trends reinforced the fear of each side that the other side was not serious. For Palestinians, the Israeli government appeared to lack the ability and perhaps even the will and desire to confront the settlers and, as had been expected, to limit settlement expansion and preserve the status quo in the West Bank and Gaza until final status negotiations. For Israelis, the PA appeared to lack the ability and perhaps even the will and desire to put an end to the violence that was claiming Israeli lives. There were thus competing trends in late 1995: one extremely hopeful but another that raised fears that the Oslo process might unravel.

The tragic assassination of Yitzhak Rabin on November 4, 1995, marked the beginning of a new phase of the Oslo process. Rabin was shot by Yigal Amir, a young religious Jew and former yeshiva student, following a rally in Tel Aviv in support of the Oslo Accords. Amir had made plans to assassinate Rabin on two previous occasions, although these were never implemented, and he expressed satisfaction upon hearing that his attack had killed the prime minister. In his view, Rabin deserved to die for his willingness to withdraw from parts of the Land of Israel, which he considered a betrayal of the Jewish people.

Shimon Peres, a veteran Labor Party politician who at the time was foreign minister, assumed the premiership upon Rabin's death, and in February, he called for new elections, which were held in May. The election, which was marked by an especially bitter campaign, pitted Peres against Benjamin Netanyahu, the leader of Likud. By a slender margin, 50.5 percent to 49.5 percent, Netanyahu emerged the victor and became prime minister. The coalition government formed by Netanyahu included Knesset members from Likud and religious and other parties from the Center and the Right.

Although he had opposed the Oslo Accords, Netanyahu stated that his government would respect agreements made by the previous government. At the same time, he insisted that he would do only what was clearly required, embracing the letter but not the spirit of the interim agreement, and that he would demand strict Palestinian

compliance with all relevant provisions. Netanyahu also had little interest in halting or even slowing the expansion of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza. His government restored the financial incentives offered to settlers that had been canceled by Labor and authorized settlement expansion in the central part of the West Bank, which had been opposed by Labor. More than four thousand new housing units were built during his time as prime minister.

All of this reinforced Palestinian doubts about the peace process, but Israeli actions were not the only Palestinian complaints. Many Palestinians were also disappointed at the autocratic way in which Arafat and the PA governed the areas over which they had authority. As described by a prominent Palestinian analyst, Arafat “was egocentric, reveled in attention, and was jealous of rivals. He worked tirelessly to keep all the strings controlling Palestinian politics, particularly the financial ones, in his hands alone.”⁶⁰ There were also growing complaints about corruption within the Palestinian leadership and administration. According to opinion polls, the proportion of Palestinians concerned about corruption was 49 percent in September 1996, 61 percent in March 1998, and 71 percent in June 1999.

The failure of the peace process to halt or even slow Israel’s settlement drive, as well as mounting dissatisfaction with Arafat’s leadership, contributed to the growing popularity of Hamas, and to a lesser extent Islamic Jihad, another political faction operating under the banner of Islam. Although these were still minority movements, a growing number of Palestinians were receptive to their message that peace with Israel was neither possible nor desirable and that “armed struggle” was the only way to secure Palestinian rights. By late 1998, approximately 20 percent of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza were telling pollsters that Hamas and Islamic Jihad were their preferred political factions.⁶¹ The Islamist movement was also building a grassroots organization, laying the foundation for a more serious challenge in the future, especially if Arafat was unable to

obtain meaningful concessions from Israel and unwilling to deliver honest and effective government.

In January 1999, amid mounting political discontent in Israel, not only among those dissatisfied with the meager accomplishments of the peace process but also among those to the right of Netanyahu, the Knesset voted to dissolve itself and hold new elections. The Labor Party was led at this time by Ehud Barak, one of the most decorated soldiers in the history of Israel, and Barak's election campaign emphasized the need for a breakthrough in the peace process and also the withdrawal of the Israeli troops remaining in southern Lebanon. The election was held in May, and the result was a decisive victory for Barak and Labor over Netanyahu and Likud.

Upon becoming Israel's tenth prime minister, Barak moved quickly on his agenda, displaying the straightforward and goal-oriented style of a military officer. There was a flurry of diplomatic activity during the remainder of 1999 and the first half of 2000. This period saw the first Israeli-Palestinian talks addressed to final status issues, as well as a short-lived effort by Israel and Syria to reach a peace agreement and, as Barak had promised, the withdrawal of Israeli forces from southern Lebanon. Barak's election also brought increased US involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In July 1999, for example, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright coordinated a meeting between Arafat and Barak at the Egyptian resort of Sharm al-Shaykh, where the Israeli and Palestinian leaders signed a document devoted to the implementation of outstanding commitments and agreements. Also notable at this time was President Bill Clinton's strong personal interest and involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

Despite the flurry of diplomatic activity, progress on the ground was limited, and by 2000, both Barak and Clinton had concluded that a summit meeting offered the only possibility for a breakthrough. Clinton was in the last months of his presidency, and having already invested heavily in the Middle East peace process, he hoped that his legacy would include an Israeli-Palestinian accord. Barak believed

that only at a summit devoted to final status issues could the two sides make concessions that were not only difficult and painful but also potentially explosive at home. The Palestinians did not share the US and Israeli eagerness for a summit; in fact, they strongly opposed the idea, insisting that they would not have time to prepare adequately and that continued negotiations were required if the summit, when held, were to have any chance of success. Pressed by the United States, however, and with Clinton assuring Arafat that the Palestinians would not be blamed if the summit ended in failure, the Palestinian leader was unable to refuse the Americans, and the summit opened at Camp David on July 11, 2000.

The overriding final status issues facing the Israelis and Palestinians at Camp David were borders and settlements (which were interrelated), Jerusalem, refugees, and security. Each of these issues would have to be satisfactorily resolved if there were to be a two-state solution that brought the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to an end. With respect to borders, the question was the extent to which Israel would withdraw from the West Bank and Gaza, allowing all or at least most of this territory to be the basis for a Palestinian state, and to what extent Israel would dismantle Jewish settlements in order to make this possible. Palestinians claimed that by recognizing Israel in its pre-1967 borders they had already agreed that the Jewish state would occupy 78 percent of historic Palestine, and they thus insisted that they could not accept less than the remaining 22 percent for their own state. Indeed, they claimed that a territorial compromise on the basis of the pre-1967 borders was implicit in the Oslo Accords. For its part, Israel sought to retain at least some of the West Bank and to reach agreement on a border that would allow the largest-possible number of settlements to be annexed to the Jewish state and the smallest-possible number of settlements to be dismantled because they would otherwise be in the territory of the Palestinian state.

With respect to Jerusalem, the question was the extent to which the city would be redivided on the basis of the pre-1967 borders so that the Palestinians would have all of East Jerusalem as their capital, or

whether the borders would be redrawn to reflect the fact that Israel had unified the city after 1967 and since that time had built new neighborhoods and municipal institutions that virtually erased the old boundaries. Furthermore, apart from the question of how to distribute Israeli and Palestinian sovereignty across the various and intertwined Jewish and Arab neighborhoods in the eastern part of the city, there would also have to be agreement about the exercise of sovereignty over places having religious significance for both Jews and Muslims. Of particular importance in this connection was the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif, which neither side was prepared to see fall under the sovereign control of the other.

The refugee question concerned the rights and future of Palestinians who had left or been driven from their homes during the 1947 to 1948 war, many of whom, with their offspring, had lived in neighboring countries, frequently in refugee camps, since that time. The Palestinians insisted that Israel recognize the refugees' "right of return"—their right to return to the communities, now in Israel, they had left in 1947 and 1948. They also called for reparations, to include compensation not only for individuals but also for the property abandoned by the refugees, and they argued that claims for these reparations should be addressed solely to Israel. The refugee question was thus a *political* issue for the Palestinians, and they insisted that Israel's recognition of its responsibility for creating the refugee problem would be a historic gesture—one that was necessary for Israeli-Palestinian peace.

The Israelis, by contrast, insisted on addressing the issue as a *humanitarian* concern. They were unwilling to recognize the Palestinians' right of return, arguing that Israel's Jewish character would be compromised should a significant number of non-Jews be added to the country's population. Already Muslim and Christian Arabs constituted about 20 percent of Israel's citizens. From the Israeli perspective, the solution to the refugee issue thus lay in compensation and resettlement. No more than a small number of refugees would be permitted to return to Israel, and this would be within the framework of family reunification. The rest would be able

either to move to the Palestinian state or, should they prefer, to receive assistance in relocating elsewhere.

After two weeks of complicated, difficult, and ultimately unsuccessful negotiations, the Camp David summit ended on July 25, 2000, with no agreement on any of the key issues. Nor was there agreement after the summit about exactly what had been offered by each side and, in particular, about who was responsible for the failure to reach agreement on any of the final status issues (see [Box 2.1](#)).

With distrust already heightened by the failure of the Camp David summit, the situation in the West Bank and Gaza deteriorated quickly, and an escalating cycle of violence, often called the “al-Aqsa intifada,” took shape in the fall of 2000. Helping to ignite the violence in late September was a provocative and controversial visit to the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif by Ariel Sharon, who had assumed the leadership of Likud following Netanyahu’s electoral defeat in 1999. There is dispute about Sharon’s motives for this visit. Sharon himself declared that his purpose was to examine archaeological sites following work by Muslim authorities in an area of historic importance to Jews. Others suggested that his objectives were more political, both to shore up support within Likud against a possible challenge from Netanyahu and to pressure Barak and reduce any chance of a compromise with the Palestinians on control of the holy sites.

Whatever his motivation, or combination of motivations, the visit helped to touch off a cycle of violence that continued throughout the fall and then through 2001, 2002, and beyond. Although the visit itself was completed without incident, clashes soon followed as young Palestinians threw stones at Israeli police, who in return fired tear gas and rubber bullets at the protesters. Rioting later broke out in East Jerusalem and Ramallah, and confrontations continued and became more lethal in the days that followed. By the end of the month, the disturbances had spread to almost all Palestinian towns in the West Bank and Gaza, with twelve Palestinians killed and more than five hundred wounded. Small numbers of IDF troops were also

wounded during this period. Palestinian and Israeli deaths resulting from the violence during 2001 were 469 and 191, respectively. The next year was even more lethal; the numbers for 2002 were 1,032 and 321, respectively.

As with the Camp David summit, there are competing narratives about who was responsible for the outbreak of the al-Aqsa intifada. Although it seems clear that Sharon's action was a catalyst, some Israeli accounts contend that the visit merely gave the Palestinians an excuse to launch a campaign of violence that had in fact been planned in advance. A variation on this Israeli narrative is that although the uprising may not have been planned in advance, Palestinian leaders, and Arafat in particular, concluded that it served their interest, and they therefore made no attempt to restrain it once it was under way. For Palestinians, however, the disturbances were simply an understandable response to the deteriorating conditions and hopelessness that characterized life under occupation. Given this situation, it was predictable; and indeed the Palestinians had predicted it and had warned Israeli authorities in advance that Sharon's visit would bring protests that could easily lead to violence.

What was left of the Oslo peace process played out against the background of the intifada in late 2000 and early 2001. Diplomatic initiatives were renewed during these months, including meetings that brought Barak and Arafat together in Paris and Sharm al-Shaykh and even in Barak's home. The most important events during this period were meetings at the White House in December 2000 and at Taba, Egypt, in late January 2001. Bill Clinton presented what became known as the "Clinton Parameters" at the December White House meeting. These spelled out what the US president, and many others, considered to be a fair and realistic compromise on each of the issues that had divided Israelis and Palestinians at Camp David, and this led some analysts to suggest that had Clinton presented these at Camp David the summit might have turned out differently.



Box 2.1 Competing Narratives over THE JULY 2000 Camp David Summit

Although there is a general consensus on the broad outlines of the positions and proposals that were advanced, there are competing narratives about exactly what transpired at Camp David in July 2000.⁶²

One narrative reflects the Israeli position, which also received support from Bill Clinton and some US analysts. It holds that Israel made unprecedented and indeed revolutionary concessions at Camp David. For example, Barak crossed traditional Israeli red lines by agreeing to Palestinian sovereignty in the Jordan Valley and some parts of Jerusalem. More generally, as expressed by Barak himself, for the first time in the history of this conflict, the Palestinians were offered . . . an independent contiguous state in more than 90 percent of the West Bank and in 100 percent of the Gaza Strip, access to neighboring Arab countries, the right of return for Palestinian refugees to any place in the Palestinian state, massive international assistance and even a hold in a part of Jerusalem that would become the Palestinian capital.

Thus, according to this narrative, the summit failed not because of any deficiencies in what the Israelis offered but rather because the Palestinians, and Arafat in particular, were not seriously interested in concluding a peace agreement. After describing what the Israelis offered, Barak stated that “Arafat refused to accept all this as a basis for negotiations and [later] deliberately opted for terror. That is the whole story.”⁶³

Another narrative, advanced not only by Palestinians but also by some US and Israeli analysts, puts forward two interrelated arguments: that there were serious shortcomings in what the Israelis offered, even if the proposals did break new ground from the Israeli perspective; and that responsibility for the failure to conclude an agreement does not rest solely with Arafat and the Palestinians. Furthermore, many of these analysts contend that the summit was followed by a campaign of disinformation and spin, led by Israeli and US allies of Barak, regarding Israel’s “generous offer” and Arafat’s “rejectionism.” According to Robert Malley, a member of the US team at Camp David, “The largely one-sided accounts spread in the period immediately after Camp David have had a very damaging effect.” Malley additionally asserts, however, that these accounts “have been widely discredited over time.”⁶⁴

The substance of this second narrative identifies what its advocates consider serious deficiencies in the Israeli proposals offered at Camp David. Specifically, the borders proposed by Israel made a significant portion of the West Bank and most of East Jerusalem a permanent part of the Jewish state; Israel refused to accept Muslim sovereignty over the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif in return for Palestinian recognition of Jewish sovereignty over the Western Wall; Israel insisted on de facto control of the Jordan Valley for an extended period, thereby reducing further the proportion of historic Palestine controlled by the Palestinian state; Israel also insisted on retaining two slender land corridors running from pre-1967 Israel in the west to the Jordan Valley in the east, thus dividing the Palestinian state into three noncontiguous blocks, in addition to Gaza; and not only did Israel refuse the return of a significant number of Palestinian refugees to the territory they left in 1947 and 1948, but the Israelis at Camp David also refused even to acknowledge Israel's responsibility for the refugee problem.

Those who support this narrative do not necessarily contend that the failure of the summit rests solely with the limitations of Israel's proposals. Many acknowledge that the Palestinians did not do an adequate job of advancing counterproposals and that Clinton and the Americans were too closely aligned with the Israelis and should have done more to fashion compromise proposals. Overall, as Malley writes in this connection, "All three sides are to be indicted for their conduct" at Camp David, including the Palestinians, but the summit did not fail because of Palestinian rejectionism. "If there is one myth that has to be put to rest," he contends, it is that the US-backed Israeli offer was something that any Palestinian could have accepted. One should not excuse the Palestinians' passivity or unhelpful posture at Camp David. But the simple and inescapable truth is that there was no deal at Camp David that Arafat, Abu Mazen, Dahlan or any other Palestinian in his right mind could have accepted.⁶⁵

The Taba meeting took place without US participation. George W. Bush had won the US election of November 2000, and the new US president decided that his administration would not get involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The discussions at Taba were nonetheless substantive and productive, and at their conclusion, the parties issued a joint statement saying they had made significant progress even though important gaps remained. The talks concluded shortly before elections were to be held in Israel, and the final communiqué

stated that “the sides declare that they have never been closer to reaching an agreement and it is thus our shared belief that the remaining gaps could be bridged with the resumption of negotiations following the Israeli elections.”⁶⁶

The elections held on February 6 resulted in a crushing defeat for Barak and Labor and a decisive victory for Sharon and Likud. Sharon received 62.39 percent of the vote, winning by the largest margin ever in Israeli politics. During the electoral campaign, the Likud leader had made clear that his government would have no interest in talks with the Palestinians under the conditions prevailing in the West Bank and Gaza. Thus, if there is a specific date on which the Oslo peace process can be said to have completed its run, it would be February 6, 2001.

New Actors, Continuing Conflict

The post-Oslo period was marked not only by the absence of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations but also by a deteriorating situation on the ground. On the one hand, the settler population in the West Bank and Gaza continued to grow and received increased support from the government. On the other, the al-Aqsa intifada continued and became ever more deadly. Thus, whereas there had been something of a contest between hope and doubt during the early years of the Oslo process—when a sense of genuine opportunity competed with a history of distrust and for a few years it even looked like hope was the more justified sentiment—the landscape of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in 2001 was bleak, angry, and moving in a direction that brought satisfaction only to those who opposed the historic compromise promised by the Declaration of Principles.

Approximately 193,000 Israeli settlers were living in the West Bank, exclusive of East Jerusalem, at the beginning of 2001, and the number increased steadily in the years that followed. According to Israeli government figures, the settler population of the West Bank had grown to about 259,000 by the end of 2005. Moreover, according to a report based on a 2004 Israeli government database, 38.8 percent of the West Bank land on which settlements were built was listed as “private Palestinian land,” much of it secured illegally for settlement purposes.⁶⁷ The settler population also grew in Gaza and East Jerusalem during this period. In Gaza, the number of settlers increased by 18 percent after Sharon became prime minister, from about 6,700 in early 2001 to about 7,900 in August 2005, when the settlers were evacuated. The number of Israelis living in East Jerusalem in areas captured in the June 1967 War increased from 172,000 to 184,000 between the beginning of 2001 and the end of 2005 (see [Chapter 20](#), [Map 20.1](#)).

The troubled situation on the ground was also the result of the expanding and increasingly lethal violence associated with the al-

Aqsa intifada. Whether condemned as “pure terrorism” by Israelis or defended by Palestinians as “armed struggle” against a determined and deepening occupation, the al-Aqsa intifada did not resemble the popular mass uprising of the first intifada, in which most Palestinians pursued a strategy of nonviolent resistance. With murderous attacks on civilian targets inside Israel, as well as armed assaults on both soldiers and settlers in the occupied territories, the al-Aqsa intifada had the character of a guerrilla war. By the end of 2004, 905 Israelis had been killed by Palestinians, with the largest number of deaths (443) resulting from suicide bomb attacks against civilians in Israel.

If the total number of Israelis killed by Palestinians from 2001 to 2004 was 905, the number of Palestinians killed by Israelis during the same period was more than three times as high: 469 in 2001, 1,032 in 2002, 588 in 2003, and 821 in 2004, for a total of 2,910. Most of these deaths were the result of Israeli military action, although fifty-five Palestinians were killed by settlers. It was inevitable, and understandable, that Israel would respond to the violent assaults by Palestinians and that Israelis would be particularly outraged by the attacks carried out not in the occupied territories but against civilian targets in the country itself. Many observers nonetheless judged the Israeli response to be excessive, and some, including some Israeli analysts, suggested that IDF aggressiveness may have helped to shape the violent character of the intifada. For example, a report written by prominent Israeli scholars and published in 2005 by the Teddy Kollek Center for Jerusalem Studies stated, “The IDF’s excessive reaction might have . . . transformed the popular uprising into a full-fledged armed conflict.”⁶⁸

Among the strategies Israel employed in an effort to suppress the intifada was Operation Defensive Shield, launched in late March 2002. The operation brought about the reoccupation of the West Bank by the Israeli forces and was intended to undermine the PA as well as to suppress the violence—related objectives in the judgment of the Sharon government. In what became the largest IDF operation in the West Bank since the June 1967 War, armored units moved

into major Palestinian cities for the purpose, as Sharon told the Knesset, of capturing terrorists, their dispatchers, and those who support them; confiscating weapons intended for use against Israeli citizens; and destroying the facilities used to produce weapons. Strict and extended curfews were placed on Palestinian communities during the operation, leading human rights organizations to complain that Israel was practicing collective punishment. The fiercest fighting associated with the operation was in Jenin and its refugee camp, considered by Israel to be a center of Palestinian terrorism. During a two-week assault, the IDF used tanks and helicopters to support its troops and suppress local resistance. Some Palestinians and others described the military campaign as a “massacre.” An investigation by Human Rights Watch disputed this charge, concluding that a massacre did not take place but that the IDF had used excessive and indiscriminate force in Jenin.

Operation Defensive Shield was officially terminated on April 21, 2002, even though the occupation of areas under PA authority continued. Furthermore, although the campaign achieved some of its objectives—capturing or killing key activists—it did little to restrain the Palestinian intifada. The violence continued and, as noted, brought about a steadily increasing number of Israeli and Palestinian deaths.

With suicide bombings inside Israel continuing in the weeks and months after Operation Defensive Shield, the Sharon government in June 2002 began the construction of what it termed a security barrier (and what critics called a separation wall) in an effort to prevent terrorists from entering Israel from the West Bank. The barrier was to consist of an electrified fence in most sections, with barbed wire, trenches, cameras, and sensors running alongside. In some areas, it was to involve high concrete walls with fortified guard towers. Designed to seal off the West Bank and projected to be more than four hundred miles long when complete, the barrier was to run through Palestinian territory, roughly following the Green Line but also cutting eastward in order to place settlements on the Israeli side of the divide whenever possible. The first phase of the construction,

involving stretches around Jerusalem and in the areas of Jenin, Tulkarm, and Qalqilya, totaling about ninety miles, was completed in summer 2003.

The barrier was strongly condemned by Palestinians, in part because its projected route placed almost 15 percent of the West Bank and the villages in this territory on the Israeli side of the barrier. In some instances, it also divided Palestinian communities or separated Palestinian farmers from their fields and made it difficult for them to market their produce to other parts of the West Bank. If Israelis sought to barricade themselves inside a wall, the Palestinians argued, the wall should be built on Israeli land rather than along a route that imposed new hardships on many Palestinians and also confiscated Palestinian land.

The barrier was also controversial in Israel, in ways that transcended the traditional ideological differences between the Right and the Left. Sharon, like many on the right, had initially opposed the construction of a barrier, despite the popularity of the idea among the Israeli public, because it would divide the Land of Israel and separate not only Palestinians but also many settlers from the Jewish state. Thus, the project was originally proposed by Labor and the Left, rather than Likud and the Right, as a response to Palestinian terrorism. Sharon embraced the concept in the aftermath of Operation Defensive Shield, but the plan remained a divisive issue on the right side of the political spectrum—not only because of its potential territorial implications but also because it might send the message that the intifada had succeeded in forcing Israel to make unilateral concessions.

Four initiatives aimed at reviving the peace process were put forward in 2002 and 2003 in an effort to reverse the deteriorating spiral of events on the ground. Two were well-intentioned but ultimately short-lived Israeli-Palestinian efforts. The first of these was a petition drive initiated in March 2002 by Ami Ayalon, former head of Israel's General Security Services, and Sari Nusseibeh, a prominent Palestinian intellectual and president of al-Quds University in East

Jerusalem. The petition called for a two-state solution and the resolution of final status issues along the lines set forth in the Clinton Parameters and the understandings reached at Taba the year before. By late summer 2005, the petition had been signed by 254,000 Israelis and 161,000 Palestinians. The second Israeli-Palestinian effort was the product of a small working group led by Yossi Beilin, who had been minister of justice in the Barak government, and Yasir Abd Rabbo, who at the time was the PA's minister of information. The document produced by the group, known as a "Geneva accord" because of support provided by the Swiss government, was introduced at a signing ceremony in Jordan in October 2003. It also drew on the Clinton Parameters and the discussions at Taba but went into more detail than the Ayalon-Nusseibeh proposal.

One of the two remaining initiatives during this period was a Saudi Arabian proposal introduced at an Arab League summit in March 2002. The proposal advocated a two-state solution and offered Israel not only peace with the Arabs but also full and normal relations. In return, it called upon Israel to return to its pre-1967 borders and agree to the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, with East Jerusalem as its capital. The Arab League summit, with all twenty-two member states represented, approved the proposal unanimously but added the provision of a "just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem" to be agreed upon in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions.

Finally, there was an international initiative. Called the "Road Map for Peace," or simply the "road map," it was put forward in April 2002 by the United States, the European Union, Russia, and the United Nations, frequently designated "the quartet" in diplomatic circles. The road map put forward a three-stage plan: first, through May 2003, ending violence, normalizing Palestinian life, and building Palestinian institutions; second, from June to December 2003, a transition to an independent Palestinian state with provisional borders and attributes of sovereignty; and third, a permanent status and end of conflict agreement to be completed during 2004 and 2005.

None of the documents and plans put forward in 2002 and 2003 brought changes on the ground or led to a resumption of peace talks. Other post-Oslo developments, by contrast, altered the political landscape in both Israel and the Palestinian territories. In January 2003, the Likud coalition won an overwhelming victory in the Israeli general election, enabling Sharon to form a new center-right government. Surprisingly, though, Sharon would soon modify his long-held opposition to territorial compromise and introduce a new dynamic into Israeli political life.

Of even more immediate consequence was a change in Palestinian politics. In November 2004, Yasir Arafat fell ill, and after being taken to France for treatment, the seventy-five-year-old Palestinian leader fell into a coma and died. Following Arafat's death, Mahmud Abbas, commonly known as Abu Mazen, became head of the PLO, which in theory continued to represent Palestinians throughout the world. Abbas was also nominated to replace Arafat as president of the PA, a position to which he was formally elected in January 2005. As a member of Arafat's inner circle, Abbas represented continuity in Palestinian leadership. At the same time, he was known as someone who favored negotiations with Israel and who considered the use of violence in the name of "armed struggle" and "resistance" to be detrimental to the Palestinian cause.

Palestinian politics at this time was also marked by the emergence of a "young guard," younger members of Fatah who had not been in exile with Arafat and had earned their nationalist credentials during the first intifada or in Israeli jails. These Palestinians complained about the cronyism and corruption of the PA under Arafat. They also resented their own limited influence in Palestinian politics and were unhappy that this appeared to be continuing after Arafat's death. The most prominent member of the young guard was Marwan Barghouti, who had been in prison in Israel since 2002. In late 2004, Barghouti declared that he would run against Abbas in the presidential election, although he subsequently withdrew after receiving assurances that the younger generation would be given more influence in the future.

The young guard was not the only challenge facing Abbas. Of greater and more immediate concern were relations with Hamas, which had gained significantly in popularity during the al-Aqsa intifada. Confronting Abbas in particular was the question of Hamas's participation in elections for a new Palestinian Legislative Council, which were scheduled for January 2006. Israel opposed the Islamist movement's participation since it had not given up its weapons and had not recognized Israel. The United States declined to support the Israeli position, however, and with PA leadership insisting that the question of participation was for Palestinians alone to decide, planning went forward and the elections were scheduled for January 25, 2006.

Israeli politics also saw transformative developments during this period. Early in 2004, Sharon shocked both supporters and opponents by announcing "a change in the deployment of settlements, which will reduce as much as possible the number of Israelis located in the heart of the Palestinian population," and he then indicated that the key element of the new policy would be Israel's total pullout from the Gaza Strip, not only redeploying the IDF but also relocating the settlers and dismantling the settlements. The proposed pullout from Gaza divided the political Right in Israel and brought bitter criticism from many in Sharon's coalition. The prime minister nevertheless pushed ahead, and the pullout began in August 2005, with the IDF forcibly removing those settlers who insisted on remaining in Gaza and then demolishing their residences. The removal of all Israeli civilian and military personnel and the demolition of all residential buildings were completed by mid-September. Opponents of the withdrawal had hoped the pullout would prove to be something of a national trauma, sufficiently difficult and divisive to discourage any consideration, by both the government and the public, of dismantling additional settlements in the future. In fact, however, despite angry denunciations on the political right and determined resistance by some settlers, the evacuation for the most part went smoothly, giving more encouragement to those who favored the evacuation of settlements than to those who opposed it.

In explaining and seeking to justify the withdrawal, Sharon stated that defending the Gaza settlements had become unacceptably difficult and costly, whereas the pullout would facilitate engagement with the enemy, when needed, and improve Israel's security. He insisted that "it is out of strength and not weakness that we are taking this step," yet many, including many Palestinians, pointed out that the disengagement from Gaza was a tacit admission that the intifada was taking a toll and sent the message that armed struggle was more effective than negotiation in securing Israel's withdrawal from occupied territory.

The withdrawal was also a tacit admission that retention of the West Bank and Gaza involved a demographic challenge. The argument, whose implications Sharon and Likud had always refused to accept, is that Arabs would soon outnumber Jews in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza, taken together and that permanent retention of the occupied territories would make Jews a minority in the Land of Israel when this occurred. According to this argument, this situation would present Israel with an impossible choice: either deny political rights to a permanent Palestinian majority, in which case the country would cease to be democratic, or grant citizenship and equality to the Palestinians, in which case the country would not remain Jewish. Sharon's spokesman said in this connection that Israel "must draw its borders so it has a clear Jewish majority, ensuring that it is both a Jewish and democratic state. Staying in Gaza goes against those goals."⁶⁹

Palestinians, for their part, welcomed the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, and many also drew the conclusion that confrontation rather than negotiation seemed to be the best way to obtain territorial concessions from the Jewish state. But Palestinians also had important complaints and reservations. They complained about the unilateral character of Israel's action. The absence of Palestinian involvement, they contended, worked against a smooth and orderly transfer of authority to the PA, which might lead to instability in the future. In addition, many pointed out that the withdrawal hardly made Gaza independent since Israel retained control of its sea and

airspace and most land access routes. Indeed, the disengagement plan itself specified that Israel “will guard and monitor the external land perimeter of the Gaza Strip, will continue to maintain exclusive authority in Gaza air space, and will continue to exercise security activity in the sea off the coast of the Gaza Strip.”

Many Palestinians also distrusted Sharon’s motives, arguing that he was pulling Israel out of Gaza in order to remove security and demographic challenges that might exert pressure for greater territorial concessions elsewhere. According to this analysis, the Gaza pullout was not a step on the road to territorial compromise. On the contrary, by withdrawing from Gaza with its roughly 1.4 million Palestinians, Sharon was sacrificing seventeen Israeli settlements in order to retain the West Bank, or at least most of it. Thus, as expressed by a knowledgeable researcher who works with the Palestinians of Gaza,

Of course, it is better for Israel to leave Gaza than to remain there and for some sort of renewal to begin. . . . But equally, we should oppose Sharon’s Disengagement Plan for the cynical motivations that inspired it and the reality its execution is going to create.⁷⁰

Whatever the relative explanatory power of the various factors that shaped Sharon’s decision to evacuate the settlements in Gaza, his action split the Right in Israel and dramatically changed the country’s partisan landscape. With continuing opposition to his policies in Likud and with new elections scheduled for March 2006, Sharon formed a new political party, Kadima, in order to have a freer hand in pursuing his policy of unilateral disengagement should the new party succeed in the forthcoming election. A number of Sharon’s allies in Likud followed him into Kadima, including Ehud Olmert. Shimon Peres, at the time vice premier in Sharon’s beleaguered coalition, stated that he would leave the Labor Party and join the prime minister’s next government, should he be elected.

Early in January 2006, the seventy-seven-year-old Sharon suffered a massive brain hemorrhage and subsequently lapsed into a prolonged coma. With the prime minister incapacitated, presumably permanently, Olmert assumed the leadership of Kadima as the party prepared for elections and as Israeli politics entered the post-Sharon era. Sharon's program of unilateral disengagement was a central plank in the party's campaign platform. It specified that the borders to be drawn by Israel would be determined according to three rules: inclusion of areas necessary for Israel's security; inclusion of places sacred to the Jewish religion, and first and foremost a united Jerusalem; and inclusion of a maximum number of settlers, with a stress on settlement blocs. The election gave Kadima 29 seats in the new parliament, with Labor finishing second and winning 19 seats; this enabled Olmert to form a new centrist-governing coalition.

In the meantime, elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council in January 2006 had introduced equally significant changes into Palestinian political life. With a turnout of 78 percent and in balloting pronounced to be free and fair by both international and local observers, the Palestinian public handed a decisive and unexpected victory to Hamas. The party's lists, presented to voters under the label of Change and Reform, captured 74 of the Council's 132 seats. Fatah, by contrast, won 45 seats. Of the remaining 13 seats, 4 went to independent candidates backed by Hamas, 3 went to the Popular Front, 2 went to an alliance of the Democratic Front and several other small factions, 2 went to the Independent Palestine list, and 2 went to the Third Way list of Hanan Ashrawi and Salam Fayyad.

A variety of factors contributed to the Hamas victory. Prominent among these was dissatisfaction with Fatah and the leadership of the PA. There was broad dissatisfaction with the PA, and hence with Fatah, because it had failed to win concessions from Israel or even slow Israeli settlement activity, despite more than a decade of peace negotiations. Hamas, by contrast, was given credit for the resistance that had forced Israel to dismantle settlements and withdraw from Gaza, the only time the Jewish state had ever relinquished Palestinian territory. Probably even more important, the PA's

corruption and cronyism hurt Fatah candidates, whereas Hamas won appreciation from the public for its operation of schools, orphanages, mosques, clinics, and soup kitchens. As reported by one observer shortly after the election,

Gaza and the West Bank are poor, and although in the past decade Western and Arab governments have poured billions of dollars into the accounts of the PA, most Palestinians believe that, thanks to the corruption of Fatah, they have been systematically robbed of much of that aid money.⁷¹

Alternatively, Hamas was reported to be devoting about 90 percent of its estimated annual budget of \$70 million to social, welfare, cultural, and educational activities, delivering services that the government often failed to provide.

In addition to emphasizing social justice and internal political reform, the Hamas electoral platform also declared, “Historic Palestine is part of the Arab and Islamic land and its ownership by the Palestinian people is a right that does not diminish over time. No military or legal measures will change that right.” Accordingly, there were immediate questions about the degree to which Palestinians who voted for Hamas were endorsing the party’s rejection of territorial compromise and a two-state solution. Many in Israel argued that this was the case—that the victory of Hamas showed that many and probably most Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza did not accept Israel’s right to exist. In fact, however, public opinion polls taken at the time of the election showed only a weak correlation between partisan preference and attitudes toward Israel and the peace process. A poll taken by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR) two weeks after the election, for example, reported that 40 percent of Hamas voters supported the peace process and only 30 percent opposed it, so it concluded that the victory of Hamas “should not be interpreted as a vote against the peace process.” A PCPSR poll taken a month later reported that 75

percent of the Palestinian public wanted Hamas to conduct peace negotiations with Israel, while only 22 percent were opposed to such negotiations.

These developments from 2004 to 2006 swept away the status quo that had been in place for decades. For Palestinians, not only had the thirty-six-year era of Yasir Arafat's leadership come to an end, but the equally prolonged dominance of Fatah had been successfully challenged. For Israelis, the incapacitation of Ariel Sharon removed the man who had dominated the Right for more than a quarter of a century, exercising greater and more sustained influence over Israeli policy in the West Bank and Gaza than had Begin, Shamir, Netanyahu, or any other right-wing politician. And the situation on the ground had changed as well. The intifada, however painful for both Israelis and Palestinians, had helped to persuade Israel, for the first time, to withdraw from occupied Palestinian territory; and Israel's new leadership team was promising additional disengagement, albeit unilateral disengagement. On the Palestinian side, control of Gaza offered an opportunity to initiate new programs of reform and development and to demonstrate, to the Palestinians themselves as well as to Israelis and others, what might be expected from an independent Palestinian state.

Subsequent events played out against this background, and regrettably, they did not involve new opportunities for progress toward peace but instead brought continuing tension and fresh confrontation. Following its success in the Palestinian elections of January 2006, Hamas invited Fatah to join it in a national unity cabinet. Abbas and Fatah declined, however, in large part because Hamas refused to accept international agreements previously signed by the PA, without which negotiations with Israel would be impossible. The situation became much more tense in April 2006 when PA security forces, most of whom were members of Fatah, clashed in Gaza with forces loyal to Hamas and the latter eventually seized control of the territory. Thereafter, Gaza and the West Bank had separate and competing administrations. This split persisted

through 2008 and 2009 and was the source of serious tension in Palestinian political life.

Israel held elections for a new Knesset in March 2006, and the balloting confirmed the political primacy of Kadima, now led by Ehud Olmert. In December, Olmert began negotiations with PA president Mahmud Abbas, and over the course of 2007 and much of 2008, the two leaders developed many creative ideas and significantly narrowed the gap between them on key issues, including security, borders, Jerusalem, and refugees. Despite the promise of these negotiations, however, and while both Olmert and Abbas later made statements to the effect that they were “very close,” negotiations ended in September 2008 without a final agreement.⁷²

In the meantime, the newly elected Olmert government almost immediately faced serious challenges on other fronts. In July 2006, Hizbullah fired rockets at towns south of the Israel-Lebanon border and then attacked two IDF vehicles patrolling on the Israeli side of the frontier, killing three soldiers and kidnapping two others. Israel’s need to respond to this provocation was understandable, but at least some observers believed that the situation could have been resolved through diplomacy; many, in any event, judged the IDF’s military response to be disproportionate and excessive. Israel’s military operation, which included massive air strikes and artillery fire, caused extensive loss of life and damage to the Lebanese infrastructure. Yet the campaign was largely unsuccessful. When the IDF withdrew after thirty-four days of fighting, the result was a stalemate, not an Israeli victory. The campaign also brought widespread criticism of Olmert—from the international community for the devastation caused by the Israeli action and within Israel for failing to manage the war effectively and achieve a satisfactory outcome.

Increasingly accurate missile attacks from Gaza caused tension to rise further from 2006 to 2008. By May 2007, four Israelis had been killed and eighty-four had been injured. Hamas argued that the continuing Israeli blockade of Gaza justified these attacks, but the

attacks were intolerable for Israel, and the Jewish state responded with massive retaliatory strikes. During the fall of 2006, Israeli actions killed more than three hundred Palestinians. In December 2008, following a short ceasefire, the Palestinian organization intensified its campaign of rocket attacks on Israeli communities, and Israel again responded with devastating air raids, this time followed by a ground assault in January 2009. The Israeli operation, "Operation Cast Lead," killed more than one thousand Palestinians, most of whom were civilians, according to Israeli human rights organizations. It also caused extensive damage to both government and civilian buildings.

The death and destruction in Gaza brought a predictable array of charges and countercharges. Israelis argued that their military operation was both necessary and justified. They pointed out that the actions of Hamas had initiated the confrontation, and they bitterly observed that the international community, now eager to condemn Israel for defending itself, had not responded to Israel's repeated complaints about Hamas's provocations and its own consistent warnings that its patience in the face of these attacks was limited. Israelis also charged that Hamas had launched many of its missile attacks from areas with a dense civilian population and that this, not any Israeli desire to punish the people of Gaza, was the main reason for the large number of civilian deaths.

Palestinians and some international observers offered a different assessment. While not necessarily defending Hamas, they argued that the root of the problem lay in the Israeli blockade of Gaza and, more generally, in Israel's refusal to offer the Palestinians a serious alternative to armed struggle. In addition, even those who expressed sympathy for the Israeli position often judged the Jewish state's action to have been disproportionate and significantly beyond what could be justified. These arguments were rekindled in the fall of 2009 when the "Report of the United Nations Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict" was submitted. The mission was headed by Richard Goldstone, former judge of the Constitutional Court of South Africa and former prosecutor of the international criminal tribunals for the

former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. The Goldstone report condemned both Hamas and Israel, but it was much more critical of Israel. It condemned Israel in particular for failing to take the actions needed to prevent the widespread loss of civilian life. Subsequently, while continuing to be critical of Israel's actions on the ground, Goldstone stirred new controversy in April 2011 when, in a *Washington Post* opinion article, he distanced himself from some of the report's conclusions and endorsed the Israeli position that Palestinian deaths had not been the result of deliberate policy.

Israel held elections for a new Knesset in February 2009 against the background of these developments, and Likud, once again led by Benjamin Netanyahu, was victorious. Netanyahu initially formed a right-wing coalition with a slender parliamentary majority. Coalition politics changed in May 2012, however, when Netanyahu announced that Likud and the centrist opposition Kadima Party had formed a national unity government. The coalition agreement pledged to “renew the political process with the Palestinian Authority,” but this was never implemented since Kadima left the coalition two months later following a failure to reach agreement with Likud on an important and controversial domestic political issue—regulations for drafting ultra-Orthodox men into the IDF. Netanyahu and Likud called early elections several months later, and the balloting was held in January 2013. Likud presented a common list with Yisrael Beitanu, a secular right-wing party, and captured 31 Knesset seats, well ahead of its nearest rival. The new government, again headed by Netanyahu, was dominated by Likud but included centrist as well as rightist parties. Kadima received only 2 seats, in large part because its leader, Tzipi Livni, and others had left to form a new political party.

In the Palestinian political arena, Fatah and Hamas worked during this period, with uneven results, to end their four-year rift. Meeting in Cairo in talks brokered by Egypt, Abbas and Hamas leader Khaled Meshal signed a “Reconciliation Pact” in May 2011. The pact called for an interim government to administer both the West Bank and Gaza Strip and to prepare for presidential and parliamentary elections within a year. Talks aimed at implementing the agreement

made only limited progress, however, and although further agreements were signed in Doha in February 2012 and in Cairo in May of the same year, skeptical observers waited to see whether and when there would be a unity government and new elections and with what implications.

The second decade of the twenty-first century brought not only continuing domestic political challenges for Israelis and Palestinians but also regional developments that introduced additional uncertainties. One source of tension was Iran's increasingly effective efforts to produce weapons-grade nuclear materials. Israel and its supporters insisted that Iran could not be allowed to acquire nuclear weapons, raising the prospect of an Israeli attack on Iranian facilities if international sanctions failed to bring a change of course in Tehran.

Perhaps the most important sources of regional uncertainty during the first years of the current decade were associated with what became known as the "Arab Spring," which involved massive antigovernment protests in a number of countries and led to the fall of long-standing authoritarian regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. The change of regime in Egypt was of particular concern, especially after a candidate affiliated with the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood, Muhammad Morsi, became the country's first democratically elected president in June 2012. While promising to respect Egypt's international engagements, including its peace treaty with Israel, and while also helping to broker a ceasefire between Hamas and Israel when the two were on the brink of war in November 2012, Morsi and his party were much more critical of Israel than had been the Mubarak government, and this raised the possibility of a change in the Egyptian-Israeli relationship. It also raised the possibility that Egypt might build a stronger alliance with Hamas. Morsi was ousted by the Egyptian military in July 2013, however, and Egypt-Israel relations returned to the "cold peace" based on mutual interest by which it had been characterized for decades.

There were also diplomatic initiatives during these years. The election of a new American president, Barack Obama, brought hopes that the United States would work to revive the Israel-Palestinian peace process. In May 2011, Obama made an especially strong speech in which he called for a Palestinian state based on Israel's pre-1967 borders. Then in July 2013, following Obama's reelection the previous November, the new US secretary of state, John Kerry, launched a peace initiative that involved numerous meetings with Israeli and Palestinian leaders, as well as direct meetings between Palestinian and Israeli officials. The initiative never made significant or sustained progress, however, despite Kerry's very substantial commitment. With each side blaming the other and with some blaming the United States as well, Kerry reluctantly abandoned his quest nine months after it had begun.⁷³

The Palestinians undertook diplomatic initiatives of their own during this period. In fall 2011, Mahmud Abbas declared that Palestine would seek to become a full member of the United Nations, thereby giving it access to additional channels through which to put pressure on Israel and the United States. Israel urged the United States to oppose the Palestinian effort, however, and the Obama administration aligned itself with the Israeli position and threatened to veto any resolution for full Palestinian membership that came to the Security Council. Indeed, the United States terminated its aid to UNESCO when, later in the fall, despite American objections, Palestine was granted full membership in the UN agency.

The Palestinians had more success in November 2012 when they sought, and received, recognition by the UN General Assembly. By a vote of 138 to 9, with forty-one abstentions and with the United States among the dissenters, the assembly passed a resolution upgrading Palestine to a "nonmember observer state" at the United Nations. Predictably, Israel denounced the resolution, and a few days later, the Netanyahu government announced plans to expand Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The Palestinians also continued to press their case for international recognition beyond the UN. In December 2014, the European Union

passed a resolution recognizing Palestinian statehood. The Vatican officially recognized the Palestinian state in May 2015.

An additional dimension of the Palestinians' international campaign in support of their cause is the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement, popularly known as BDS. Claiming inspiration from the campaign to end apartheid in South Africa, the BDS movement was initiated in 2005 by a coalition of Palestinian nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and since that time, it has evolved into a global campaign with support in many countries. It calls for divestment from Israeli companies, or at least those that do work in the occupied territories, and the boycott of Israeli activities and institutions, including Israeli universities. The movement has been strongly criticized by Israel and its supporters, who argue that many of its advocates are motivated by anti-Semitism and also that it seeks to undermine Israel's right to exist, not only to pressure the Jewish state into withdrawing from the West Bank and East Jerusalem.⁷⁴ The effectiveness of BDS has also been questioned, and even many supporters acknowledge that its impact has thus far been limited. Nevertheless, the movement has continued to gain support in some quarters, particularly in Europe and on some American university campuses. In November 2015, for example, the European Union mandated that there be identifying labels on Israeli products manufactured in the West Bank and exported to Europe.

The fighting between Israel and Hamas in Gaza was replayed in fall 2012 and again in summer 2014. The 2012 clashes, though deadly, did not escalate into a full-blown and sustained confrontation, thanks in large part to mediation provided by Egypt and the United States. By contrast, summer 2014 brought violence and destruction that exceeded even that of the Israel-Hamas "war" of January 2009. Responding to Hamas rocket attacks and the use by Hamas of tunnels to carry out raids or to attack or kidnap Israelis, the IDF launched Operation Protective Edge. Air strikes were accompanied by the entrance into Gaza of Israeli troops. By the time a ceasefire was accepted in late August, more than 2,100 Palestinians had been killed, the majority of whom were civilians, and seventy Israelis,

sixty-four of whom were soldiers, had lost their lives. There was also extensive damage to housing and infrastructure in Gaza. As in the past, there were bitter arguments about the legitimacy of Hamas' attacks on Israel and about the legitimacy and proportionality of the Israeli response.

Developments during the years that followed left prospects for an Israeli-Palestinian accord as remote as ever. Likud scored a decisive victory in the Knesset elections of March 2015, and Israeli settlement activity continued to surge under the right-wing Netanyahu government. By early 2018, the number of Israeli settlers in the West Bank was about 400,000, with another 215,000 Israelis living in East Jerusalem. Among Palestinians, anger was fueled not only by the deepening occupation and expansion of Israeli settlements but also by discontent with the Palestinian Authority under the leadership of Mahmoud Abbas and by the continuing division between Fatah and Hamas. A poll in December 2016 reported, for example, that two-thirds of the Palestinian public believed a two-state solution to the conflict with Israel was no longer possible, and about the same proportion wanted Abbas to resign. In October 2017, Fatah and Hamas agreed to a "reconciliation" arrangement that gave Fatah civilian control in the Gaza Strip, but an April 2018 poll found that only one-third of those surveyed were satisfied with the performance of the reconciliation government. And again, two-thirds wanted Abbas to resign.⁷⁵

The election of Donald Trump as US president in November 2017 brought increased American support for Israel and its occupation policies. Particularly significant and symbolic was Trump's decision to move the American Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem—something that past presidents, both Republican and Democratic, had been unwilling to do. The new American Embassy opened in May 2018. Trump also appointed as American ambassador to Israel a man who endorsed and had financially supported Israeli settlement activity in the West Bank.

Tensions were also fueled by new confrontations between Israel and Hamas in the spring and summer of 2018. Beginning in March, Palestinians in Gaza began a series of protest demonstrations near the territory's border with Israel. The protests were organized by independent activists but had the support of Hamas. While organizers stated that the demonstrations were to commemorate the *nakba* and affirm the Palestinian refugees' right of return, demonstrators were also protesting and were clearly motivated by the move of the US Embassy to Jerusalem and Israel's deepening blockade of Gaza. In response to the protests, Israel deployed the IDF and, in some cases, shot at and killed Palestinian demonstrators. On May 14, as the day of Israeli independence and the Palestinian *nakba* approached, protesters massed along the border and some tried to cross into Israel. Israeli soldiers responded by firing at the Palestinians; according to Palestinian sources, fifty-eight were killed, and more than one thousand were wounded. Adding yet another dimension to the confrontation, Palestinians in Gaza sent kites and balloons with fire across the border and into Israel in summer 2018. In response, Israel imposed additional restrictions on the entry of goods into Gaza and blocked all delivery of fuel and gas.

As in the past, each side blamed the other for these confrontations; and by this time also, significantly, majorities on each side appear to have concluded that the other side was not seriously interested in territorial compromise and peace. Accordingly, the two questions posed by this situation were whether it still made sense to think about the conflict in terms of a two-state solution; and if not, what was the best way to think about the alternative? A two-state solution was not beyond the realm of possibility. But it would require that the parties suddenly find the political will to address final status issues seriously and accept a compromise formula—perhaps based on the parameters offered by Bill Clinton in late 2000 or the Olmert-Abbas negotiations of 2007 and 2008. In mid-2018, there was little to suggest that this political will would be found in the foreseeable future.

The alternative, made increasingly likely by the facts on the ground, is what many observers were beginning to describe as a “one-state reality,” meaning that Israel would retain most if not all of the West Bank and offer its Palestinian inhabitants local autonomy and improved security and economic conditions. Some Israelis argued, as they had in the 1980s before the first intifada, that the Palestinians would eventually accept this formula and that Israel could then, without significant cost, avoid any division of the historic Land of Israel. It was far from evident that Palestinians were any more likely to accept this than they had been a quarter of a century earlier, however. On the contrary, in the absence of any prospect for the establishment of a Palestinian state, it was hard to imagine anything other than continued conflict. And even if the Palestinians should grudgingly conclude that they had no choice but to accept a political formula that leaves them stateless, Israel would be left with the question of whether it can retain its democratic character if a significant proportion of the permanent population within its borders, possibly a majority, does not have full political rights, or if it can retain its Jewish character if it extends these rights to the Palestinians.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has sometimes produced surprises. Both Sadat’s trip to Jerusalem in 1977 and the secret Israel-PLO negotiations in Oslo in 1993 introduced a hopeful political dynamic that few would have predicted beforehand. And since many Israelis and Palestinians have long been ready for meaningful compromise, perhaps the future holds additional surprises—developments that will restore hope and set in motion a peace process that this time, finally, will lead to a just resolution of the conflict. Unfortunately, as welcome as this would be, the situation in the summer of 2018 was such that this would indeed be a surprise.

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3 States and Institutions

Ellen Lust¹

As discussed in [Chapter 1](#) and [Chapter 2](#), by the decades following World War II those living in the area comprising the Middle East and North Africa had moved from being ruled by expansive, Islamic empires to being under control of European mandates to, finally, being citizens of independent states. At least in theory, Syrians, Tunisians, and others were to govern themselves, managing their own society's problems and development. But as we will see in subsequent chapters, in many cases societies have often fallen short from achieving optimal outcomes; societies suffer limited participation ([Chapter 4](#)), social inequalities ([Chapter 5](#)), sectarian strife ([Chapter 6](#)), stalled economic development ([Chapter 7](#)), and international and regional interference ([Chapter 8](#)). In part, this is because weak state development and a lack of institutions that depersonalize and depoliticize the distribution of goods and services limit societies' ability to use resources efficiently and grant opportunities to all.

This chapter presents three interrelated ways to understand states and institutions that affect governance in the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) today. First, the chapter examines the strength of MENA states—their ability to affect the daily lives of citizens, influence the distribution of resources, and implement public policies that improve the living conditions for society as a whole. Most states in the region are weak, making it difficult for governments to respond to citizens' demands and improve their lives. Second, the chapter considers regime type. Even after the Arab uprisings of 2011, authoritarian regimes remain prevalent in the MENA region, often diverting resources away from social development and toward narrow coalitions of ruling elites. Third, the chapter examines key state institutions, including legislatures, political parties, judiciaries, and the media. In the MENA, these institutions tend to be captured

by small circles of elites, leading to suboptimal outcomes. It describes these three factors—weak states, authoritarian regimes, and ineffective institutions—explores why these are found throughout much of the region, and considers possibilities for change. It ends by discussing two questions commonly raised with regard to the region: What explains the endurance of regimes in the face of discontent? And why has liberal democracy been so elusive?

The State

Max Weber conceptualized the state as “a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory.”² There are three important components of this definition. First, the state has *defined territorial boundaries*, presumably enjoying control over the entire area within the boundaries. Second, the state has *legitimacy*—that is, the acceptance of the community’s *right* to govern, which in the twentieth century can be enjoyed, and contested, on two levels: within the domestic community (those living within the boundaries of the state) and among actors in the international community (other states within the international system).³ Finally, the state has the *monopoly* on the use of force. The use of force by the military, police, or other arms of the state is generally viewed as a legitimate means of keeping order, while the use of force by paramilitary groups, vigilantes, or gangs—at times also intended to keep order—is not.

Ideally, the modern state system is constituted of strong nation-states—that is, countries in which nationalism (a socially constructed identity that leads a group of people to see themselves as belonging to a shared community) and state boundaries overlap and states enjoy sovereignty over territory within established borders. Further explained, “coercion-wielding organizations that are distinct from households and kinship groups . . . exercise power over all other organizations within substantial territories.”⁴ Strong states are able to extract resources from populations and implement policies that benefit society as a whole rather than subnational populations (e.g., families, tribes, or other distinct subnational groups). A strong sense of nationalism makes it easier for them to do so.

Weak States in the MENA Region

States in the MENA have often failed to live up to these ideals on a number of counts. Both international and domestic forces have challenged states' legitimate right to rule. In many cases, social groups—often ethnic, sectarian, or kin based—captured state institutions, using them to benefit themselves rather than society writ large. This undermined the establishment of an autonomous state that is capable of acting and formulating policies independent of the interests of specific groups or classes. Elsewhere, social groups have found ways to circumvent the state, avoiding the attempts of the state apparatus to govern and maintaining order according to local customs and institutions. At times, groups negotiate the boundaries of state influence with those in power, leaving entire areas out of the reach of state authorities.

These problems are not unique to the MENA region. In a cross-regional study of state building, Joel Migdal pointed out the problems that emerge in the context of “strong societies, weak states.”⁵ Ruling elites remain in power without developing the ability to extract resources, maintain order, and affect the daily lives of citizens or promote economic and social development, and he argued that they do so by establishing agreements—tacit or explicit—with local elites that effectively grant them control over spaces. The result is a sort of Swiss-cheese arrangement in which the state has control over some areas but is relatively absent in others.

This is also not to say that state building, and even the attendant development of nation-states (e.g., of shared identity of a community congruent with state boundaries), has been entirely absent in the MENA region. Citizens today appear to identify with the state more than they did when it was established in the twentieth century. During the 1950s, Arabs often took to the streets, calling for the establishment of pan-Arab states and challenging the legitimacy of newly founded states. In the 2011 uprisings, Egyptians, Libyans, Tunisians, and others made claims on state leaders as “nationals,”

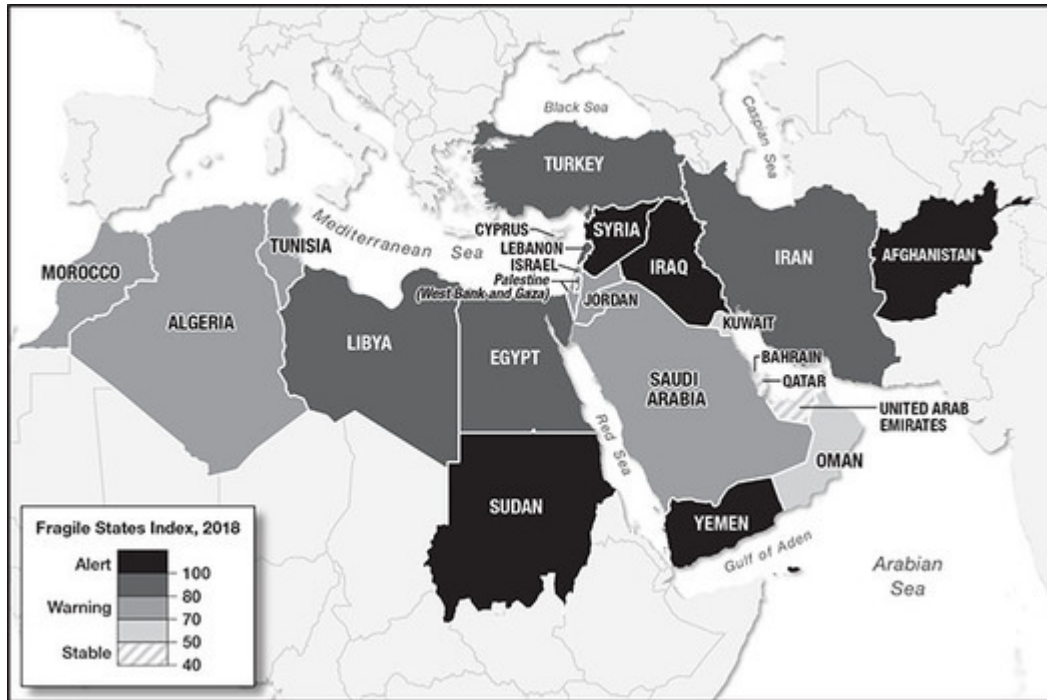
demanding their rights as citizens. That said, however, the rise of the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the resurgence of Kurdish movements, and others that draw into question the existing state system show that the state—and particularly the nation-state—remains weak. Conflicts still often center on demands by sectarian, ethnic, regional, and kin-based communities.

Many argue that MENA states are not simply fragile, but they are failed. Failed states often have the trappings of state institutions (e.g., government ministries, legislatures, and heads of state), but they have lost important aspects of statehood, such as physical control over the territory and legitimate decision-making authority.⁶ Failed states receive a great deal of international attention both because they are unable to provide services and security to their people and because they are viewed as a threat to international security. Uncontrolled territory gives transnational terrorist movements room to maneuver, while the lack of development arguably provides a base of potential recruits for such movements.

A large number of MENA states today are seen to be at high risk for state collapse and the emergence of violence, as [Map 3.1](#) shows. The 2018 Fragile States Index (FSI) rated Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and Libya as the third-, fourth-, eleventh-, and twenty-fifth-most fragile states in the world, respectively. All of these countries were in the midst of civil war. The FSI gave countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey a “warning,” and if the pressures of the crises in neighboring Iraq and Syria continue, they are likely to be destabilized even more. For example, although the influx of Syrian refugees into Lebanon has slowed, after Lebanon began to enforce border control in 2018 it had nearly one million registered refugees in addition to unregistered Syrians fleeing the war. Syrian refugees, making up approximately 25 percent of the population,⁷ contribute to economic pressures and inequalities, deteriorating public services, and polarization among domestic factions,⁸ thus fostering violence and instability. Only Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and the UAE were considered stable. Yet more disconcerting is that among those ranking in the lower half are countries with some of the largest populations: Algeria,

Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen.⁹ Millions of people live in states that cannot maintain security and guide socioeconomic development effectively.

Map 3.1 Fragile States Index for Middle Eastern and North African States, 2018



Source: Data available at <http://fundforpeace.org/fsi/excel/>.

Fragile and failed states face common challenges, but there are also important differences among them. For instance, Yemen has long been a classical weak state—unable to control territory, implement social and economic politics, and promote development; in 2010, just before the Arab uprisings, the FSI ranked Yemen the world’s fifteenth-most fragile state. As one analyst explained, “Those in the countryside [are] unconcerned about national government. They have neither contributed to, nor been affected by, central decisions.” Rather than attempting to regulate and control social forces, the Yemeni state adopted “policies of inclusion, accommodation and incorporation toward local strongmen in order to maintain social

stability and regulate daily life.”¹⁰ At times, this strategy fails, and the country erupts in violence. This was the case after 2011, when Yemen faced threats from al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), from a secessionist movement (al-Hirak) in the former South Yemen, from the Houthi movement in the north, from armed Yemeni tribes, and finally, from international intervention. The crisis has placed enormous costs on the population: By 2017, an estimated 78.5 percent of the population required humanitarian assistance every day, including more than eleven million children (greater than the population of Switzerland). ¹¹

Syria represents a second case in which a raging civil war has significantly weakened the state. Before 2011, Syria had a midperforming state, ranking forty-eighth in the world on the Fragile States Index.¹² It provided health, education, and other services and, in fact, had a health system that was highly regarded in the Arab world. Yet years of war destroyed hospitals, schools, and other public infrastructure; spurred the flight of doctors and teachers; and undermined the state’s control over territory.¹³ President Bashar al-Asad and those around him attempted to shore up their regime by claiming to be the sole defenders of Syrian sovereignty and attempting to monopolize service provision (reportedly destroying hospitals, schools, and other services in opposition-controlled areas in order to do so)¹⁴ Nevertheless, by July 2015 the state had lost control over large swaths of Syrian territory. Asad gave a surprising admission of this in a public speech before the nation, stating, “Concern for our soldiers forces us to let go of some areas. . . . Every inch of Syria is precious. The problem facing the military is not related to planning but to fatigue. It is normal that an army gets tired, but there’s a difference between fatigue and defeat.”¹⁵ As of this writing, it is impossible to know where or when the conflict may end, but it is clear that the conflict has weakened the Syrian state. Arguably, the Syrian conflict may not have erupted had the state been strong in 2011; nevertheless, the case reminds us that development is not necessarily a unilinear trajectory. States can be weakened as well as built.

A third lesson about state failure can be drawn from the case of Lebanon. As discussed in [Box 3.1](#), Lebanon lacks territorial control, is unable to provide services and frequently has fallen into civil war. Yet in contrast to Yemen, the World Bank designates Lebanon as an upper-middle income country, and the World Economic Forum notes that Lebanon has consistently “punched above its weight”¹⁶ in terms of development and global competitiveness. The influx of Syrian refugees has put health and education systems under pressure, but nevertheless, Lebanon continues to perform well.¹⁷ Such achievements are the result of a vibrant private sector; as the economist Sami Nader put it, in Lebanon the “private education soars, public education sinks.”¹⁸ As Lebanon shows, development can take place in the absence of an effective state.

Box 3.1 Lebanon’s Weak State

Photo 3.1 Bombing of the Rafic Hariri airport following escalation between Hizballah and the Israeli military.



ISSAM QUBEISI/AFP/Getty Images

Lebanon has experienced a series of problems associated with weak state institutions. It collapsed into civil war from 1975 to 1990, was dominated by Syria from 1990 to 2005, and has witnessed sectarian tensions and unstable governing coalitions. Indeed, for long periods of time Lebanon has failed to have a sitting president or legitimate parliament. It also lacks a monopoly on the legitimate use of force.

The 2006 war with Israel illustrated the Lebanese state’s failure to monopolize the legitimate use of force within its borders, to maintain

territorial control, and to stand as the sole representative of Lebanon in engaging other states. The various labels attached to the war—the “July War,” the “Second Lebanese War,” or the “2006 Israel-Hizballah War”—reflect the limited role of the Lebanese state. The war—which would last thirty-four days, cost thousands of lives, and create enormous financial setbacks—was initiated not through military escalation between states but by the engagement of a Lebanese nonstate actor and the Israeli military. The conflict began on July 12, 2006, when Hizballah (primarily a Shiite Lebanese resistance movement with strongholds in southern Lebanon and ties to Syria and Iran) escalated the long-running conflict with Israel by ambushing two Israeli Humvees patrolling the Israeli side of the border. Lebanon claimed that this was an action of Hizballah and not of the Lebanese government, but the Israeli government escalated its attacks. Most notably, on July 13, 2006, the Israeli military bombed the Rafic Hariri International Airport in the center of Beirut as the Lebanese government adamantly denied support for Hizballah. The weakness of the Lebanese state was on full display: It was unable to contain Hizballah, which effectively had engaged in a foreign-policy decision outside government control.

Before we consider why states remain fragile, it is important to note that some critics object to the concepts of failed and fragile states. They argue that these concepts lack a coherent definition and operationalization and thus fail to extend scientific knowledge. Moreover, they argue, the World Bank, the European Union, G7+, and other organizations use the designation of states as *failed* or *fragile* as a justification for intervention. Critics see the designation as an “attempt by state powers to describe reality in accordance with their foreign policy priorities.”¹⁹ Such points are well taken but do not belie the fact that in many cases, the entities that govern do not possess many characteristics of statehood.

Challenges of State-Building

Scholars and development specialists have moved from assuming that state-building is a relatively natural process (a belief prevalent in the 1950s and 1960s) to expressing great concern over “failed” and “fragile” states.²⁰ But how do we understand the failure to build strong states? What drives continued weakness?

There are two basic theories of state-building. The first views the state as a social contract between individuals who seek security. The state thus develops to maintain order and grant protection, and the relationship between citizens and the state is one of relative cooperation.²¹ The second perspective is that states develop as the outcome of war-making by competing groups that seek to expand their control over territories and extract resources.²² Victors attempt to establish authority in an effort to extract resources from those within the territories under their control, thus developing taxation; to protect human and material resources and establish order, thus establishing security; and to reduce the costs of ruling by gaining domestic and international legitimacy of their rights to control over this territory.

One explanation for the weakness of MENA states lies in the challenges of postcolonial state-building. State-building was a much different process in the MENA than it was in the West. In Europe, state-building took place during an extended period of conflict between warring factions, roughly between 1000 and 1800 CE. The conflicts were bloody and destructive, but they arguably also fostered the development of nationalism and strong states. In contrast, in the MENA modern states emerged out of conflict between elites vying for power in a much more compact period, roughly during the last one hundred years. Consequently, state borders were established, but they did not necessarily result in nation-states. Identities did not match the contours of new states but instead tended to be on either larger or smaller territorial units.²³ Rather than seeing themselves as “Syrian,” “Tunisian,” or “Iraqi,” for

instance, many saw themselves as “Arabs” or “Muslims” (and were, therefore, attracted to pan-Arab and pan-Islamic movements) or as “Shi’a,” “Kurdish,” or “Aleppan,” members of smaller sectarian, ethnic, or geographic communities. New leaders attempted to develop national identities through flags, anthems, stamps, rallies, and other performances of “nation” in the hope of shoring up their legitimacy, but they also often relied on subnational allegiances for support. The resurfacing of these identities in the face of state collapse that we see, for example, in Iraq, Libya, and Syria demonstrate the limited success of these efforts.

A second difficulty has been the intervention of powerful third parties.²⁴ External actors—most notably Britain, France, Russia, and the United States, but other states, nonstate actors, and multinational organizations as well—have often stepped in to bolster one side over another or to quash conflict altogether. Invested in maintaining the international state system, they have sought to reinforce territorial boundaries, shoring up central authorities in the face of secessionist movements or working to undermine the establishment of larger, more powerful entities (for example, the United Arab Republic, a greater Saudi Arabia, greater Syria or, more recently, Iraq’s annexation of Kuwait). This is not to say that MENA elites were puppets in the hands of the international forces. Elites vying for power in MENA states often managed to thwart external actors, to play them off against one another, or to use their support for their own purposes. For instance, the ruling Al Thani in Qatar showed savvy in first allying with the British and gaining local authority before strategically joining Saudi Arabia once it seemed more beneficial; they even went so far as converting to Wahhabism to show allegiance. Domestic elites had agency, but powerful external forces invested in maintaining an international state system created opportunities and constraints that shaped their actions.

Importantly, in some countries, states developed more organically, as they had in the West. Iran and Turkey were founded on the centers of the fallen Qajar and Ottoman empires, respectively. The empires had been weakened, and when Reza Shah Pahlavi and Mustafa

Kemal Atatürk came to power in the 1920s in Iran and Turkey, respectively, they worked to establish a new national identity and modern, Western-oriented state systems. At the same time, however, they benefited from the institutional structures that had been established in these seats of empire. Saudi Arabia, too, developed differently, with the Al Saud family establishing control over the territory that gained international recognition as an independent state in 1932.²⁵ In Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia, ruling elites benefited from an institutional system and historical experience that helped in the development of state-building, although Western support still played an important role in keeping Western-oriented leaders in power.

A third complication in the state-building process has been the ability of incumbent rulers to rely on external rents to remain in power. They are able to obtain the resources necessary to defend their position without extracting resources from the people within their states. The sources of rents vary. Oil provides important sources of income, undermining state-building efforts. Strategic rents—or direct support from members of the international community to incumbents who are situated in particularly strategic locations—can play a similar role. Egypt and Jordan, for example, have both benefited from their strategically important locations as frontline states with Israel, receiving significant aid from the United States. Such rents can allow rulers to maintain their position while providing little space for voice and accountability.

Regime Types

Many scholars and policymakers focus on regime type rather than state strength. Some focus on prospects for democracy, which they view as intrinsically better at promoting life and liberty and positively associated with good governance and socioeconomic development.²⁶ Another set of scholarship focuses on differences within regime types, particularly distinguishing between authoritarian regimes. This section defines regimes and then examines the nature of regimes in the MENA region, the challenges they face, the strategies that incumbents use to maintain the regime, and the possibilities for regime change.

What Is a Regime?

Regimes should be understood as the set of formal and informal rules (institutions) that are used to select leaders and policies and, thus, determine the relative power and relationships among different institutions within the governing system as well as how efficiently and for whose benefit resources are used. Regimes are relatively durable. They change, but it takes more than a change in a single rule or actor to alter regimes. Indeed, while it is quite clear that Libya and Tunisia witnessed regime change in 2011, the case of Egypt seemed initially more tenuous, as the military—and many former Mubarak allies—retained significant power. The extent of change was even more ambiguous in Yemen: although former president Ali Abdallah Salih was removed from power after decades in office, the former vice president under Salih, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, was elected in an uncontested presidential election that, initially, ushered in little fundamental change.

We need to distinguish between regimes and individuals in power. Many use the term *regime* to denote the leaders in power or, similarly, the period during which certain leaders are in power—that is, they refer to the “Mubarak regime” in Egypt or the “Asad regime” in Syria. Compare this with discussions of US politics, for instance, which focus on the “Bush administration” or the “Obama administration.” The assumption is that in the United States the rules remain the same although those in power to administer the rules may change, while in Egypt and Syria political rules and institutions are presumably determined—almost embodied—by the leaders themselves.

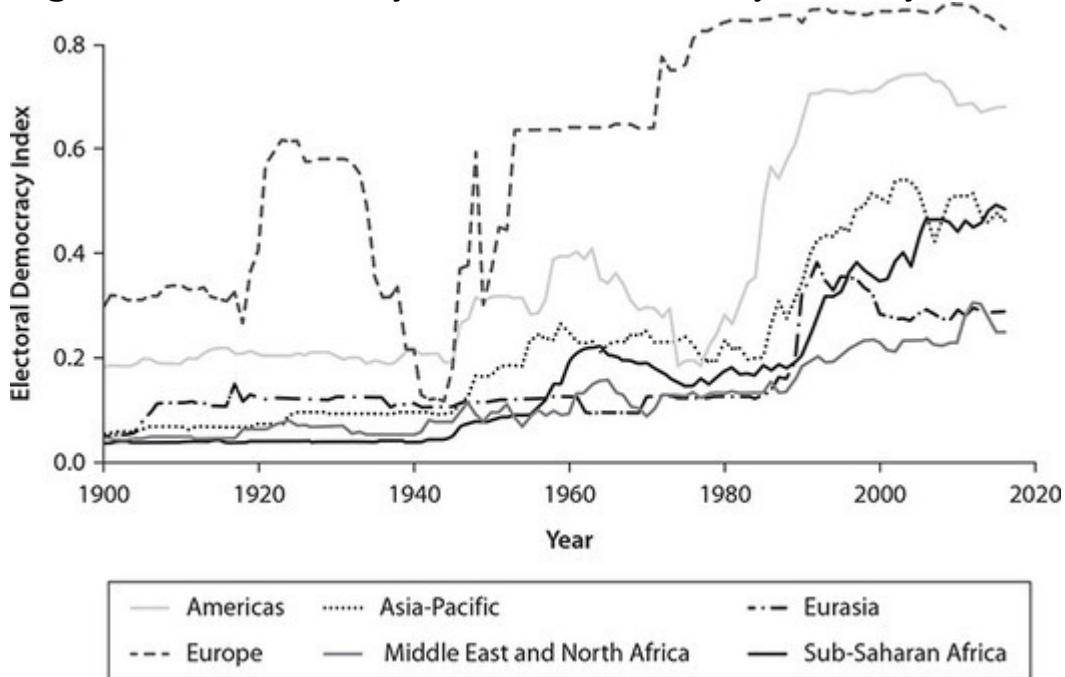
Yet using *regime* to refer to the individuals in power is misleading. One can find great continuity in a country’s regime even when leaders change. For example, the transition from Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser to Anwar al-Sadat altered the ruling elite in Egypt but was not a significant change in regime. At other times, the underlying rules of the game can change quite significantly while the

leader remains in power. Thus, President Ali Abdallah Salih, president of the Yemen Arab Republic since 1978, continued to rule Yemen even after the unification in 1990, when not only the borders but also the rules of the game that governed politics in both the former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen and the Yemen Arab Republic altered significantly.

Regimes in the MENA Region

The MENA region has long been characterized by resilient authoritarianism. When much of the rest of the world experienced what is now called the “third wave” of democratization, the region saw much less change (see [Figure 3.1](#)). This remains true even after the Arab uprisings. Attempts at democratization in most countries where regimes fell—Libya, Egypt, and Yemen—have failed. Of these countries, today only Tunisia enjoys relatively stable democratic processes, and even here, in the context of economic decline and instability, talk has turned from optimistic proclamations of an “Arab spring” to gloomy discussions of “Arab winter.” As [Table 3.1](#) demonstrates, authoritarian regimes with long-standing leaders continue to dominate the region.

Figure 3.1 Democracy Index over Time, by Country



Source: The Varieties of Democracy Dataset. Michael Coppedge et al., “V-Dem Dataset V8,” Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project, <https://www.v-dem.net/en/>.

Table 3.1 Longevity of Rulers in Regimes in the Middle East and North Africa, as of June 2019
 Table 3.1 Longevity of Rulers in Regimes in the Middle East and North Africa, as of June 2019

Country	Date of ascendance	Current leader (years in office)	Previous leader (years in office)
Authoritarian Republics			
Algeria	April 2, 2019	Acting President Abdelkader Bensalah (2 months)	President Abdelaziz Bouteflika (19 years, 11 months)
Egypt	June 8, 2014	President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi (4 years, 11 months)	Acting President Adly Mansour (11 months)
Syria	July 17, 2000	President Bashar al-Asad (18 years, 10 months)	President Hafiz al-Asad (29 years, 3 months)
Monarchies			

Country	Date of ascendance	Current leader (years in office)	Previous leader (years in office)
Bahrain	March 6, 1999	Shaykh Hamad bin Issa Al Khalifa (20 years, 2 months)	Shaykh Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa (37 years, 6 months)
Jordan	February 7, 1999	King Abdallah II (20 years, 3 months)	King Hussein (46 years, 5 months)
Kuwait	January 29, 2006	Shaykh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (13 years, 4 months)	Shaykh Jabir Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (28 years)
Morocco	July 23, 1999	King Muhammad VI (19 years, 10 months)	King Hassan II (38 years, 4 months)
Oman	July 23, 1970	Sultan Qabus bin Said Al Said (48 years, 10 months)	Sultan Said bin Taimur (38 years, 5 months)

Country	Date of ascendance	Current leader (years in office)	Previous leader (years in office)
Qatar	June 25, 2013	Shaykh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani (5 years, 11 months)	Shaykh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani (17 years, 18 months)
Saudi Arabia	January 23, 2015	King Salman bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud (4 years, 4 months)	King Abdallah bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud (9 years, 5 months)
United Arab Emirates	November 3, 2004	Shaykh Khalifa bin Zayid Al Nuhayyan (14 years, 7 months)	Shaykh Zayid bin Sultan Al Nuhayyan (32 years, 11 months)
Quasi Democracies			
Iraq	October 2, 2018	President Barham Salih (8 months)	President Fuad Masum (4 years, 2 months)
	October 25, 2018	Prime Minister Adel Abdel-Mehdi (7 months)	Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi (4 years, 1 month)

Country	Date of ascendance	Current leader (years in office)	Previous leader (years in office)
Israel	July 24, 2014	President Reuven Rivlin (4 years, 10 months)	President Shimon Peres (7 years)
	March 31, 2009	Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (10 years, 2 months)	Prime Minister Ehud Olmert (3 years, 2 months)
Lebanon	October 31, 2016	Acting President Michel Aoun (2 years, 7 months)	No direct predecessor
	December 18, 2016	Prime Minister Saad Hariri (2 years, 5 months)	President Tammam Salam (2 years, 5 months)
Libya	March 30, 2014	Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj (3 years, 2 months)	Prime Minister Abdallah al-Thani* (2 years, 19 days)

Country	Date of ascendance	Current leader (years in office)	Previous leader (years in office)
Turkey	August 28, 2014	President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (4 years, 9 months)	President Abdallah Gül (7 years)
	N/A	Prime Minister position abolished June 2018	Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım (2 years, 1 month)
Tunisia	December 31, 2014	President Beji Caid Essebsi (4 years, 5 months)	President Moncef Marzouki (2 years, 1 month)
Yemen (united in 1990)	February 27, 2012	President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi (7 years, 3 months)	<p>President Ali Abdallah Salih (21 years, 9 months; leader of North Yemen 1978–1990)</p> <p>(Former one-party regime)</p>
Islamic Republic			

Country	Date of ascendance	Current leader (years in office)	Previous leader (years in office)
Iran	June 4, 1989	Supreme Leader Ali Hosseini Khamenei (30 years)	Supreme Leader Ruhollah Mousavi Khomeini (9 years, 6 months)
	August 3, 2013	President Hassan Rouhani (5 years, 10 months)	President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (8 years)

Source: Author's records, December 2018.

Note: Bold denotes cases which at the time of coding were engaged in civil war.

* Internationally recognized until March 2016.

Box 3.2 Classifying Regimes

There are many different ways to classify regimes. Some focus on the degree of freedom and inclusion of everyday citizens in politics. For instance, Robert Dahl's classic book, *Polyarchy*, classified regimes according to the degree of contestation and participation, with closed hegemonies at one end of the spectrum and polyarchies at the other.¹ More recent scholarship on hybrid regimes (e.g., regimes that are nondemocratic yet allow for significant freedom and contestation) or advocates of ranking systems such as that employed by Freedom House take this approach as well.² A second perspective focuses on the sociological basis of rulers and their supporters. Barrington Moore's seminal study, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, considered how class relations could underpin the development of different regime types.³ Subsequent scholars distinguish, for instance, peasant-military alliances from urban bourgeoisie or military rule and

consider this as a basis for distinguishing regimes.⁴ A third approach emphasizes the nature of executive power, focusing on patrimonialist or sultanistic regimes (e.g., regimes in which all power flows directly from the leader). A fourth view emphasizes institutional arrangements. This focus on institutional arrangements to distinguish regime dates back to Aristotle, who distinguished among regimes with one, few, and many rulers. The emphasis on institutions may be particularly appealing because rules of the game may be more malleable than factors such as resource endowments or the sociological basis of ruling coalitions.

Scholars (including Aristotle) combine institutional arrangements with other factors. Two recent and influential coding schemes demonstrate this. Barbara Geddes and her colleagues created a typology that combines institutional structures and a focus on actors who emphasize “control over access to power and influence,” thus distinguishing among military, personalist, and single-party regimes.⁵ Focusing more on the institutional rules of the regime, Jose Cheibub, Jennifer Gandhi, and James Vreeland set forth a typology that distinguishes among parliamentary, semipresidential, and presidential democracies⁶ and monarchic, military, and civilian dictatorships.

It is worth noting that the distinction between civilian and military dictatorships may not be as significant in explaining outcomes as the typology suggests. For instance, Bjørnskov and Rode (building from Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland) consider Algeria to be a civilian dictatorship while they viewed Egypt, even before 2011, as a military dictatorship. However, as Lahouari Addi explains in [Chapter 9](#), the military plays a significant role in Algeria, while in Egypt the military played a key role in overthrowing President Mubarak in 2011, despite the fact that Mubarak hailed from the military himself. Yet more importantly, there is quite a bit of disagreement over the classification of regimes. In the previous example in 2010, while Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland classified Algeria as a civilian and Egypt as a military dictatorship, respectively, Geddes, Wright, and Frantz⁷ characterized Algeria as a military regime and Egypt as a party-personal-military hybrid. Similar contradictions are seen in [Table 3.2](#). For example, Bjørnskov and Rode code Lebanon as a civilian dictatorship, Magaloni et al. code it as a multiparty autocracy, Freedom House sees the regime as partly free, and Varieties of Democracy calls it an electoral autocracy. As a result of such disagreements, regimes that are apparently similar in one coding scheme are viewed as distinct in another. For instance, Bjørnskov and Rode and Magaloni et al. view Lebanon and Libya as

similar regimes, while Varieties of Democracy see them as very distinct. It is important for students of politics to keep this in mind when using these indicators and to employ robustness checks across different datasets when undertaking research.⁸

[1.](#) Robert Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971).

[2.](#) Larry Diamond, "Thinking about Hybrid Regimes," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 21–35; Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 51–65.

[3.](#) Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966). On the Middle East, see also Haim Gerber, *Social Origins of the Modern Middle East* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1994).

[4.](#) H. E. Chehabi and Juan J. Linz, eds., *Sultanistic Regimes* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Juan J. Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2000); Gero Erdmann and Ulf Engel, "Neopatrimonialism Reconsidered: Critical Review and Elaboration of an Elusive Concept," *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 45, no. 1 (February 2007): 95–119.

[5.](#) Barbara Geddes, "What Do We Know about Democratization after Twenty Years?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 2 (June 1999): 123.

[6.](#) A democracy is presidential if the government is not responsible to the legislative assembly, and it is parliamentary if it is. It is semipresidential if it is responsible to the legislative assembly, but there is an elected head of state with a fixed term in office.

[7.](#) Barbara Geddes, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz, "Autocratic Breakdown and Regime Transitions: A New Data Set," *Perspectives on Politics* 12, no. 2 (2014): 313–31.

[8.](#) For more discussion, see Hans Lueders and Ellen Lust, "Multiple Measurements, Elusive Agreement, and Unstable Outcomes in the Study of Regime Change," *Journal of Politics* 80, no. 2 (April 2018): 736–41.

Despite the tendency of MENA regimes to be authoritarian, there is important variation in regimes of the region. It is wrong to presume, as is often done, that the entire MENA region is nondemocratic (and destined to remain so). It is also problematic to think that the only important distinction between regimes is that which separates democracies from autocracies. Institutional arrangements that distinguish autocracies from each other and those that do similarly in democracies are also consequential. There are many ways to characterize regimes, as described in [Table 3.2](#).

Table 3.2 Classification of MENA Regimes

Table 3.2 Classification of MENA Regimes

	Classifying authorities			
Country	Christian Bjørnskov and Martin Rode (2018) (Classification in 2012, for comparison with Magaloni)	Magaloni et al. (end of 2012)	Freedom House (2018)	Varieties of Democracy, Regimes of the World (RoW) 2017
Algeria	Civilian dictatorship	Multiparty autocracy	Not free	Electoral autocracy
Bahrain	Royal dictatorship	Monarchy	Not free	N/A
Egypt	Military dictatorship (Military dictatorship)	Multiparty autocracy	Not free	Electoral autocracy

	Classifying authorities			
Iran	Civilian dictatorship	Single-party autocracy	Not free	Electoral autocracy
Iraq	Military dictatorship (Military dictatorship)	Multiparty autocracy	Not free	Electoral autocracy
Israel	Parliamentary democracy	Democracy	Free	Electoral democracy
Jordan	Royal dictatorship	Monarchy	Partly free	Closed autocracy
Kuwait	Royal dictatorship	Monarchy	Partly free	Closed autocracy
Lebanon	Civilian dictatorship (Civilian dictatorship)	Multiparty autocracy	Partly free	Electoral democracy
Libya	Civilian dictatorship (Civilian dictatorship)	Multiparty autocracy	Not free	Closed autocracy
Morocco	Royal dictatorship	Monarchy	Partly free	Closed autocracy
Oman	Royal dictatorship	Monarchy	Not free	Closed autocracy

	Classifying authorities			
Palestine	N/A	N/A	Gaza Strip: Not free West Bank: Not free	Closed autocracy
Qatar	Royal dictatorship	Monarchy	Not free	Closed autocracy
Saudi Arabia	Royal dictatorship	Monarchy	Not free	Closed autocracy
South Sudan	Military dictatorship (Military dictatorship)	Multiparty autocracy	Not free	Closed autocracy
Sudan	Military dictatorship (Military dictatorship)	Multiparty autocracy	Not free	Electoral autocracy
Syria	Military dictatorship	Military	Not free	Closed autocracy
Tunisia	Presidential democracy (Presidential democracy)	Multiparty autocracy	Free	Electoral democracy

Classifying authorities				
Turkey	Civilian dictatorship (Mixed democratic)	Democracy	Not free	Electoral autocracy
United Arab Emirates	Royal dictatorship	Monarchy	Not free	N/A
Yemen	Military dictatorship (Military dictatorship)	Multiparty autocracy	Not free	Closed autocracy

Sources:

- Christian Bjørnskov and Martin Rode, *Regime Types and Regime Change: A New Dataset* (August 18, 2018), <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3234263> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3234263>, <http://www.christianbjoernskov.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Codebook-BR-dataset.pdf>.
 - Regime category coding follows Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland (2010): *parliamentary democracies, mixed democracies (with weak presidents), presidential democracies, civilian autocracies, military dictatorships, and royal dictatorships*.
- Beatriz Magaloni, Jonathan Chu, and Eric Min, *Autocracies of the World, 1950–2012 (Version 1.0)* (Stanford University, 2013), <https://fsi-live.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/res/Codebook.pdf>.
 - Coding: *monarchy, military, single-party autocracy, multiparty autocracy, democracy*
- Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2018*, https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FH_FITW_Report_2018_Final_SinglePage.pdf.
 - Coding, according to Freedom House: “Each country and territory is assigned between 0 and 4 points on a series of 25 indicators, for an aggregate score of up to 100. These scores are used to determine two numerical ratings, with 1 representing the most free conditions and 7 the

least free. A country or territory's political rights and civil liberties ratings then determine whether it has an overall status of *free*, *partly free*, or *not free*.”

4. Anna Lührmann, Marcus Tannenberg, and Staffan Lindberg, *Regimes of the World (RoW): Opening New Avenues for the Comparative Study of Political Regimes. Politics and Governance*, 2018, <https://www.v-dem.net/files/5/Regimes%20of%20the%20World%20-%20Final.pdf>; M. Coppedge et al., *V-Dem Codebook v7.1*. (Gothenburg: Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project, 2017a).

- Coding: This indicator is aimed to answer this question: How can the political regime overall be classified, considering the competitiveness of access to power (polyarchy) as well as liberal principles? Classifications include *closed autocracy*, *electoral autocracy*, *electoral democracy*, *liberal democracy*.

In this section, we take an institutional approach. We examine variations in regime type, considering commonalities among regimes of the same type as well as their differences. We focus on the historical evolution of MENA regimes, their bases of support, strategy of rule, and sources of threat to incumbent elites.

Monarchies

The contemporary MENA hosts more monarchies than any other region and the majority of the world's absolute monarchies.

Monarchies are distinguished by the fact that hereditary rule is the legitimate form of transfer for executive power, and they thus rely on family networks to determine succession. It is not always the oldest male family member who assumes power (in other words, primogeniture is not a universal rule), but when succession is not determined by birth order, potential ascendants must be a member of the family and vetted by other family members in order to take the throne. The throne comes with enormous power. Unlike the constitutional monarchies found in much of Europe today—where law, constitutions, and democratically elected parliaments constrain kings and queens—in the absolute monarchies of the MENA region, rulers enjoy relatively unconstrained sovereignty.

Emergence of Monarchies

As Lisa Anderson has argued, MENA monarchies are not relics of an ancient past or an extension of historical caliphates, but instead are nineteenth- and twentieth-century institutions much more suited for and resilient to the strains of contemporary rule than one may first expect.²⁷ As states obtained independence in the twentieth-century MENA, the vast majority of them came to be ruled by hereditary monarchs. In many cases, kings—backed by Western powers—inherited the state at independence. In Egypt, for instance, the ruling family was of direct descent from Mehmet Ali (in Arabic, Muhammad Ali), who had been given control over Egypt in return for withdrawing his threat to the Ottoman sultan during the 1840 pacification of the Levant (see [Chapter 1](#)). By the early twentieth century, Egypt had fallen into debt and was increasingly dependent on the British, for whom the Egyptian ruling family provided a convenient, loyal ally. Similar arrangements existed in Iraq and Jordan, where Hashemite kingdoms were established in the wake of World War I as a

“consolation prize” for Sharif Hussein, whose ambitions to gain a greater Arab kingdom the Europeans curtailed. In Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, and small Gulf states, ruling families emerged from families who had worked closely with their French, Italian, and British protectors, respectively. Even in Saudi Arabia and Iran, where emerging leaders mobilized somewhat more independently, the establishment of the ruling families gained British and, later, US support.

Bases of Support

Monarchs derive power from several sources. They enjoy formal institutional guarantees of immunity vis-à-vis their subjects. For example, Article 54 of Kuwait’s constitution states that the “Emir is the Head of the State. His person is immune and inviolable.” Monarchs hold similarly expansive powers in Morocco and Jordan, despite constitutional reforms taken in the wake of the Arab uprisings. Morocco’s 2011 constitution defines the king as “commander of the faithful” and head of state (Article 41), assures that the “person of the king inviolable, and respect is due to him” and provides him immunity (Article 46).²⁸ Similarly, Article 30 of the Jordanian constitution dictates that “the King is the Head of the State and is immune from any liability and responsibility.”

Monarchs sit above parliaments, where they exist. Parliamentarians take an oath of allegiance not only to the state but also to the king. Kings can dismiss cabinets, parliaments, and ministers swiftly and without legal recourse, discussion, debate, or deliberation;²⁹ and, when necessary, they can pass legislation by decree. Moreover, the elected representatives’ subordinate position is clearly demonstrated through the members’ oaths. For instance, in the Jordanian constitution, Article 80 specifies the member’s oath as, “I swear by Almighty God to be loyal to the King and to the country, uphold the Constitution, serve the Nation and conscientiously perform the duties entrusted to me.”

They also derive power from historical, hereditary, religious, and procedural legitimacy. Legitimacy is difficult to see or measure, but it is potentially powerful. Think of it as the “discount rate” of rule achieved when people believe that the rulers have the right to govern. Monarchs tend to emphasize legitimacy of the royal family, often in terms of historical legitimacy or a unique relationship with God (for example, the commander of the faithful in Morocco, the custodian of the two holy mosques in Saudi Arabia, and the descendant of the Prophet Muhammad in Jordan). We should not overestimate the role of legitimacy in maintaining rule, and one can question whether it is legitimacy or other factors, such as oil rents or repression, which keep rulers in power. Yet an example from Morocco helps to illustrate how religious legitimacy can help strengthen monarchies. On July 10, 1971, the Moroccan military reacted to the growing national unrest by mounting a coup attempt during a party at the king’s palace in Skhirat. The king, invoking his role as commander of the faithful, asked the dissident troops to join him in prayer. The troops—apparently reminded of the king’s special status—abandoned their cause.³⁰

Importantly, a popular mandate is not a source of legitimacy in monarchies, and palace politics are thus isolated from participatory politics. In Jordan and Morocco, members of the royal family do not run for parliamentary seats; and in Kuwait, the al-Sabahs can neither vote nor run for seats in the National Assembly.³¹ In short, monarchs in the contemporary MENA enjoy a status more akin to the divine right of rulers in medieval Europe than to contemporary European royalty.

Strategies of Rule

Monarchs have also devised a set of strategies of rule by which they attempt to contain potential opposition. These include the rules governing the distribution of key positions within the system, as well as divide-and-rule strategies and controlled liberalization. We find considerable variation in the rules governing the distribution of

power, but rather similar attempts to divide-and-rule and undertake political liberalization when necessary.

Some monarchies have devised dynastic systems that help stabilize their regime. In dynastic monarchies, the top government positions, including cabinet portfolios, the military, and other leading posts, are reserved for members of the ruling family, while in nondynastic monarchies, members outside the ruling families hold the key portfolios. As Michael Herb points out, this creates very different incentives for members of the ruling family and inner circles of government to remain loyal to the ruler.³² In dynasties, members of the royal family are heavily invested in maintaining the regime. They may disagree over the direction of foreign policy, succession, or other key issues, but they ultimately find ways to compromise and maintain their family rule rather than risk losing control.³³ Family members benefit in nondynasties as well, but they are less likely to see their personal success as fundamentally tied to maintaining the dynasty. Moreover, those who hold these key positions can often imagine doing well in another regime because their position is not dependent on their bloodline. In short, it is easier to buy the loyalty of members of the ruling family—who believe their options are limited if the family loses power—than it is to buy the loyalty of powerful elites who are not closely tied to the regime.

Monarchs also employ a divide-and-rule strategy to overcome threats. They benefit from emphasizing political competition and division rather than popular unity and thus foster social and ideological divisions. By doing so, they establish themselves as a crucial “moderator” among competing forces. As Alan Richards and John Waterbury explain,

What the monarchs want is a plethora of interests, tribal, ethnic, professional, class based, and partisan, whose competition for public patronage they can arbitrate. None of these elements can be allowed to become too powerful or

wealthy, and the monarch will police and repress or entice and divide.³⁴

Thus, monarchies tend to exacerbate divisions among various groups in the population, such as those between citizens and noncitizens in Kuwait, citizens of East Bank and Palestinian origin in Jordan,³⁵ or Amazighs and Arabs in Morocco. They also promote divisions in and among parties in order to keep them weak and divided.

Monarchs can employ controlled liberalization in the hope of depressing opposition, and they can do so in a manner that promotes their importance in the political system. By bringing the various parties together to form national pacts, as seen in the Jordanian National Charter (Mithaq al-Watani), the Moroccan constitutional reforms of 1972, and the Jiddah Compact, monarchs both appear to grant concessions and reinforce their role as supreme arbitrator. Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany, and Paul Noble conclude: "What is interesting about the monarchies is that they appear to be in a position to establish many of these rules and to thereby act simultaneously as both interested players and far-from-impartial umpires in the political reform process."³⁶

One-Party Regimes: Single-Party and Dominant-Party Types

One-party regimes are also prevalent in the MENA, and we find them in two types: single-party and dominant-party regimes. Single-party regimes have a “vanguard party” that officially dominates political power. Smaller parties sometimes are allowed to participate in politics if they accept the ruling party’s role and rules, but they have little power. Dominant-party regimes allow for the participation of multiple parties and theoretically permit alternation in power; however, the dominant party monopolizes power. It makes the rules of the game, determines who is permitted to compete, and enjoys disproportionate control over resources. Thus, single- and dominant-party regimes have much in common.

Pathways to One-Party Regimes

By the end of the twentieth century, one-party regimes had emerged across much of the region. They came to power via three historical pathways: emergence through revolution, military coups, and transitions between dominant- and single-party regimes. Exploring these paths illuminates distinctions between these regimes and also suggests that the civilian-military distinction may not be particularly helpful, at least not in the contemporary MENA. In other regions, such as Latin America, militaries that came to power often ruled collectively through military juntas. In the MENA, military rulers gradually established one-party regimes.

The first set of one-party regimes emerged from struggles for independence. In a study of 169 countries covering the period from 1950 through 2006, Beatriz Magaloni and Ruth Kricheli found that 28.36 percent of one-party regimes were established after periods of anarchy, including independence wars.³⁷ Forty years earlier, Samuel Huntington examined the emergence of one-party regimes from independence movements, arguing that “the more intense and

prolonged the struggle and the deeper its ideological commitment, the greater the political stability of the one-party system.”³⁸ In the MENA, such regimes emerged in Tunisia and Algeria, following the independence struggles against the French which helped establish the national movements that emerged into ruling parties: the Destour (Constitutional) Party in Tunisia (which later became the Neo-Destour Party) and the National Liberation Front (FLN) in Algeria. In these cases, party structures were established before independence.

The second pathway to one-party regimes was emergence through military coups, sometimes in partnership with political parties. Again, this is fairly common; Magaloni and Kricheli found that military dictatorships led to the founding of 33.33 percent of dominant-party regimes and 23.33 percent of single-party regimes. In Iraq and Syria, for instance, military leaders who were the major force behind the regime transformations were loosely allied with the leaders of the Ba’ath Party. The regimes transformed into Ba’athist regimes, and party structures came to play an important role in politics. In other cases, most notably Egypt, the military took power and sought to establish a dominant party as a means of control. Doing so was not necessarily easy. Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser struggled to establish a ruling party. He first established the Egyptian National Union in 1957 (five years after the Free Officers revolution) and then renamed it the Arab Socialist Union in 1962 in one of many efforts to revitalize the party system.

The third means of transition in MENA one-party states has been the shift from single-party to dominant-party regimes, and vice versa. When ruling elites found themselves under attack, they sometimes chose to open space for opposition parties, allowing them greater freedom of participation; when they became more secure, they constricted the political space once again. Globally, 63.33 percent of dominant-party regimes from 1950 through 2006 transitioned to single-party regimes, and 25.33 percent of single-party regimes transitioned to dominant-party regimes.³⁹

Egypt illustrates the transition from a single-party to dominant-party regime. Following the assassination of President Anwar al-Sadat in 1981, the newly inaugurated president, Hosni Mubarak, allowed multiparty elections for the national legislature while he simultaneously clamped down on Islamist opposition. In 2005, facing regional instability, opposition, and concerns about regime succession, he called the first multiparty elections for the presidency. The Egyptian system went from one in which there was a vanguard party to one in which several parties compete, but until the fall of Mubarak in 2011, the governing National Democratic Party enjoyed clear dominance.

Bases of Support

Ruling elites in one-party systems may seem to have unlimited power, but their legitimacy is closely tied to maintaining the appearance of popular support. Unlike monarchs, who sit above the fray of participatory politics, presidents' legitimacy is based largely on their ability to represent the people. They thus often promote state-led development or a nationalist or anti-imperial project to shore up their regime. It is important that the ruling party be seen as embodying the will of the people.

Institutional structures reflect this. Presidents are generally not granted the special privileges and isolation from popular politics that monarchs enjoy. For example, Tunisia's constitution under President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali mentioned neither executive immunity nor scrutiny. Members of parliament took oaths of allegiance to the state, but not to the head of state.⁴⁰ Legislatures also generally have more *formal* authority than their counterparts in the monarchies.⁴¹ In reality, however, presidents often gain extraconstitutional powers by declaring a state of emergency and their monopoly over resources to ensure that legislatures are packed with supporters.

Strategies of Rule

One-party regimes take a different approach than monarchies to shore up their regime. Building ruling parties and legislatures is itself a strategy of rule and one that scholars have consistently found makes regimes more durable.⁴² In addition, when necessary, ruling elites turn to political liberalization in an attempt to strengthen their regime in times of crisis. As we shall see, however, the logic of one-party regimes makes such liberalization a more difficult tactic than it is in monarchies.

Three points should be kept in mind as we discuss the role of ruling parties. First, one must remember that many of the efforts to establish ruling parties were made between the 1950s and the 1970s, when the Soviet Union was a major power and socialist-oriented, state-led development was a widely accepted strategy for newly independent states. In many ways, the enthusiasm for one-party regimes mirrored that for democracies in the 1990s. The function of political parties was to mobilize resources and channel activities in solving the twin problems of governance and development that plagued the new states; it was not to provide an arena for political competition. Second, not all governing elites have invested equally in developing the ruling party, and nowhere in the MENA did ruling parties achieve the organizational strength that they did in communist China and the USSR. Third, and relatedly, politics became increasingly personalized in these regimes. The Baathist revolution in Syria, for example, evolved toward the personalistic regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, and of Hafiz al-Asad, and subsequently his son Bashar, in Syria. In Tunisia, Bourguiba and then Ben Ali dominated the ruling party, called first the Neo-Destour and then the Constitutional Democratic Assembly (RCD). The personal leadership of the president and the president's closest associates became far more important in determining the distribution of resources within society than the organizational structures and internal politics of the ruling party.

Nevertheless, the establishment of party organizations may help sustain authoritarian regimes. Parties do this first by helping to alleviate internal conflict among elites. The party can also provide a

source of recruitment and socialization for emerging elites, giving them space within the existing regime. Ruling parties, and the legislatures associated with them, also provide an arena for the distribution of patronage and the co-optation of elites. Furthermore, they can be a mechanism through which demands are voiced—within boundaries—and limited policy concessions can be made. Finally, they can provide a mechanism through which mass support can be mobilized. This can help to tie citizens (particularly in the rural areas) to the regime, and the party also provides a base of support that can be mobilized in the face of potential threats to the regime.⁴³

Political parties—and the accompanying legislatures and elections—serve to reduce the pressures on ruling elites, but they also tie presidents to participatory institutions, which may make attempts at controlled liberalization more difficult. In contrast to the monarchs who direct political liberalization from above the fray, presidents must compete in popular politics. Thus, during liberalization, presidents must compete in elections (albeit as participants who hold the reins of power) and risk the chance of being overthrown. Consequently, there is reason to believe that liberalization is more difficult for presidents and that it calls for different tactics. Instead of creating a political system in which competing forces will emerge, presidents need to develop a system that strengthens their own party and weakens opponents.

Military Regimes

The MENA region also hosts military regimes, in which military officers take power and rule. The prevalence of military regimes depends, in part, on how one defines these regimes. As Geddes, Wright, and Frantz argue, there are three usages of the term *military regime*. The most inclusive simply refers to an autocracy led by a military officer.⁴⁴ As Magaloni puts it, “The key distinctive trait of military regimes is that the armed forces control access to the principal positions of power,” and even if political parties exist, “the dictator and his critical ruling coalition share power through the institution of the armed forces rather than the party.”⁴⁵ In this view, Egypt under Mubarak and Tunisia under Ben Ali were military regimes. A second perspective focuses on the role of the military as an institution; military regimes are those in which a military *junta*, or organization, rules. For instance, Egypt under General Neguib, following the Free Officers revolution, was a military regime but Mubarak’s Egypt was not. A third type, which they call the “military strongman,” exists when power is held in the hands of a single military officer. Syria under Asad or Egypt under Nasser or Sisi are examples of such regimes.

Strategies of Rule: The Emergence and Evolution of Military Regimes

It may seem relatively easy to identify the emergence of a military regime, but the ways by which they come into power and evolve can make them much more difficult to detect than one might expect. Military regimes emerge when officers take power. These are often dramatic events, such as military tanks rolling through the streets of the capital city or officers taking over means of communication. It could also be a military declaration to “restore order,” particularly after people have taken to the streets in protest. Such was the case on July 3, 2013, when General Sisi, flanked by Egyptian notables across the political spectrum, declared President Morsi’s removal.

The debate then ensued over whether or not this was a military coup.

Similar ambiguities arise as military regimes evolve. Military officers may choose to build a ruling party, as Nasser did in Egypt, or to establish a multiparty system, as Ataturk did in Turkey. They may also consolidate personal power, as Hafez al-Asad did in Syria. It is not entirely clear under which conditions they can wrest control from other military leaders or the extent to which establishing these institutions limits the military control. Indeed, these are interesting questions to be studied. It is clear, however, that these institutional changes make it much more difficult to identify military regimes than one may expect.

Challenges and Implications

Military regimes appear brittle. In her classic 1999 study, Geddes found that military regimes were the least durable, although they were more likely to extricate themselves from rule through elections or other “uncoerced” means. It appeared that military leaders were less able to withstand the challenges of collective rule and more likely to return to the barracks. Although it was not the focus of her study, it was also possible that those leaders who succeeded in overcoming these challenges did so by transitioning to personalistic or party rule. These were no longer “military regimes” in her early classification, but the leaders had nevertheless remained in power—that is, there were two ways for military juntas to overcome their challenges, either by relinquishing power or by consolidating it through a personalist or party regime.

Distinguishing military regimes that rule collectively from those in which the military officer concentrates power in his own hands sheds important light on the nature of military rule. A regime that rules through a military collective, which Geddes and her colleagues call a “military regime,” is likely to be short-lived, extricate itself from rule without conflict, and have a better chance at establishing democracy. A regime that is ruled through a military strongman, on the other

hand, is likely to be ousted through uprisings or invasions and to usher in another era of autocracy.⁴⁶

This has important lessons for understanding the trajectories of regimes in the MENA. Mubarak's Egypt, as well as Asad's Syria, could be understood as military strongmen. In this view, it was unsurprising that these leaders' tenure resulted in uprising. The current Sisi regime is in the process of consolidating power. If Sisi continues to consolidate a personalistic regime, the likelihood of the military choosing to withdraw from power peacefully is low and the prospects for democracy dim. If he fails in this effort, the prospects for withdrawal and democracy improve.

Islamic Republic

The Islamic Republic of Iran is a unique regime in the region, incorporating elements of monarchic and republican rule. Iran's institutional arrangements were intended to shape revolutionary change after the 1979 overthrow of Western-oriented Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. The regime is best known as the world's only Shiite theocracy. It has been an explicit, revolutionary attempt to create a regime based on Islam.

Institutionally, the Islamic Republic of Iran has a dual-government structure: One side includes the popularly elected executive and legislative branches, while the second includes unelected bodies aimed at guarding the Islamic nature of the regime. In [Chapter 11](#), Mehrzad Boroujerdi discusses the regime in more detail, but what is critical to note is that the unelected leadership is more powerful than the elected bodies—that is, the supreme leader is more powerful than the president; the Guardian Council and the Expediency Council play more important roles than the parliament. This is well illustrated by the simple fact that candidates for the parliament and presidency must be first vetted by the Guardian Council. No one who would violate what is deemed as legitimate for an Islamic republic can run for office, let alone win.

Within these limits, however, there has generally been a great deal of competition, transparency, and accountability. The mechanisms that we often associate with good governance in democracies are not entirely absent in Iran, nor are they fully assured. The elections of the summer of 2009, in which there was significant contestation over the extent to which the balloting was free and fair and the subsequent electoral results were legitimate, clearly illustrate the limitations of the regime. The contestation curtailed daily progress and development, bringing the regime to deal with upheaval long after the polls had closed.

Importantly, while the ruling elites in Iran purposefully attempted to fashion a distinct regime, the Iranian regime has some elements of monarchic rule. Like monarchies, the clerical rule is based on religious legitimacy. Moreover, the clerics stand above the fray of participatory politics and thus can manage a more open arena of political competition. Moreover, although it is based on an Islamic model, the details of the model and the mechanisms of rule are themselves often contested. The regime is thus less unique than it may initially appear.

Quasi Democracies

The MENA is also home to regimes that, either currently or recently, fit the *procedural* or *minimalist* view of democracy. Each falls short of liberal democracy in important ways, and as shown in [Table 3.2](#), analysts may disagree about applying the label *democracy* to the regime. Nevertheless, Israel, Lebanon, Tunisia, and Turkey (until around 2015) may be described as quasi democracies.

Before examining the nature of democracies in the region, it is useful to note that these cases illustrate the distinction between regime type, state strength, and political stability. Democracies, like strong states and political stability, are believed to enhance governance. Many thus mistakenly conclude that these three factors go hand in hand. Yet the countries discussed here have very different levels of state strength and political stability. Israel is a relatively strong, stable state; Lebanon is weak and unstable; and Tunisia, with a relatively new regime, faces continued challenges. In short, it is important to keep in mind that regime type, state strength, and stability are separate factors.

Emergence of Quasi Democracies

As Dankwart Rustow reminded us long ago, democracy can be born out of hotly contested “family feuds,” wherein the bargain of democracy is preferred to the near uncertainty of political conflict. For him, it was primarily a domestic conflict that mattered. When individuals see themselves as part of the same community (e.g., nationalism is developed) but have divergent preferences, they can create democratic institutions that allow them to resolve differences in the short run and maintain the chance to win in the future.⁴⁷ Yet in much of the MENA region, international forces have played an important role in shaping institutions.

In some cases, the international influences have been primarily through demonstration effects, wherein ideals of successful

arrangements in the West encouraged the adoption of democratic institutions. For instance, Israel was a settler state, with many of its founding leaders coming from democratic states in Western Europe. Often considered the only liberal democratic regime in the region, it strove to be a “Jewish, democratic state” since its establishment in 1948, developing a vibrant party system, civil society, and freedom of speech, press, and association, as well as an active and influential parliament. The formation of the Turkish Republic in 1923 was formed in part out of emulation of the West. Mustafa Kemal, a military officer known as Atatürk (Father of the Turks), was determined to establish a modern, secular, Western-oriented regime in the seat of the former Ottoman Empire. In the twentieth century, Turkey evolved toward democracy, albeit with a series of interruptions. The 1924 constitution (and more than twenty subsequent versions) established Turkey as a parliamentary system, with an elected president, parliament, prime minister, and an independent judiciary. The extent of competition steadily increased in Turkey, with an initial period of single-party dominance followed by a multiparty period after World War II. More recently, Turkey has witnessed a remarkable centralization of power in the hands of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, drawing into question whether Turkey is accurately described as a “democracy” (see [Chapter 24](#)).

Exposure to the West also played a role in the establishment of a democratic system in Lebanon. Lebanon developed a confessional, semipresidential democracy. It is confessional because it is a system that is established to guarantee representation to various groups in society (an arrangement called *consociationalism*, which is sometimes seen as a solution for social tensions in deeply divided societies) and one in which the divisions and representational guarantees are based on religious sect. It is semipresidential because it holds elections for a president, as well as parliament with a prime minister.

Both confessionalism and semipresidentialism are often critiqued as systems that are highly volatile and fragile, but at the time, it also seemed a reasonable solution to the conflict between Lebanese

sectarian groups over the nature and boundaries of the Lebanese state. Christian Maronites strongly preferred that Lebanon remain an independent entity with French support, while Sunni Muslims advocated Lebanese unification with Syria. The result was a compromise solution embodied in the National Pact: Lebanon was to be an independent country (*not* unified with Syria) with an Arab (*not* French) orientation, but the institutional arrangements would guarantee protection of both Muslim and Christian interests. The president would be a Maronite Christian, the prime minister a Sunni Muslim, the speaker of the house a Shiite, and the distribution of parliamentary seats would be in a ratio of six to five between Christians and Muslims. The ratio reflected the population distribution shown in the 1934 census, the last to be taken in Lebanon.

Strategies of Rule

The strategies of rule in democracies have received less attention than those of autocracies. In part, this may be because there is an implicit assumption that democracies rule by the will of the people, which removes strategies of rule somewhat from consideration. Yet elites in democracies make efforts to maintain democratic regimes in the face of challenges.

One strategy is institutional reform. For instance, in Iraq the 2005 Constitution recognized an Iraqi Kurdistan as an autonomous region, thus alleviating tensions between Kurds and Arabs. Similarly, federalism has been proposed in Libya as a solution to regional tensions, although it failed to be instituted. As already discussed, Lebanon designed a confessional system to assure competing communal groups representation, and it established a dual legal system with both civil and religious courts in order to guarantee individuals the right to adjudicate personal matters in accordance with their religion. These institutions facilitated the installation of democracy, although division of political power along sectarian lines also exacerbated tensions between them.

Even where democratic institutions are established, they are often fragile. Israel and Lebanon face instability and the threat of heightened conflict, and each fails to guarantee free competition and equal participation in decision-making. Turkey has recognized a new constitution that strengthens the role of the presidency, has withdrawn freedoms and liberties, and is considered by most to be no longer democratic. Even Tunisia, the “success story” of the Arab uprisings, faces instability and the threat of autocracy.

Key Institutions

A third strand of scholarship on the region focuses on key institutions within regimes, particularly those associated with democracy: legislatures and political parties, judiciaries, and the media. In this section, we give a brief overview of the role that these institutions are expected to play and the variation in their performance in the MENA region.

Before turning to these institutions, it is important to consider whether they are even meaningful in authoritarian regimes. Many argue they are not, and certainly, it is true that these institutions do not fully determine the outcomes of struggles over resources. In the MENA, as elsewhere, one must look at players and political practices outside the formal political sphere in order to understand politics. However, even in authoritarian regimes, elites both in and out of power debate constitutional amendments that shape executive-legislative relations, argue over electoral rules, critique laws governing the press and publication, and push back against restrictions on political parties. They do so because these institutions matter.⁴⁸

Legislatures

Ideally, legislatures perform four core functions. They provide a mechanism through which the demands of different constituencies within societies are represented and competing ideas contested. They shape public policy through crafting, vetting, and passing legislation. Legislatures oversee the executive branch, ideally to ensure both vertical accountability of rulers to the ruled and horizontal accountability of other government agencies to the legislature. And finally, throughout the world, legislators provide constituency service.⁴⁹ Strong legislatures are potentially important tools for establishing effective governance.⁵⁰

Yet legislatures in much of the region are weak or absent. In one-party regimes, the legislature is closely tied to the regime's legitimacy; eliminating legislatures is thus politically costly for the ruling party, but incumbents use electoral rules and political manipulation to ensure that the legislature is comprised primarily of members from the ruling party. In monarchies, legitimacy is not closely tied to the performance of a ruling party, so it is less politically costly to rule without functioning legislatures. Both Jordan and Morocco have experienced long stretches of time when the parliament was disbanded; Qatar elected its first parliament only in 2013; and as of 2018, Saudi Arabia still did not have an elected legislature. One might expect that quasi democracies would have strong, functioning legislatures, but even here, we find weaknesses. Lebanon, for instance, postponed legislative elections from 2009 to 2018, leading many to argue during that time that the sitting parliament lacked legitimacy.

Where legislatures do exist, they are often highly constrained. Many have no significant input into the formation of government. This is true even in nominally parliamentary monarchies, where members of parliament (MPs) should, technically, influence the choice of prime minister and the government. For example, in Jordan the king appoints the prime minister, who then appoints the government. In Morocco, since 2011, the king must choose the prime minister from

the party holding the most parliamentary seats, and the parliament can give a vote of no confidence on the government. However, the fact that kings can dissolve the government and parliament at any time puts parliament in a subordinate position. Similarly, in one-party regimes parliaments can and have been restricted by declaring emergency powers. Moreover, in some cases the legislature can only debate those laws that have been presented to it. In other cases, the lower house may propose legislation, but an appointed upper house holds veto power.

MENA legislators are often poorly equipped to meet the tasks of legislation. Many legislatures have low incumbency rates due in part to weak and fragmented party systems, discussed later in this chapter.⁵¹ Legislators often have little or no policymaking experience and lack competent staff, efficient technology, and organizational structures that allow them to form committees, draft legislation, or provide oversight of the executive. At the same time, legislators often benefit directly from their positions, making them less willing to challenge the system. Holding office brings prestige and personal benefits such as cars, drivers, direct access to the government bureaucracy that doles out public contracts, and often immunity from prosecution. These perks can be enormously lucrative. For instance, a businessman may use his connections with the ministries to bypass import duties, to obtain preferential treatment, or to win bids for public contracts worth huge sums of money.⁵²

Citizens also tend to reward legislators who focus on constituency service rather than lawmaking and executive oversight. Where there is little bureaucratic transparency, accomplishing seemingly simple bureaucratic tasks—obtaining licenses or building permits, for example—requires not simply finding the right government office, filling out forms, and paying a fee, but often finding the right person to exert personal influence on one's behalf, helping to “walk” the issue through the office.⁵³ Given legislators' contacts with government, their ability to (threaten to) use the floor of the legislature, and their access to media to call into question officials' performance if they don't respond, legislators are particularly well

placed to perform these tasks. Consequently, some refer to the legislators as *na'ib khidma* (service deputies), charged with providing services rather than legislating or overseeing the executive.

In short, for many, parliament is a service organization, not a legislative body, and elections are a competition over access to a pool of state resources, not struggles over policymaking or the rules of the game. Voters want legislators who can deliver the goods and services. Legislators, recognizing that their success is tied to meeting such needs and benefiting from their positions, have little incentive to push for reforms that would expand the legislative powers and enhance accountability.

Political Parties and Party Systems

Political parties and party systems can also be key institutions. Strong political parties are characterized by programmatic platforms that reflect relative agreement of members over policy bundles; close ties and communication with the citizens; avenues for democratic leadership, decision-making, and mobility within the party; financial resources; and a fair degree of party stability and longevity.⁵⁴ Strong party systems are characterized by moderate fragmentation (neither too many nor too few parties), low polarization (parties not spread too widely across the political spectrum), and high institutionalization (stable, depersonalized, and embedded within the system).⁵⁵

Yet many MENA countries contain weak political parties. In monarchies such as Jordan and Morocco, this may not be surprising. The monarch does not rely on a strong political party to legitimize his rule. That political parties are weak in democracies is somewhat more surprising since elections and political parties are intimately tied to determining the highest political offices. Here too, however, the political-party system suffers from personalization, as in Lebanon. Perhaps most surprising is the fact that the one-party states often suffer from weak parties. This is true not only of opposition parties but also of the ruling party. Those who want to succeed professionally or to obtain political perks are virtually required to be party members in countries like Syria. However, these parties are more intent on mobilizing support for the regime than on providing venues for transmitting preferences, facilitating turnover of political elites, and influencing policy. In the decades after these regimes were established, the ideological and programmatic bases of the parties were undermined, and the core organizational structures withered.⁵⁶ Parties functioned mainly as a mechanism for elite control. Thus even in transitioning regimes, the vast majority of parties (with the notable exception of Islamist parties that were closely linked to service-providing organizations) had difficulty providing a conduit of information between elites and masses and failed to mobilize the masses effectively.

Political-party systems are also weak in much of the MENA. Existing parties fragment into new parties, parties disappear, or ruling elites ban parties from politics and encourage others to take their place. This party system fluidity may at first seem to reflect a vibrant political system, but it really demonstrates the system's fragility. It also makes it difficult for citizens to recognize and trust the parties. In fact, in the MENA, citizens often recognize political parties by their leaders and cliques rather than by their platforms and policy positions.

There are several reasons for this. In authoritarian regimes, elites intent on crushing the opposition thwart party development. Incumbents often shape and implement political-party laws in a manner that excludes or weakens potential contenders, at times using rules to drive a wedge between political parties that are given legal status (and thus have an opportunity to access state resources) and those that are not. Where political parties are uniformly permitted or excluded from the political system, the parties are more likely to cooperate, demand greater political reforms, and experience somewhat more stable systems. Where some are included but others excluded, such cooperation between political parties is much less likely.⁵⁷ Finally, the weak role that parliaments play also undermines political parties and the party system. Party labels signal policy preferences, which are important when policymaking is at stake. However, where parliaments play a limited role in policymaking, voters pay little attention to political parties and party platforms, and party leaders have no incentive to develop them. Parties and party systems remain underdeveloped.

Judiciary

An independent judiciary and strong rule of law may play an important role in ensuring human rights, securing property rights, and providing responsive governance. Thomas Carothers defined *rule of law* as “a system in which the laws are public knowledge, are clear in meaning, and apply equally to everyone” and argued that establishing strong rule of law is “a way of pushing patronage-ridden government institutions to better performance, reigning in elected but still only haphazardly law-abiding politicians, and curbing the continued violation of human rights that has characterized many new democracies.”⁵⁸ Similarly, one Egyptian activist argued, “We cannot aspire to have reform without an independent judiciary. . . It is the first and most important block in the reform process.”⁵⁹

The MENA region has a great deal of variation in the Rule of Law and in the locus of rights.⁶⁰ Countries such as Algeria, Iran, Lebanon, and the Palestinian Authority have judiciaries that are often closely tied to and dependent on the ruling elite. Elsewhere, as in Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen, where the reach of the state is limited, nonstate forces often mete out justice. Finally, in a case such as the UAE, the country scores high in rule of law, but rights are extended fully only to those who are UAE citizens—approximately 10 percent of those living in the territory.⁶¹

Judicial independence can vary over time, shaped by political forces. In Egypt, for instance, courts became notably more independent during the three decades preceding Mubarak’s fall. The Supreme Constitutional Court increased the number of rulings it issued from one ruling in 1980, when it upheld the government position, to more than thirty rulings in 2000, two-thirds of which found government decrees unconstitutional.⁶² Tamir Moustafa argues that extending judicial independence, at least initially, served President Mubarak’s needs. The ruling elite, seeking to provide for credible protection of property rights in an era of economic liberalization and to rein in the

corruption and indiscipline of an increasingly unwieldy bureaucracy, could benefit from shifting potentially difficult and polarizing decisions into the courts that were seen as independent.⁶³ As Tarek Masoud explains in [Chapter 10](#), the post-Mubarak period saw a marked decline in the judiciary's reputation and, ultimately, its independence. President Morsi limited the judiciary's oversight abilities through constitutional amendments, and President Sisi has continued to control its purview. Similar rollbacks in judicial independence have been witnessed in Turkey as well. Strengthening rule of law is important, but even where advances are made, they can be reversed.

Media

A well-functioning, independent media can play an important role in providing transparency and constraining ruling elites. Often called the “fourth pillar of democracy,” the media can be the watchdog over the checks-and-balances system among executives, judiciaries, and legislatures. It can sound the alarm in response to abuses of power and ultimately help reduce the possibilities and prevalence of corruption.

Media in much of the MENA became considerably more vibrant in the two decades preceding 2011, owing in part to technological changes. The increased use of satellite television, radio, and the Internet provided important channels of alternative information that were not previously available and helped to create a new public sphere.⁶⁴ It gave voice to opposition forces and, in the eyes of some, played an instrumental role in mobilizing the uprisings. Yet uprisings occurred earliest and with the most force in the MENA countries where Internet usage was least widespread.⁶⁵ It was long-standing grievances—not new media—that brought citizens into the streets to demand change.⁶⁶

The media in much of the region remains restricted. Press and publication laws often set the boundaries within which journalists must act—not writing slanderous or treasonous material, for instance; they do not specify what kinds of material are deemed to cross the red lines. These interpretations are left to the authorities, who are closely tied to the ruling elites. It is also difficult for journalists to demand reforms. Laws governing association and state control over the media as well as press associations limit journalists’ abilities to act collectively. The situation is complicated by the fact that some journalists working within the country are rewarded handsomely for their close association with and support for the ruling elite, while the same closeness between the regime and journalism undermines linkages with external associations.

Understanding Regime Breakdown and Reform

Let us conclude by considering two important, interrelated questions: First, why and when do regimes break down? And second, what explains the nature of the regimes that arise in their place, or as it is more frequently put, why is the region so resistant to (liberal) democracy?

What Explains Regime Breakdown?

Explanations for why increased discontent leads to conflict and regime breakdown in some countries and not others center on four factors: economic factors, regime type, Islam, and external factors. As we turn to each of these, it is important to remember that these are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The breakdown in any country may be a combination of economic factors and the regime, for instance. Moreover, when we consider regime breakdown, we should be aware that we are examining a probabilistic event. There is a great deal of uncertainty and chance affecting when protesters take to the streets, military coups succeed, and regimes are overturned. The questions we ask regard what makes regime breakdown *more or less likely*, and the explanations we examine are *probabilistic, not deterministic*.

Economic Factors

Economic factors are generally understood to affect the breakdown of authoritarianism in three ways. First, economic development, including industrialization, urbanization, and rising standards of living, can spur demands for reform.⁶⁷ Second, economic crises can increase discontent in society, making it easier for members of a political opposition to challenge incumbent authoritarian regimes.⁶⁸ Third, economic resources, and particularly rents obtained from oil, strategic aid, or other resources, can strengthen incumbent elites. They can avoid the need to extract taxes, thus diminishing demands for taxation; can distribute goods and services to society; and can develop a strong security apparatus to repress potential opposition.⁶⁹

This third explanation is often singled out as the most important factor explaining which regimes were destabilized during the 2011 uprisings. Jason Brownlee, Tarek Masoud, and Andrew Reynolds⁷⁰ argue that oil was one of two necessary factors that stabilized some

regimes during the uprisings (the other factor, dynastic rule, will be discussed shortly). Determined to keep their populations from joining in the spreading demands for political reform, Gulf monarchs handed out fistfuls of funds. At least in the short run, they succeeded everywhere but in Bahrain, where economic coffers were less endowed and the Shi'a-Sunni divide is politicized.

Regime Type

Another set of explanations for regime durability or breakdown is situated in the nature of the authoritarian regime. Barbara Geddes turned scholars' attention to the importance of regime type in 1999 when she found that single-party regimes are more stable than military regimes or personalistic dictatorships.⁷¹ The mechanism at work is a matter of debate. Some point to the ability of ruling parties to solve intra-elite conflict,⁷² while others argue that parliaments (often associated with one-party states) provided a mechanism of co-optation and "controlled bargaining" with potential oppositions.⁷³ More recently, scholars have argued that it is revolutionary regimes, which come into power through "conflicts triggered by efforts to carry out radical social change" and subsequently build highly cohesive coalitions, that are extremely durable.⁷⁴ A similar argument about the cohesion of ruling elites is heard with regard to monarchies.⁷⁵

There does appear to be a relationship between regime type and the ability of regimes to survive the Arab uprisings. As shown in [Table 3.3](#), one-party regimes proved brittle in 2011. This stands in contrast to prevailing wisdom that one-party regimes are resilient. It may be explained by the weak political parties and tendency toward personalism in the aging regimes.⁷⁶ A contradiction emerged between these leaders' impulse to ensure the succession of power to their sons, a process referred to as "dynastic republicanism," and the logic of a regime whose legitimacy was based on participatory institutions.⁷⁷ Egypt's president Hosni Mubarak, Yemen's president Ali Abdallah Salih, and Libya's Qadhafi were intent on ensuring that their sons—Gamal Mubarak, Ahmad Salih, and Saif, respectively—

replace them. Many military and other long-standing regime supporters saw the leaders' political maneuvering, aimed at achieving these goals, as simply unacceptable. Because legitimacy is closely tied to ruling parties and electoral institutions in these regimes, the personalization of power undermined the very institutions on which the regime relied.⁷⁸

In contrast, most monarchies saw little mobilization during the Arab uprisings of 2011, and where more substantial uprisings took place—in Oman and Bahrain—they were ended without regime change.⁷⁹ Some scholars argue that the reason for this lies in the fact that the ruling coalition, particularly in dynastic monarchies, depends on the regime's survival and is thus more likely to remain cohesive.⁸⁰ Others call attention to the fact that monarchs can promote democracy while remaining in power; this strengthens reformers, who seek democratization under the king, over radicals, who would seek to overthrow the king, and it divides and weakens opposition movements.⁸¹ A third explanation turns our attention to the role that cultural norms, and the legitimacy of monarchs, can play in depressing mobilization.⁸² A final one, in line with the argument advanced earlier, is that there was no discord between shoring up personal power and strengthening a regime based on hereditary legitimacy.

Table 3.3 Regime Type, Mobilization, and Resilience during the Arab Uprisings, 2011–2012

Table 3.3 Regime Type, Mobilization, and Resilience during the Arab Uprisings, 2011–2012

	Little mobilization	Partial mobilization	Mass mobilization	Violent unrest
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	Little mobilization	Partial mobilization	Mass mobilization	Violent unrest
Monarchy	Qatar Saudi Arabia UAE	Jordan Kuwait Morocco	Oman Bahrain	
One-party (republican)	Algeria		Egypt Tunisia Yemen	Syria
Revolutionary experiment				Libya
Competitive	Lebanon Iraq Palestine			

Source: Author's records.

Note: Bold denotes cases in which the incumbent was removed from power.

Not all scholars agree that these factors explain the stability of monarchies. Greg Gause and Sean Yom argue that three “strategic decisions” explain their resistance: the ability of resource-rich monarchs to offer their populations incentives to remain quiescent; the regime’s ability to draw domestic support from long-cultivated, cross-cutting coalitions of support; and external support from international actors committed to the regime’s stability.⁸³ At least two of these factors were present in all MENA monarchies. Certainly, these factors make change less likely, but they do not make

monarchies immune to pressures. In fact, Bahrain experienced serious challenges that may have led to very different outcomes in the absence of foreign intervention.

Quasi democracies were also notably resilient during the 2011 uprisings. Palestinians took to the streets to express frustration over the Hamas-Fatah division; hundreds of thousands of Israelis mobilized to demand better economic and social conditions; Turkey saw demonstrations aimed at protecting democratic liberties as well as increased Kurdish unrest in the southwest; and the Lebanese, too, saw sectarian mobilization, fueled in part by the growing instability in Syria. Yet demands were primarily focused on the need for changes in policies and maintaining liberties, not on the downfall of the regime. Even imperfect democracies seemed more capable of staving off more fundamental ruptures than one-party regimes.

Finally, some scholars argue that we need to pay attention to other characteristics of regimes to understand authoritarian endurance. For instance, one can focus on the level of institutionalization of the military or nature of social ties underpinning the regime. As Eva Bellin points out, when the military is professionalized, as it was in Tunisia and to a lesser extent Egypt, it is less likely to shoot on protesters to repress unrest. In contrast, Bellin notes that when the military is

organized along patrimonial lines, where military leaders are linked to regime elites through bonds of blood or sect or ethnicity, where career advancement is governed by cronyism and political loyalty rather than merit, where the distinction between public and private is blurred and, consequently, where economic corruption, cronyism, and predation is pervasive [the military is much more likely to repress protesters brutally].⁸⁴

As the civil war in Syria demonstrates, such conditions do not entirely eliminate the possibility of protest or even regime

breakdown. They may, however, make it less likely.

Islam

Many see the predominance of Islam in the MENA region as the reason for so little regime change in the region. The argument is often set forth with an emphasis on the prospects for democracy, as discussed below. Yet, Islam can also be seen as a factor that reinforces existing regimes.

One explanation focuses on the relationship between Islam and a patriarchal society, arguing that Islam fosters a culture that represses citizens' participation. As we will see in [Chapter 4](#), neither civil society organizations nor mobilization is a new phenomenon in the region,⁸⁵ and the 2011 uprisings demonstrated that mobilization was possible, even in highly religious, patriarchal societies such as that found in Libya.

A more nuanced explanation suggests that Islam provides authoritarian rulers with a particularly compelling, symbolic repertoire by which to legitimize their rule. This is particularly true in monarchies where the king's legitimacy is based in part on religious authority. Thus, for instance, Madawi Al-Rasheed argues that the Saudi monarchy was able to conflate obedience to the state with the notion of being a good Muslim, helping to reinforce its rule.⁸⁶ Certainly, regimes that are most explicitly based on religious legitimacy were less likely to break down, but it is not clear whether they survived because they could invoke religious legitimacy or due to other reasons previously discussed. Moreover, incumbent rulers are not the only ones who can use Islam to reinforce their claims on political authority; opposition forces can do so as well.

A third explanation focuses on the relationship between opposition and ruling elites and the relative power between them. Scholars have long paid particular attention to the relationships between elites engaged in competition over the rules of the game⁸⁷ and to changes in the political conditions that alter the ability of leaders on both sides

to create networks, mobilize support, and frame their concerns as they engage in this struggle.⁸⁸ Where radical forces are too strong, reforms are often stalled.⁸⁹ Moderate forces in the ruling elite are reluctant to form coalitions with the radical opposition, fearing the consequences of change. Indeed, when it appears that radicals may be able to claim the playing field if the status quo changes, even moderate opposition forces are unwilling to side with radicals. Importantly, the decisions of these actors are driven by the perception of the different actors' goals and relative strengths. The belief that radical opponents are strong and unyielding undermines the possibility of change, whether or not such beliefs are empirically correct.

Applying this logic to the MENA suggests that the *belief* that the MENA contains strong, radical, antidemocratic, Islamist forces can undermine pressures for change. It is not Islam as a set of beliefs that affects the likelihood of change, but rather the belief about the nature and strength of Islamist political movements that matters. If democratically oriented, secularist forces and their international sympathizers fear the ascendancy of Islamists, they can prefer the authoritarian regime in power over the possibility of an Islamist alternative.⁹⁰ In the period leading up to the 2011 Arab uprisings, the decline of the radical jihadi movement, incorporation of some Islamists into the formal political system, and cooperation between Islamist and secularist opposition over such issues as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the US intervention in Iraq led to the diminishing of fear between secularists and Islamists.⁹¹ The resurgence of radical jihadi forces in the form of ISIS, Ansar al-Sharia, and other groups, combined with the experience of Muslim Brotherhood rule in Egypt, may have the opposite effect, making non-Islamist opposition less willing to challenge their regimes.

Regional and International Forces

External forces also influence the possibility of regime change. Two sets of arguments are put forth to explain the stability of regimes in

the region: first, the strategic importance of many countries in the region, which explains why external actors are often reticent to see regime change in the region; and second, the neighborhood effects, wherein changes in neighboring states provide more or less of an impetus for actors to rally for regime change.

It has long been recognized that the geopolitics of the region, and particularly on the presence of Israel, affect the MENA region. Some argue that authoritarian leaders used the protracted Arab-Israeli conflict to justify building a large military apparatus, maintaining martial law, and repressing the people. Yet while ruling elites have used the language of the conflict to justify the strong militaries and emergency rule, it is not clear that their people are always—or even usually—convinced by their arguments. Indeed, even in regimes that lie far from the conflict (and where the military conflict with Israel provides little justification for maintaining repressive regimes), one finds long-standing authoritarian regimes.

Others argue that external actors support authoritarian regimes in order to protect their own interests. Rather colorfully, Shaykh Fadlallah claims that the United States has

pressed Arab rulers into service as watchdogs for their policies and interests in the Islamic world. Consequently, Muslims are repressed by other Muslims. The Egyptians are being beaten by the Egyptian regime, and the Algerians are beaten by the Algerian regime, so the United States does not have to dirty its hands.⁹²

As Janine Clark shows in [Chapter 5](#), citizens in the region are highly skeptical that the United States acts to promote democracy in the region.

The belief that powerful international players were not necessarily interested in democracy promotion may quash mobilization from below as well. Amaney Jamal, for instance, argued that citizens

support authoritarian regimes because they fear that an alternative, likely Islamist, regime would lose US support and endanger state security.⁹³ Turning attention from citizens to democracy promoters, Sarah Bush argued that in an effort to maintain their ability to operate within authoritarian regimes and facing little alternative pressure from donors, democracy promoters turned to “tamer” forms of aid that ultimately shored up—or at least failed to undermine—authoritarian regimes.⁹⁴

The 2011 uprisings demonstrated that foreign influence does not fully explain the persistence of authoritarianism. Perhaps the most important evidence in this regard was the fall of the Mubarak regime. The United States would have preferred that the region’s largest aid recipient, most influential regional partner, and neighbor to Israel would have remained under control of Mubarak, and when the uprisings began, the United States worked hard to portray Mubarak as a reformer and stabilize the regime. Yet the United States has never controlled political change in the region as completely as proponents of this perspective suggest. The failure to support the shah of Iran and to maintain a quiescent alliance with Saddam Hussein also shows that the United States does not fully determine the region’s politics. In short, even if the United States had not promoted democratization in the MENA region as enthusiastically and consistently as it does elsewhere, it also cannot ensure its allies’ stability.

Regional actors may also affect the likelihood of regime change. The spread of unrest across the region since 2011 could be understood as the result of four effects: first, the demonstration effect, by which citizens in other countries “learn” that change is possible, and second, the diffusion effect, by which transnational networks facilitate the conscious dissemination of frames and tactics. This is more likely to occur when citizens identify strongly across countries; thus, shared Arab language and culture (reinforced by satellite and Internet media) facilitated the spread of unrest across the region.⁹⁵ Third is the result of direct intervention, particularly by regional players (e.g., states, the Gulf Cooperation Council [GCC], and other

regional organizations) that choose to intervene in the domestic politics of their neighbors, partly in an effort to assure stability at home (see Marc Lynch's [Chapter 8](#) for further discussion). Fourth is the spillover effect from changes in the neighboring states, most notably through the deterioration of border control as neighboring regimes' grip on the state weakens and in the influx of refugees from neighboring conflicts, such as that seen in Libya, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen after 2011.

Importantly, international and regional forces can act either to promote or prevent regime change. For instance, intervention in the uprising in Bahrain promoted regime stability, while it promoted regime overthrow in Libya and prolonged conflict in Syria. So, too, the uprising in Tunisia, Egypt, and Syria initially encouraged Jordanians to take to the streets in 2011, yet by 2018, the increasing authoritarianism in Egypt and violent conflict in Syria convinced them to stay home. It is important to look closely at these factors on a case-by-case basis.

In short, the 2011 uprisings tested arguments about the persistence of authoritarian regimes in the Arab world and also provided new evidence and insights into the scholarship on regime breakdown. The nearly unthinkable became reality when first Ben Ali, then Mubarak, Qadhafi, and Salih were pushed from power. They exited in different ways in each case and with different results, but they shook the belief that the Arab world was destined to endure aging authoritarian regimes. Oil, Islam, and Israel may influence the likelihood that individual authoritarian regimes endure, but none of these factors make MENA regimes entirely immune from breakdown.

Prospects for Democracy?

Scholars have long sought to understand why the region appeared so resistant to liberal democracy. Before 2011, scholars of the Arab world, in particular, focused on understanding “enduring authoritarianism.” Why, they asked, did authoritarian regimes in the region persist, despite escalating social and economic crises,⁹⁶ while those in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America underwent democratization? After a brief moment of optimism following the uprisings, the question once again rose to the surface. In a global context of democratic backsliding and instability, the region may not appear as anomalous today as it did during the third wave of democratization, but many still ask, Why does democracy remain so elusive?

Before we answer this question, two points are in order. First, the region lacks a stable, liberal democracy in a well-functioning state, but contrary to conventional wisdom, it does contain electoral democracies—even Arab ones. Second, while it is important to consider the prospects for democracy in the region, this is not the only significant question to ask regarding regimes in the region. There are interesting questions about the politics of authoritarian regimes and how these regimes transition from one form of authoritarianism to another that deserve study, even if a goal is to foster democracy.

Economic Factors

There are two ways in which economic conditions may affect the establishment or consolidation of democracy. The first focuses on the relationship between economic development and democracy. As discussed earlier, modernization theorists such as Seymour Martin Lipset argued that economic growth would create demands for inclusion, ultimately fostering democracy.⁹⁷ More recent scholars nuanced this argument, most notably with Adam Przeworski and his colleagues arguing that development made democratic

consolidation, not democratization, likely. While it is important to recognize this argument, it is unlikely to explain the lack of democracy in the MENA region. In general, the region consists of middle-income countries, far more developed than their counterparts in sub-Saharan Africa. If democracy is possible in poor countries of Africa, it should be possible in the MENA region.

A second way that economic factors may affect democracy is found in the nature of assets and income distribution. Scholars argue that when assets are immobile and income unequal, it is difficult to establish a stable democracy;⁹⁸ the obstacles may be particularly high in oil-based economies, where stakes are high.⁹⁹ Importantly, the impact of oil in sustaining authoritarianism is a matter of debate, and even proponents of the argument recognize that it does not fully explain regime stability and the lack of democracy in the MENA region.¹⁰⁰ Conflict over oil rents and the ability of incumbent elites to use oil wealth to buy support can undermine nascent democratic institutions. And in the MENA region, this appears to be the case. The conflicts in Libya and Iraq, for instance, are closely linked to the struggles over oil. Indeed, fighting often takes place around and over oil fields, and the destruction of oil pipelines in Libya, which in 2015 had reduced the country's oil exports from an average 1.6 million barrels per day (bpd) to around 350,000 bpd and devastated the economy, becomes a strategy of war.¹⁰¹

Religion and Democracy

Another set of explanations for the failure to develop strong, stable democracies centers on the relationship between religion and the state. Some believe that Islam and democracy are simply incompatible. Focusing on both the doctrine and organization of Islam, Huntington famously argued that democracy and Islam are incompatible because “no distinction exists between religion and politics or between the spiritual and the secular, and political participation was historically an alien concept.”¹⁰² There are several problems with this argument. First, it assumes that all Muslims

identify, first and foremost, as *Muslims* (rather than with ethnic groups, regions, and economic classes, for instance), an assumption that is rarely made of Christians in the West. This perspective also suggests that there is a single, monolithic interpretation of Islam, ignoring various strains within Islam and the competition among them. Finally, the argument that for Muslims “political participation was historically an alien concept”¹⁰³ is also incorrect both historically and currently. The first caliph, Abu Bakr, reportedly told the people in the seventh century that they had the power to remove him if he failed to act according to God’s laws,¹⁰⁴ which is strikingly democratic. Today as well, Islamic parties in such countries as Malaysia and Indonesia take an active role in democratic governance. Moreover, there is considerable support for democracy among Muslims in the Arab world.¹⁰⁵

A second way to understand the impact of Islam on democracy focuses on polarization. The polarization between Islamist and non-Islamist forces may explain not only the unwillingness of regime opponents to take to the streets (as discussed earlier) but also the failure of these forces to make the compromises necessary for democracy. Alfred Stepan has postulated that democracy requires “twin tolerations,” wherein, first, religious individuals agree to act in accordance with man-made laws and, second, officials allow individuals to express their values and practice their beliefs freely, as long as they do so in a manner that respects other citizens’ rights and the law.¹⁰⁶ He credits Tunisia’s successful transition to date with its ability to practice these twin tolerations. In contrast, Egypt’s failed attempt to establish democracy after the fall of Mubarak may be understood, at least in part, as the outcome of stark differences over views regarding the role of religion in the state¹⁰⁷ (see [Chapter 10](#) by Tarek Masoud).

Even in more long-standing democracies in the region, the tension between religion and the state challenges democracy. The struggle between secularists and Islamists long undermined democracy in Turkey. In the early period of the republic, Atatürk’s secularist vision took the upper hand, repressing rights of more religious Muslims to

express their views and practice religion freely. This gradually changed, such that today the struggle between secularism and Islamism continues, with Islamists having the upper hand. In each case, rights and liberties are curtailed for opponents out of fear of the other, arguably contributing to democracy's demise.

The issue of religion and the state undermines democracy in Israel as well. The tension between Israel as a Jewish state and Israel as a democratic state is arguably the greatest challenge to its democracy. Arabs, who make up about 20 percent of the population inside what is known as the Green Line, are given Israeli citizenship and voting rights and have even formed political parties and sat in the Knesset. Yet their citizenship is curtailed, perhaps most notably in their inability to serve in the military, which is a major source of social mobility in Israel, their loyalty is sometimes drawn into question, and they find themselves the target of discussions over the "Arab problem" in Israel. That is, even Jewish Israelis recognize that Israel cannot, in the long run, simultaneously safeguard Israel's identity as a Jewish state and be fully democratic. There is a fundamental contradiction between the definition of *democracy* in a multireligious society and the maintenance of a Jewish state. The tension not only divides Israeli Arabs from Israeli Jews but also creates fissures among Jews as well.

International and Regional Actors

Regional and international actors can undermine democracy as well. Given their own strategic goals, external actors can challenge democracies by aiding domestic contenders in sometimes-violent struggles or by engaging directly in internal affairs. It is always difficult to know what would have been in the absence of interventions, but arguably, they have at times undermined MENA countries' prospects for democracy. These include actions aimed at overthrowing democratically elected leaders, such as Iran's Prime Minister Mossadeq or the Palestinian Hamas, or those in support of authoritarian leaders, outlined earlier.

The prospects for democracy appear particularly bleak for countries surrounded by authoritarian regimes. Some argue that there is a “neighborhood effect” for democracies, wherein countries surrounded by autocracies are less likely to democratize.¹⁰⁸ This seemed at work after the Arab uprisings, as oil-rich monarchies in particular sought to stave off regime change and democratization in the region. Given this, strong liberal democracies may be difficult to establish in the MENA today.

Longue-Duree Arguments

A final set of arguments for why democracy is absent in the MENA focuses on historical factors, not contemporary conditions. In many ways, the foundation of these arguments is the same factors outlined previously: economic factors, religion, and international forces. The difference, however, is that all are based on the notion that divergent paths taken centuries ago explain contemporary outcomes.

Some focus on the role of financing and state-building. For instance, Blaydes and Cheney argue that the nature of military establishments in sixteenth-century Europe and the Muslim world explains the divergence in regime types today. European rulers relied on land grants to support their military, thereby establishing a feudal society, while Muslim leaders had a military force raised from slaves. Consequently, European leaders enjoyed a loyal military but found themselves constrained by a rising feudal nobility, while the Muslim rulers were put at risk of undisciplined militaries but remained unconstrained—that is, feudalism promoted democracy in Europe but not the Muslim world.¹⁰⁹ For Rothstein and Broms, it is “temple financing” that explains the divergence between medieval Europe and the Middle East. In Europe, churches financed themselves by gathering tithes from the people, while in the Muslim world, Islamic waqfs worked akin to financial foundations. Where there was no financing from below, there was similarly no need to develop responsive institutions. This argument echoes the “no democracy without taxation” argument put forth by scholars who focus on oil, but it seeks the antecedents of autocracy centuries earlier.¹¹⁰

Others consider international actors. For instance, Hariri¹¹¹ argues that differences in colonial penetration account for “Middle Eastern and Muslim Exceptionalism.” As did Blaydes and Cheney, he sees the early Muslim empire as fiscally and militarily stronger than other regions. He asserts, however, the effect was that the colonial expansion was less able to penetrate these areas. Consequently, there were fewer settlers from the West who had “communication and communion” with Europeans and weaker institutional legacies. The result, again, was democracy where Europeans had a strong presence but not in the Muslim Middle East.

These accounts are intriguing, but they also are problematic. Explanations for contemporary divergence in regimes must account not only for the correlation between these factors and present outcomes but also for instances in between—that is, the feudal system, taxation, or colonial success should account not only for a difference across regions in democracy today but for a divergence (or lack thereof) in interwar Europe and the region or elsewhere. Moreover, the underlying reasoning should follow for countries and regions outside the sample, traveling to Latin America, Asia, and elsewhere. And finally, they raise an important concern: If the outcomes of choices regarding military recruitment, financing, or colonial success are so permanent, and intervening choices of such little consequence, what are the prospects for countries as they go forward? These theories, though intriguing, give us very little guidance.

Conclusion

The MENA region has some particular characteristics that seem to undermine state-building, democratization, and institutional reform. One has been the prevalence and strength of Islam. There is little reason to believe that Muslims in the MENA region are unable to establish strong states or democracies, as they have done elsewhere. However, there is reason to believe that the presence of political Islam may affect the possibilities of democratization and pressures for institutional reform. When prodemocratic forces inside and outside the country step down their demands for reform out of fear that Islamists may be a Trojan horse, pretending to embrace democracy only until they hold the reins of power, the prospects for reform are dim. Similarly, when they seek external support against Islamist forces in transitional processes, the necessary democratic bargains will be less likely to emerge.

A second challenge has been the strategic location of the region. Its position—previously a major trade route to the East but now as a region seated atop massive oil reserves, located at the crossroads of the cold war, and one that includes Israel—has prompted international forces to invest enormous amounts of energy and resources into shoring up dependable leaders. They have tended to give incumbents the means to remain in power without building strong states, often rewarding them for repressing public opinion when it would advocate policies they find unacceptable. In doing so, regional and international forces not only accept the authoritarian nature of the leaders but often help to reinforce these tendencies. Moreover, the support that they offer leaders undercuts the needs for leaders to establish bargains with their citizens and thus arguably promotes a weak state.

Oil also appears to undermine state-building and political reform. Oil sales provide an easy source of revenue that can be invested in education, health, and other social policies, but this revenue also

reduces the state's need to tax citizens. This may help maintain authoritarian leaders and impede development of strong states.

Not only do oil, Islam, and international support affect the three facets of governance, but policies aimed at strengthening states, promoting democracy, and reforming institutions are equally entwined. Programs intended to promote effective governance often focus on one facet of development, and they use different strategies. Thus, for instance, programs aimed at strengthening states may focus on such factors as education and civic training. The approach is to help shape citizen-state engagement and extend state legitimacy and its mandate, which often requires long-term, relatively indirect interventions. Other programs are aimed at strengthening parliaments, political parties, and other institutions associated with increasing accountability, improving transparency, and, ultimately, promoting democracy. In this case, training programs and technical changes can help increase institutional capacity. It may appear far easier to address problems one institution at a time, focusing on legislative strengthening, the rule of law, political parties, and the media. Yet without addressing the broader issues of state-building, a focus on institutions—or even democratization—may have limited impact.

Solutions, as the problems themselves, must be seen as part of an interrelated whole, each being conditioned by and impacting the possibilities of others' success. Programs aimed at strengthening parliaments, the media, political parties, and judiciaries are likely to be successful only insofar as they are associated with broader changes in the mandates of institutions and changing executive-legislative relations. Strong, democratic institutions may be ultimately necessary if legislatures, parties, courts, and the media are to function effectively. At the same time, regimes are limited in the absence of state strength. Democratization, even if successful, may improve the living conditions for citizens only if the state is strong enough to govern. Strong states may lead to effective governance when the state not only acts upon citizens but incorporates them into decision-making processes. Improving governance is a messy,

complicated process, but this messiness must be recognized if the lives of citizens are to improve. The challenges are very daunting but not insurmountable.

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4 Religion, Society, and Politics in the Middle East

Robert Lee

Lihi Ben Shitrit

Middle eastern societies appear more religious today than they did fifty years ago. Here and there, radical Islamist groups threaten governments and civilians. In countries where the Arab Spring unseated dictatorships, Islamist parties emerged to dominate elections and compete for power. Coptic Christians worried about their status in an Egypt governed by Islamists, and Syrian Christians, not to mention Alawites, fretted about their position as minorities in a new Syria governed by Sunnis. Religion appears in the name of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and Israel regards itself as a Jewish state. Students beginning to study the Israel-Palestine conflict often assume it is essentially the continuation of an age-old struggle between Judaism and Islam. Global television transmissions from the Middle East occasioned by public demonstrations or aimed at portraying daily life show heavy proportions of the population in dress that they or others may interpret as religious.

It is not surprising, then, that contemporary Westerners tend to see religion as a dominant force in the society and politics of the region—a more prominent aspect of life there than it is in the United States or in Europe. This Western perception is not new. Quite to the contrary, European academics of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—those who came to be known as “Orientalists” for their knowledge of Middle Eastern languages and societies—emphasized the contrast between the rationalism of the Enlightenment in the West and the mysticism of the East. When Napoleon invaded Egypt, he pretended to be Muslim, so confident was he that proclamations of fidelity to Islam would be sufficient to win popular support for him and his troops. Europe always saw the Ottoman Empire as primarily Turkish and Muslim, even though it included substantial populations that were neither; religious minorities reached out to Europe for support against their own governments, and religious mystics drew the attention of Europeans with their dances, music, rituals, and excesses. In the Orientalist vision of things, as expressed in literature, textual analysis, accounts by travelers, social interaction, and works of art, Western secularism contrasted with the religiosity of the East.

There is some truth in these perceptions of both past and present, but we argue that the influence of religion on the region is more subtle, more selective, and less determinate than commonly thought. The Middle East is, indeed, home to the world’s three most prominent monotheistic religions—a place where remnants of still-older religious traditions have left important marks and where sectarian splits have created a bewildering diversity of religious minorities. It is a region where most constitutions identify a state religion and where both governments and opposition groups invoke religious themes to muster support. It is a region where religious community has been an important aspect of personal identity, sometimes congruent with ethnic, local, and political identities and sometimes in conflict with them. But religion everywhere is shaped and reshaped by human interactions; it is an evolving phenomenon, forged by environments, political entities, social structures, individual actions, and the flow of events. The advent of European imperialism, the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the emergence of independent nation-states in the twentieth century, the creation of the state of Israel, the attacks of September 11, 2001—all have profoundly altered the role, significance, and structure of the religions themselves. Transformative through its spiritual impact and social dynamism, religion has also been transformed by context and events. Religion matters, but perhaps not in the ways and to the degree that many Westerners imagine.

What we mean by “religion” is not merely scriptures, beliefs, and rituals. Every major religious tradition has given rise to a set of understandings and interpretations that have evolved, sometimes as a result of disputation, sometimes in response to geographical dispersion, and sometimes in response to political and social circumstances. To speak of Judaism, Christianity, or Islam as though they comprised single sets of scriptures, beliefs, and rituals is thus misleading.

“Religion,” understood as a social phenomenon, includes the communities that have emerged under the leadership of priests, *ulema*, rabbis, shaykhs, and shaykhas, some claiming divine guidance, others offering only scholarly wisdom and help with the moral law. As literacy has spread beyond the world of religious scholars, laypeople without special training have entered the field to interpret scripture and organize believers in the pursuit of social and political goals. Early Zionists were interested in national more than spiritual redemption, but the notion of Zion came from Jewish tradition. Hasan al-Banna, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) in Egypt, used religion to fashion a nationalist organization. Zionists and Islamists, though not necessarily religious by intent, necessarily fall within our definition of *religion*. A single religion gives rise to an unlimited set of group identities. Moreover, believers engage in behaviors that they see as religious, such as putting amulets on babies to protect them from evil spirits or visiting the tombs of saints, activities that some monotheists may see as heretical and offensive. A broad definition of a religion includes what people believe and do in the name of that religion.

It is common to assert that the Middle East is a part of the Muslim world or to speak of countries in the area as Islamic. While Muslims constitute a majority in most countries of the region, the term *Muslim world* obscures enormous variation in the social and political impact of Islam and wrongly implies the existence of a vast, homogeneous, transnational entity extending from West Africa to Indonesia. Most states in the area identify in some measure with Islam, but only three—the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan—include religion in their formal titles. By current convention, the word *Islamic* suggests direct inspiration from religion, as in Islamic ritual or Islamic art; Muslim states are those where the majority of citizens are Muslims, those who submit to God; and Islamists are those groups and individuals who invoke Islam in their pursuit of social or political ends, according to prevailing academic conventions. Writers often refer to the activities of Islamists as “political Islam” and call that fraction of Islamists who endorse the use of violence in their cause “radical Islamists.”¹ We will use *Islamists* to refer to Muslims who are committed to the social and political applications of Islam but label as *Islamic* the groups and associations they organize in the name of Islam.

Religious Diversity

The population of the Middle East including North Africa (MENA) was 93 percent Muslim, with about 322 million Muslim inhabitants in 2011, expected to increase to more than 381 million by 2020.² But great diversity exists both within the religion of Islam as it is practiced in the area and among the non-Muslims that make up about 7 percent of the population of the region. The main division within Islam is between Sunni Muslims and Shi'i Muslims. The origin of this split dates back to the contestation over the succession of the Prophet Muhammad following his death in 632 CE. Shi'i Muslims believe that leadership should have passed to Ali ibn Abi Talib, the Prophet's cousin and husband of the Prophet's daughter Fatima. According to Shi'i doctrine, Muhammad's direct descendants through the line of Ali are the only rightful rulers of the Muslim community (*umma*).

The Prophet was succeeded by three other companions (Abu Bakr, Umar, and Uthman) before Ali became the caliph following the assassination of Uthman. Ali's reign was brief and violently contested. After Ali's assassination at the hands of a hard-line Muslim faction in 661, Muawiya, who had earlier waged a battle against Ali, came to power and established the Umayyad dynasty. Hussein, Ali's second son, led a rebellion against the Umayyads but was defeated and killed in 680 in the city of Karbala in Iraq, becoming a martyr honored by Shi'a to this day. Shi'a believe that certain descendants of Ali, called imams, were deprived of their rightful claim to leadership by the ruling dynasties that have held power over the Muslim world since the death of Ali. In the Twelver version of Shi'i doctrine, the twelfth imam, al-Mahdi, is believed to have gone into a state of occultation—a temporary absence or disappearance—in 874 and is expected to return to reign over the *umma* in the future.

Sunni Muslims are those who have accepted the three rightly guided successors to Muhammad as well as subsequent rulers not related to the Prophet by blood. Sunnis constitute the majority of Muslims in the Middle East today, but some countries in the region, such as Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, and Bahrain, have majority or plurality Shi'i populations. While Twelvers dominate Shi'ism, minority sects prominent in the Middle East include Ismailis and Zaidis, who hold different interpretations of the imamate's line of succession; the ruling Alawites in today's Syria; and the Alevis in Turkey, who combine Sunni and Shi'i traditions. Sunnis make up an estimated 80 percent of the Muslim community in the Middle East,³ but they do not constitute a monolith. Practices and interpretations of religious law differ throughout the Sunni countries of the Middle East. There are four main schools of Islamic jurisprudence that represent the diversity of interpretive traditions in the region: the Hanafi, Shafi'i, Maliki, and Hanbali schools. Both Sunnis and Shi'a claim to follow the sunna (custom of Muhammad and his righteous companions) of the Prophet.

Sufism constitutes an important tendency within both Sunni and Shi'i versions of Islam, further diversifying religious practice; it offers a more mystical approach to religious experience and focuses on prayer, meditation, and ecstatic rituals that are meant to induce closeness with God. Sufism's syncretic ability to draw on local, non-Islamic traditions has made it especially popular in Asia and Africa and has helped the spread of Islam in these regions.

With Arab migrations and expansions to the north, east, and west, Muslims came to control territories largely populated by Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians, as well as by followers of various polytheistic Near Eastern religions in Arabia, the Byzantine Empire, and Sasanian Iran. Much of today's religious diversity in the MENA is a result of the pre-Islamic religious

demography of the region. Muslim rule in the region was significantly more tolerant of religious diversity than the empires it replaced. Designated as *dhimmi*s—tolerated religious minorities—by Muslim regimes, Jews and Christians enjoyed the right to continue their religious practice. They were not, however, equal to Muslims. Non-Muslims were required to pay a special poll tax (*jizyah*) and faced special restrictions, such as, for example, restrictions on the size of their places of worship relative to Muslim sites. Religious minorities were second-class subjects, but they enjoyed significant accommodations. Jewish communities, for instance, did not suffer the severe limitations and persecution experienced by Jews in Europe. Muslim-ruled Spain and Iraq became centers of flourishing Jewish culture and scholarship, and after their expulsion from Spain in 1492, many Jews fled to the eastern Mediterranean and established their homes in territories governed by the Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans developed a pattern of rule (the *millet* system) that accorded Greek Orthodox Christians, Armenian Christians, and Jews official autonomy to manage their own communities and their internal religious affairs.

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the number of Jews and Christians in Muslim-majority countries in the region has diminished. Opposition to Zionism in the early twentieth century led to violent attacks against Jewish communities in several Muslim countries, which were followed by both expulsions and wide-scale emigration of Jews to Israel and elsewhere. The once flourishing Jewish communities of Egypt, Iraq, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Iran, and Syria have all but disappeared. Today, the Jewish community of Egypt consists of fewer than two hundred individuals.⁴ In Morocco, which has the largest Jewish population in an Arab country, the community counts only about three to four thousand members. The non-Arab states of Iran and Turkey retain larger Jewish communities—about twenty thousand each—but their size and influence relative to the wider populations are minuscule. The creation of Israel and subsequent waves of Jewish immigration from Europe and Russia (described in [Chapter 2](#)) have, however, increased the total number of Jews in the region. There are currently around 6.5 million Jews in the state of Israel. A multitude of Christian communities also have a small presence in the region. These include Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant groups. Their relative numbers, however, have declined as a result of emigration and higher Muslim birth rates. The largest concentrations of Christians relative to the size of the country are in Egypt, where Christians, mostly Copts, make up between 8 percent and 10 percent of the population, and in Lebanon, which has an estimated 21 percent Maronite Christian population and lower percentages of other Christian groups. In Syria, between 8 percent and 10 percent of the population is Christian. Other religious communities, including Druze, Bahá'ís, Hindus, and Buddhists, maintain a small presence in the region.

Although still significantly diverse, the Middle East is no longer the haven of religious tolerance it once was. The constitutions of all the countries in the region today, except for Turkey, Lebanon, and Israel, affirm that the country's religion is Islam, or that the ruler must be a Muslim, or both. Israel, in this respect, is not so different. It does not have a constitution, but its declaration of independence proclaims the country a "Jewish democratic state." The preference of a state religion at times leads to discrimination against minority religions and to limitations on freedom of religion. By one system of ranking, the Middle Eastern states offer less religious freedom than any other region of the world.⁵ Communal conflict, though often motivated by political rather than religious interests, has pitted religious communities against one another in political competition and at times in outbreaks of violence. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, confessional politics have become salient in countries with significant religious minorities, including Lebanon, Israel, Iraq, Syria, and Bahrain.

In 2011, the Pew Research Center estimated that trends in religious demography in the Middle East are likely to continue in the future.⁶ The Muslim population is expected to increase at a

higher rate than that of non-Muslims, with lower birth rates and rising emigration by religious minorities contributing to a growing gap. The recent violence in Iraq and Syria along with conflict in other countries have led to considerable population change in the region, especially with the targeting of religious minorities by groups such as Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, or ISIS, which may further diminish their numbers in the region. However, the Pew Center reports that “there is little reliable data to measure overall regional shifts in the last few years.”⁷ The growth rates of Sunni and Shi’i populations appear to be equal, but lower fertility rates in Iran, with the largest concentration of Shi’i Muslims in the region, might mean that the Sunni population will increase slightly in relative size. As for prospects of greater religious freedoms and diminishing levels of confessional tensions, the Arab Spring of 2011 initially promised a more democratic future together with greater respect for individual freedom and rights. Instead, postrevolutionary politics have produced disorder, repression, and even anarchy accompanied by sharp sectarian conflict in several countries. Only Tunisia appeared, nearly eight years after the Arab Spring began there in December 2010, to remain on the path toward liberal democracy.

Religiosity

To many Western observers, Middle Easterners have long seemed highly religious. To Europeans of the nineteenth century who traveled in the area or who participated in European military and economic offensives, the Middle East seemed to reflect the religion-centeredness of the medieval period. While God was “withdrawing from the world” as a result of the European Enlightenment and European intellectuals were taking their distance from the Church as an institution and exploring notions of nihilism, Muslims seemed set in patterns of regular prayer, mosque attendance, dervish orders, local saint cultures, backwardness, and superstition. Scholars analyzed religious texts and posited an Islam opposed in its essential nature to the sort of creativity and innovation that increasingly marked European societies. European social scientists believed ever-more fervently in the idea of progress or modernization and in the idea that progress necessarily depended upon the secularization of society.

Many Middle Eastern leaders of the twentieth century embraced these ideas. Mustapha Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey; Gamal Abdel Nasser, the president of Egypt from 1952 to 1970; Reza Shah and his son Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi in Iran, from 1925 to 1979; Habib Bourguiba, the founder and president of the Republic of Tunisia from 1956 to 1987—all sought to liberate their fellow citizens from the religious practices and beliefs they thought inhibited economic growth. Without opposing Islam itself, they sought to reduce and reform its impact on society and politics in ways consistent with Western liberal theory. Working with those same theories, Western scholars studying the Middle East between World War II and the Six-Day War of 1967 tended to concur that religion was losing its hold in the region.

Then, religious revival swept the Middle East, and to some extent the world as a whole. Student movements once steeped in leftist ideology began to speak the language of Islam. Girls whose mothers and even grandmothers had abandoned the veil suddenly began to dress in more conservative fashion. Young people flocked to support Islamist movements, most of them peaceful, some of them violent, in protest against authoritarian governments and against the materialism and secularism of Western societies. The Gulf states, once viewed as hypocritical or hyperconservative, suddenly seemed to be leaders not only in their prosperity but in their conservative Muslim attitudes. One image of contemporary Egypt is that of air-conditioned shopping malls drawing wealthy, bourgeois women whose stylish and fashionable Islamic dress seems intended to temper materialism with piety. The Middle East appeared much more religious in 2018 than it did in 1960.

By some measures, Middle Easterners do seem more religious than their Western counterparts, but by other standards, the differences do not appear great. For example, individuals from a number of Middle Eastern countries, asked to evaluate the importance of God in their lives on a scale of 1 to 10, responded overwhelmingly with “10,” which is equivalent to “very important” (see [Figure 4.1](#)). The percentage responding “very important” topped 90 percent in Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Jordan, Libya, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen in at least one wave of the World Values Survey. Turks and Tunisians were only slightly less inclined to accord God such importance in their lives. In contrast, fewer than 60 percent of Americans, Lebanese, and Israelis said God was “very important” to them.

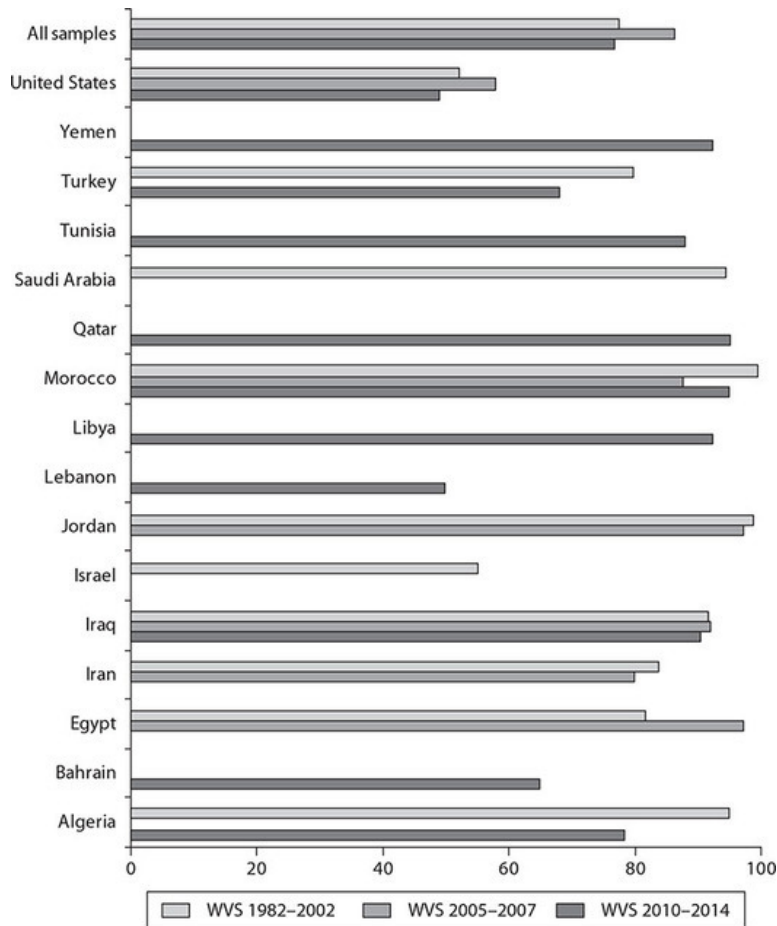
When respondents from Middle Eastern countries were asked whether they considered themselves “religious persons,” the contrasts were not as great (see [Figure 4.2](#)), and the results showed greater inconsistency year to year. Americans were as willing to call themselves

“religious persons” as citizens of several countries in the MENA, including Saudi Arabia, which is often thought to be especially devout. Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Qatar registered the highest percentages on this measure of religiosity. Sharp variations in the survey results from wave to wave in Algeria (15 points), Lebanon (31 points), and Iraq (32 points) suggest either the difficulty of sampling in these countries or, alternatively, sharp changes in the way people, responding to local or regional contexts, interpret the term *religious person*. Note that these are not panel surveys; they do not interview the same individuals over time.

Middle Easterners may pray more than Westerners; mainstream Islamic doctrine does, after all, call upon believers to pray five times a day. A question asked only in Iran (2000) sought to compare the ideal with reality: “How often do you perform the prescribed five prayers of Islam?” Nearly half the sample said they perform all five prayers every day, and another 40 percent indicated that they pray more than once a week.⁸ Only 4 percent said they never prayed. In Turkey, Morocco, Iraq, and Iran, people were asked how often they prayed outside of religious services. The percentages reporting that they prayed every day or at least once a week ranged from 60 percent in Iran to 94 percent in Iraq. The figure was 71 percent for respondents in the United States. Thus, by the response to one question in the survey, 60 percent of Iranians pray outside religious services at least once a week; the response to the other question suggests that 90 percent of Iranians pray more than once a week in some fashion or other.⁹

If one measures religiosity by attendance at religious services, the Middle East does not look extraordinary. The World Values Survey has included this question in a number of its instruments: “Apart from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services?” Interviewers have proposed these possible responses: “More than once a week, once a week, once a month, only on special [named] holy days, other specific holy days, once a year, less often, never or practically never” (see [Figure 4.3](#)). It is not, of course, self-evident that “attending religious services” has the same meaning in Muslim countries as it does in the non-Muslim world. The United States, Algeria, Egypt (except on one survey), Lebanon, Turkey, Morocco, and Tunisia all stood at about the same level, with 40 percent to 50 percent of respondents saying they attended religious services at least once a week. The proportion of Iraqis, Iranians, and Saudis who said they attended services was lower than 40 percent.¹⁰ The Saudi result seems to coincide with the relatively small number of Saudis who consider themselves “religious persons.” In the latest wave of the World Values Survey, more than 50 percent of the respondents from Bahrain, Jordan, Palestine, and Yemen reported that they attend services at least once a week.

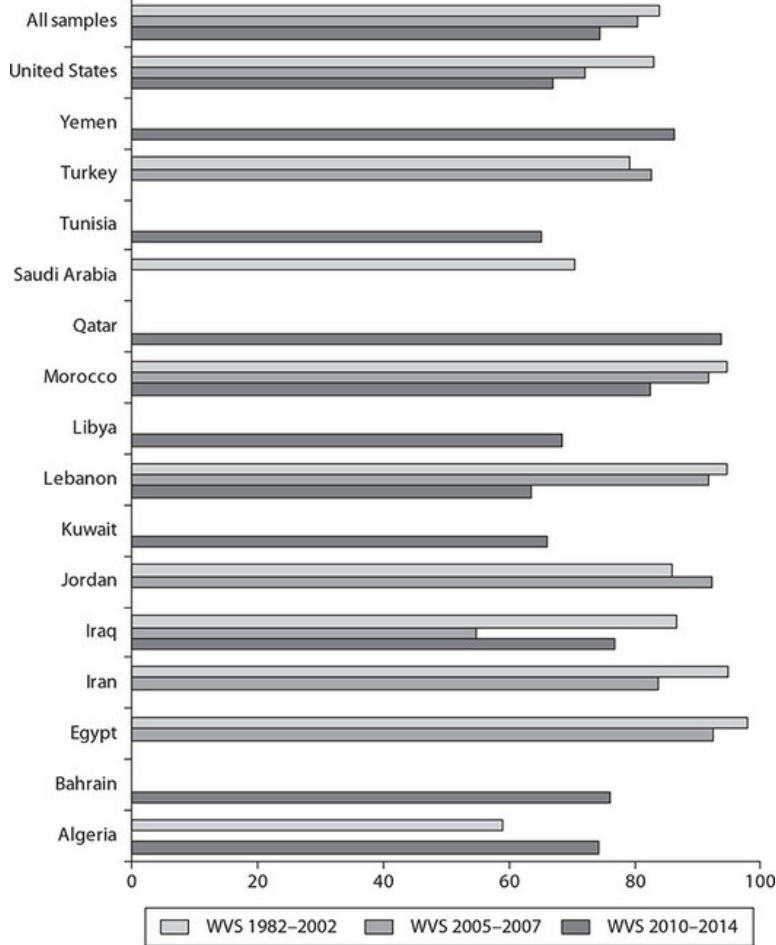
Figure 4.1 The Importance of God in the United States and Selected Countries in the Middle East and North Africa Region



Source: Inglehart, R., C. Haerpfer, A. Moreno, C. Welzel, K. Kizilova, J. Diez-Medrano, M. Lagos, P. Norris, E. Ponarin & B. Puranen et al. (eds.). 2018. World Values Survey: All Rounds - Country-Pooled Datafile Version: <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWVL.jsp>. Madrid: JD Systems Institute.

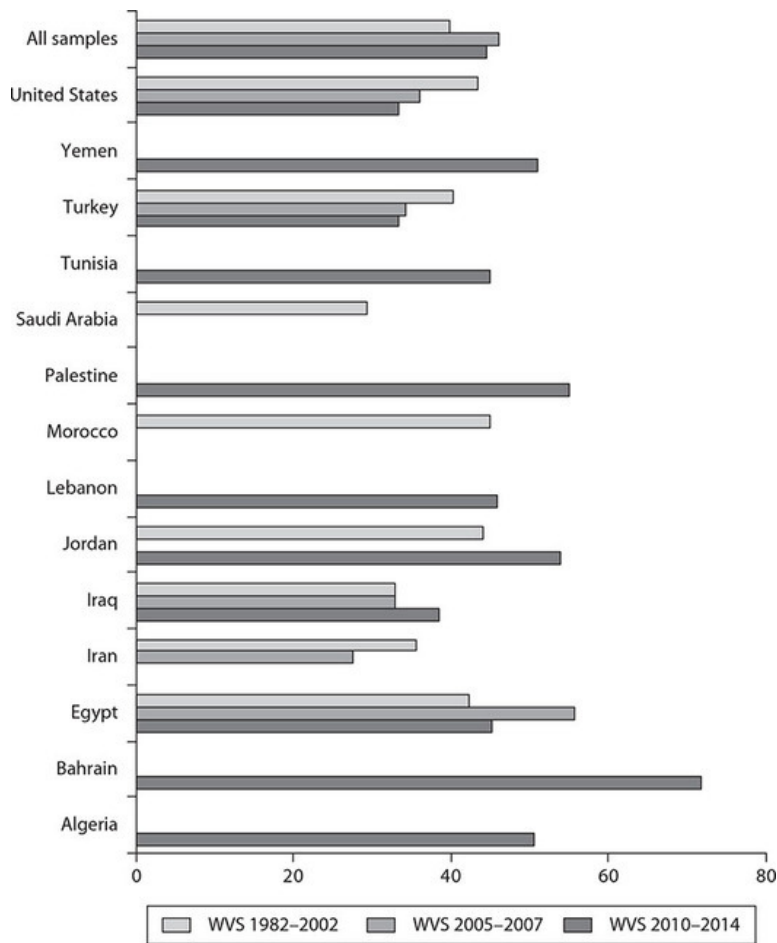
Religion is a polarizing force in Israel, with ultra-Orthodox (Haredim, 8 percent of the country's population) and secular (Hiloni, 40 percent) representing the two opposite ends of the spectrum. Orthodox (Dati, 10 percent) and Traditional (Masorti, 23 percent) Jews fall in between in religious observance and political attitudes.¹¹ Relatively few Jewish Israelis say that they try to follow all religious traditions, and relatively few say they follow none. Many think of themselves as secular, even if they light candles on religious occasions. Many see themselves as religious without necessarily following Orthodox prescriptions about diet and behavior. Whether the glass of religious observance is half full or half empty has long been a debate in Israeli sociology.¹² Religious Jews, especially settlers in the West Bank, deplore the lack of commitment of many Israelis to the defense of lands linked to important sites of biblical history, while many secular Jews criticize the state's concessions to the demands of the Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox. Pew Research finds Muslims in Israel more observant of religious traditions than Jews but less observant than Muslims in other states of the region.

Figure 4.2 Percentage of Population in the United States and Selected Countries in the Middle East and North Africa Region That Consider Themselves Religious



Source: Inglehart et al. 2014.

Figure 4.3 Percentage of Population in the United States and Selected Countries in the Middle East and North Africa Region That Regularly Attend Religious Services



Source: Inglehart et al. 2014.

Religiosity is important for the outcomes it may produce. One might imagine that higher religiosity in a society correlates with greater respect for religious leadership, with a tendency to join Islamist organizations or religious parties, with intolerance toward minority religions, with seeing international conflict in religious terms, with the incidence of radicalism, and with believing that religion is a significant reason for conflict between East and West. There is some evidence for these propositions, but it is not overwhelming. For example, respondents who say that religion is “very important” in their lives (10 on a scale of 10) have somewhat greater confidence in religious leadership than respondents who claim it is “less important.” These two questions were included in the World Values Survey in Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey between 2000 and 2002. About 58 percent of those who hold religion “very important” in their lives have a “great deal” of confidence in religious leaders, whereas only 28 percent of those who see religion as somewhat less important or not important at all have a “great deal” of confidence.¹³ “In many countries Muslims who pray several times a day are more likely to support making shari‘a official law than are Muslims who pray less frequently,” but the percentage of Muslims who favor shari‘a law varies widely from one country to another.¹⁴

High levels of religiosity may pose problems of tolerance, especially where Islam is the religion of an overwhelming majority. Turks, Egyptians, Moroccans, and Jordanians are much more

inclined than US respondents to say that they mistrust people of another religion. The percentages run from 20 in the United States to about 60 in Egypt and Turkey, 67 in Jordan, and 77 in Morocco.¹⁵ In earlier versions of the World Values Survey, respondents were asked if there were particular types of people they might not like to have as neighbors. One-fifth of the Iranian respondents named “people of a different religion”; twice that many people responded that way in Saudi Arabia.¹⁶ In 2009, the Gallup organization asked for a reaction to this statement: “I would not object to a person of a different religious faith moving next door.” Gallup asked respondents to agree or disagree on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Three-fourths of Egyptians and two-thirds of Lebanese respondents said they strongly agreed, but the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, which were the focus of the Gallup study, ranged from 18 percent of strong agreement in Saudi Arabia to 39 percent in Bahrain. The study speculated that these results reflected the degree of contact with other religions: the less the contact, the less likely that citizens would welcome a neighbor of another faith.¹⁷ By that theory, Saudi responses reflected the country’s wilful isolation.

On the basis of forty-four surveys conducted in fifteen Arab countries from 2002 to 2011, Mark Tessler concluded that about 60 percent to 65 percent of the Muslim respondents are religious by a combination of standards, and 10 percent to 15 percent do not pray frequently, read the Qur’an, identify themselves primarily with religion, and care not whether their children marry within the religion.¹⁸ The remaining 20 percent to 30 percent fall in between. Persons of greater personal religiosity are more likely than others to believe Islam should play a significant role in political life, but the surveys show sharp disagreements about the appropriate relationship between religion and politics.¹⁹

There is, of course, variation among countries and over time. Egypt, a country long reputed to be relatively secular, now appears to rank in religiosity with the monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula, but in terms of tolerance, Egypt looks quite different. Israelis appear more secular than other peoples in the region but nonetheless support political parties dedicated to maintaining and enhancing the place of religion in the society. Iran defines itself as an Islamic republic, but the available survey data do not suggest that Iranians are more religious as individuals than are other Middle Easterners. Religiosity does not seem to correlate convincingly with support for religious leadership or conviction that religious leadership would help resolve social problems. As for whether high levels of religiosity slow progress in the region, the jury is still out. The Islamist groups holding power (as in Turkey) or exercising great influence (as in Tunisia) see themselves as modernizing forces. They invoke religious support in the name of economic improvement and democratic reform. Their opponents, warning of impending danger, attack Islamic organizations but not Islam per se. For example, the government of Egypt attacked the Muslim Brotherhood periodically between 1952 and 2011 and has done so again since 2013, all the time insisting that it defends Islam. Similarly, Israelis may blame the ultra-Orthodox for obstructing progress but the government demands that Palestinians recognize Israel as a “Jewish state.” For a country at the postindustrial stage of development, the United States exhibits remarkably high levels of religiosity. Religiosity does not seem to have impeded progress or promoted it, but religiosity may help explain certain characteristics of American culture: its emphasis on morality in public life, its identification of religious organizations with democracy, and its tendency to see international politics in terms of good and evil. But relying on religiosity to account for concrete American behavior at either the individual level or that of the nation would be hazardous, indeed. The same might be said of the Middle East.

State and Religion

States in the Western world and in East Asia have tended to dissociate religious activities from those of the state. France adheres to a conception of *laïcité* that reaches beyond the doctrine dear to constitutional theory in the United States, separation of church and state. The French make exceptions to *laïcité* by adhering to religious holidays and subsidizing religious schools, and the American separation of church and state does not prevent candidates for the presidency from proclaiming their religious views or presidents from invoking God in almost every speech. Some Western states have official religions (England, for example), but even such states permit nonofficial religious organizations and sustain legal equality of all citizens with regard to religion. Nowhere is there complete separation of religion and politics; rather, there exists a variety of national relationships between state and religion that might be categorized according to several variables, including official status of a religion, state subsidies for religion, rules for religious schools, and protection of religious minorities.

Many in the West tend to exaggerate the degree of separation between church and state in their own countries, contrasting that separation with what they perceive as the conjuncture of state and religion in the Middle Eastern region. “There is no separation of religion and state in Islam,” runs the common dictum. It is not clear whether that statement refers to the Qur’anic message itself, to the early years of Muslim experience when Muhammad was still alive, to the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates, to the Ottoman Empire, or to contemporary Middle Eastern states. The statement probably applies most accurately to the period from 620 to 632, when Muhammad governed a small but growing state centered in Medina. After 632, the fissures began to appear. Middle Eastern states may tend to be more involved with religion than states in the West, but the enormous variation in that involvement, both in degree and in kind, makes it clear that religion and state are not identical anywhere. The variation among countries is inconsistent with the idea that Islam itself determines the relationship between religion and state. If it did, then the religion-state relationship would be identical across the states that define Islam as their official religion, but this is scarcely the case. Several states, including Lebanon and Turkey, do not proclaim Islam as the official religion, even though Muslims constitute a majority. And then there is the Jewish state, Israel. There are as many patterns as there are states; the problem is to make sense of similarities and differences.

One scholar has created an index of government involvement in religion (GIR) and coded all nation-states worldwide on five factors that combine to form the index. [Table 4.1](#) orders Middle Eastern states according to their ranking on the index. The five factors are “the official role of religion in the state; whether the state restricts or gives preferential treatment to some or all religions; restrictions placed on minority religious practices; regulation of all religion or the majority religion; whether the state legislates religion.”²⁰ The range of the index, from 22.17 for Lebanon to 77.56 for Saudi Arabia, suggests the enormity of variation. The presence of Saudi Arabia and Iran at the top of the table, with Israel and Lebanon at the bottom, causes little surprise to someone familiar with those political systems. Perhaps more startling is the presence of Egypt and Jordan near the top. Both countries appear to be relatively secular but quite different from each other: One is a monarchy that invokes religious heritage, the other a republic long governed by a secularly inclined military establishment. The commonality is that both have undergone considerable influence from Islamic groups.

Most countries of the Middle East fall into a relatively small, eight-point interval on the GIR index, from the United Arab Emirates at 54.70 to Kuwait at 46.82 (see [Table 4.1](#)). Yet the range

of relationships within that set of countries is large. Turkey and Tunisia, for example, have tried to prevent religion from playing a major role in public life, and to do so, they have sought to manage official religious practices. Even since the advent of an Islamist-led government in Turkey in 2002 and the uprising in the spring of 2011 in Tunisia, which temporarily brought an Islamist government to power, those states have largely pursued policies they deem secular. Their policies contrast with those of the Persian Gulf states, which have generally embraced religious law as the foundation of their legislation.

The ranking of states on this index should not be interpreted as suggesting that religion is unimportant in the politics of Syria, Bahrain, Israel, and Lebanon. Quite the contrary, power has resided with the Shi'i-oriented Alawite minority in Syria and the Sunni minority in Bahrain. The unrest of 2011 and 2012 in those countries took on a religious dimension as the minority elites sought to defend their privileged positions. The Christian minority in Syria hesitated to join the insurrection for fear that Sunni Islamists would win control of the country and suppress both Christians and Alawites. Tolerance of minorities has translated into rule by minorities in those two states. In Lebanon, the political system depends upon the confessional makeup of the country. Seats in the one-house legislature are apportioned according to religious confession. The state does not try to manipulate the practice of its multiple religions, but religion plays a decisive role in the allocation of political positions. In Israel, religion exerts its force through political parties and through advantages accorded Orthodox Judaism by a state that calls itself Jewish.

Identity

One way in which states in the area distinguish themselves is by the degree of emphasis on religion in national identity. Three states stand out for their dependence on religion in this sense: Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Israel. The Pahlavi dynasty that ruled Iran from 1925 until the revolution in 1979 invoked pre-Islamic glories by celebrating the 2,500th anniversary of the Peacock Throne in 1971. The dynasty ran afoul, though, of a politicized element of the clerical class led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. It was Khomeini who articulated a theory of Shi'i governance in the absence of the hidden twelfth imam; it was he who led the revolution and authorized a constitution based partly on his own theory. The constitution of 1979 makes Islam the official religion and details the role of Islam in defining the purposes of the state, the meaning of morality, the process of legislation, and more. Although many Iranians supported the revolution to oppose the authoritarianism of the shah and hoped for a more democratic regime to replace it, the rulers of postrevolutionary Iran have emphasized their success in overthrowing secularism and establishing a new order based in Islam. Islam has become the official foundation of the state's identity.

Table 4.1 Religion and State in the Middle East

Table 4.1 Religion and State in the Middle East

Country	GIR index	Rank by GIR	Official religion	Largest religious group	Percentage of largest religious group(s)	Largest religious minority	Percentage of largest religious minority	Number of minority groups with 5 percent of population
Saudi Arabia	77.56	1	Yes	Sunni	82–87	Shiite	10–15	1
Iran	66.59	2	Yes	Shiite	90–95	Sunni	4–9	1
Egypt	62.92	3	Yes	Sunni	90–95	Christian	5–10	1
Jordan	60.51	4	Yes	Sunni	92*	Christian	6*	1
UAE	54.70	5	Yes	Sunni	65	Shiite	11	3
Tunisia	53.73	6	Yes	Sunni	99	Christian	1	0
Iraq	53.66	7	Yes	Shiite	65–70	Sunni	30–35	1
Algeria	53.35	8	Yes	Sunni	98	Christian	<1	0
Qatar	52.90	9	Yes	Sunni	78	Shiite	10	0
Morocco	51.86	10	Yes	Sunni	99.0	Christian	<1	0

Country	GIR index	Rank by GIR	Official religion	Largest religious group	Percentage of largest religious group(s)	Largest religious minority	Percentage of largest religious minority	Number of minority groups with 5 percent of population
Western Sahara	49.36	11	Yes	Sunni	99	—	—	0
Yemen	48.41	12	Yes	Sunni	54–59	Shiite	35–40	1
Libya	48.13	13	Yes	Sunni	90.0	Ibadi	7.0	1
Turkey	47.21	14	No	Sunni	83–88	Alevi	10–15	1
Oman	46.23	15	Yes	Ibadi	48–53**	Sunni	45–50**	1
Kuwait	46.82	16	Yes	Sunni	70–75	Shiite	20–25	1
Syria	43.69	17	No	Sunni	72–77	Alawi	15–20	2
Bahrain	39.89	18	Yes	Shiite	65–75	Sunni	6–16	2
Israel	36.84	19	No	Jewish	76*	Muslim	17	1
Lebanon	22.17	20	No	Sunni	27.0***	Shiite	27.0***	4

Sources: Columns 1–3: Jonathan Fox, *A World Survey of Religion and the State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 219; other columns from “Mapping the Global Muslim Population,” Pew Research Center, October 2009, except where indicated. See also “The Global Religious Landscape,” Pew Research Center, December 2012. All percentages are estimates based on total populations, not just the number of citizens. Sunni, Shi’a, Ibadi, Druze, and Alawite are varieties or offshoots of Islam.

* *CIA World Factbook*.

** Marc Valeri, *Oman: Politics and Society in the Qaboos State* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 127–28.

*** In Lebanon, Muslims may constitute about 54 percent of the population and Christians 39 percent. The government recognizes four Muslim groups, twelve Christian, one Druze, and one Jewish. “Lebanon,” US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report, 2010.

As discussed in [Chapter 1](#), the linkage of the Saud family with Islam dates from the eighteenth century, when a relatively minor religious figure, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, allied himself with Muhammad ibn Saud and helped solidify Saudi control of the Najd region, the center of the Arabian Peninsula. The first Saudi state fell to Egyptian-Ottoman conquest in the early nineteenth century; a second state arose and fell in the later part of that century; and a third state arose under the leadership of Abdel Aziz ibn Saud, again in alliance with the descendants

and followers of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. By seizing control of the Hijaz region in 1925, the Saudi ruler became the protector of the holy places in Mecca and Medina, and the kingdom became the principal sponsor and organizer of the annual pilgrimage—a business that now attracts about three million tourists a year. The Saud family has identified itself with Muslim causes, such as the liberation of Jerusalem from Israeli rule and the liberation of Afghanistan from Soviet domination; it propagates its version of Islam via the airwaves and via funding for foreign and transnational Islamic groups. The first article of Saudi basic law reads, “The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a sovereign Arab Islamic state with Islam as its religion; God’s Book and the Sunna of His Prophet . . . are its constitution, Arabic is its language, and Riyadh is its capital.” The regime depends upon the legitimacy of a ruling family, but the ruling family depends on Islam for its right to rule.

In Israel, the question of religion so bedeviled the founders that they could not agree upon a constitution. That is, while there was no dispute that Israel should be a Jewish state as proclaimed in its declaration of independence, many early Zionists saw themselves as champions of the Jews as a people but not Judaism as a religion. Still, Israel took a name and adopted symbols linked to Jewish tradition. The state reached agreement with Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox Jews about Jewish holidays, respect for the Sabbath, Kashrut (religious dietary rules) in state institutions, the automatic absorption of Jewish immigrants, and many other matters related to religion. For some Israelis, the state is Jewish because a majority of its citizens are Jewish; if non-Jews eventually became a majority through annexation of the Arab populations of the West Bank and Gaza, then it would no longer be a Jewish state in this view. As a Jewish state, Israel has solicited support from the worldwide Jewish diaspora; it often speaks up on behalf of discrimination against Jews everywhere, even though individual leaders of the state do not necessarily see themselves or their duties as religious.

The emergence of the Islamic State in 2013 violated the boundaries of Syria and Iraq established by the imperial powers after World War I. It also threatened Iran and Saudi Arabia, which tend to see themselves as Islamic states—one Shi’i and the other Sunni—and as the power brokers of the region. In its young history, the Islamic State appeared to have outdone all rivals in its authoritarianism, militancy, cruelty, and intolerance. Nowhere else in the region is the linkage between religion and identity of the country as strong as it is in these cases, but in two other states—Jordan and Morocco—leaders claim special ties to religion. The Moroccan king calls himself “Commander of the Faithful,” a title adopted by the second successor to the Prophet, Umar, and used by the leaders of the Muslim community until the end of the seventh century and beyond.²¹ The king of Morocco claims to be Sharifian, a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, and the king of Jordan comes from a family that traces its lineage to the clan of the Prophet, the clan of Hashim. Both monarchs lead religious services and speak on religious occasions. Because the Sunni tradition offers no clear theory of governance, leaders calling themselves caliphs, sultans, amirs, shaykhs, or kings have asserted their authority and sought legitimating support from the scholarly community, the *ulema*. The Saud family, in alliance with Wahhabi *ulema*, best exemplifies this mutual dependence; the Jordanian and Moroccan rulers fall into that tradition, as do the rulers of the smaller states along the Persian Gulf.

Morality and Legislation

Religious ideas about morality underpin legislation in all countries. Several Muslim states of the Middle East commit themselves in their constitutions to follow legal rules developed within the Islamic tradition, rules known collectively as the shari'a. Saudi Arabia and Iran make the strongest commitments in this regard. Article 23 of Saudi basic law proclaims: "The state protects Islam; it implements its Sharia; it orders people to do right and shun evil; it fulfills the duty regarding God's call." The Iranian constitution declares: "All civil, penal, financial, economic, administrative, cultural, military, political, and other laws and regulations must be based on Islamic criteria." Egypt makes the shari'a "the principal source of legislation," the Kuwaiti constitution refers to the shari'a as a "main source of legislation," and the other Persian Gulf states subscribe to a similar formula. The Iraqi constitution adopted after American occupation specifies that "no law contradicting the established provisions of Islam may be established."

Such provisions might suggest a uniformity of legislation among these states, but uniformity there is not—not in the significance attached to constitutions, and not in the interpretation of those clauses. What constitutes Islamic law is a matter of disagreement not just between Shi'a and Sunnis but within the separate Shi'i and Sunni traditions. Elaborated at great length in many different versions, now as in the past, the shari'a is the product of human efforts to define God's will for human beings. While the word *shari'a* is often translated as "holy law," its status is nonetheless quite different from that of the Qur'an, which Muslims regard as the word of God. The great legal scholars of the medieval period worked from the Qur'an, which provides relatively little basis for law, and from the *sunna* of the Prophet. While the *sunna* originally referred to how things were done in the time of the Prophet, the lawyers came to identify it with a set of documents—the *hadith* literature—reporting what the Prophet or his companions had said or done. The development of law thus depended heavily on a filtering of the *ahadith* (plural of *hadith*) to sift the fraudulent messages from those regarded as reliable and then on interpreting these *ahadith* according to a set of principles. There emerged four primary schools of law within the Sunni tradition, marked by the application of somewhat different principles and by differential reliance on the *hadith* literature. While each school of Sunni legal thought bears the name of its founder, many scholars contributed and continue to contribute to the development of each of them. Shi'a have their own collections of *hadith* and a legal tradition elaborated over the centuries. For these reasons, uniform endorsement of the shari'a does not mean uniformity of legislation.

Most Muslim countries of the Middle East distinguish between matters subject to the jurisdiction of civil courts and those reserved for judgment by religious courts. States often assign personal and family matters such as apostasy, marriage, divorce, inheritance, and property rights to the shari'a system. The religious courts have typically treated women as subordinate to men and subject to some measure of segregation. Unlike in most countries in the region, Iran and Saudi Arabia also extend the jurisdiction of religious law beyond personal status matters. These countries both depend on a morality police to make sure that the rules of the shari'a (as they interpret them) are enforced. The morals police (*mutawwain*) can warn or arrest men or women they judge to be dressed immodestly; raid parties where alcohol is being served; and, in the case of Saudi Arabia, stop women who are driving automobiles. The Saudis have made great strides with the education of women but insist that females must not interact in schools, public places, or even the workplace with males who are not relatives. No other Muslim country engages in such effort and expense to segregate the sexes. In Iran, a higher percentage of women now work outside the home than before the revolution, and women outnumber men in

the university system. The Iranians do not insist on segregation—only on standards of dress for women appearing in public. Showing too much hair can get a woman in trouble.

The other countries of the Persian Gulf region share the conservative tendencies of Saudi Arabia and Iran, but in less rigid fashion. Far from minimizing a foreign military presence and discouraging foreign tourism, as does Saudi Arabia, several other Gulf states have welcomed American bases (Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar) and the tourist trade (Abu Dhabi). Without objecting to coeducation, these countries have subsidized American universities to establish branches there. In Kuwait, women have acquired the right to vote; in Bahrain, they have participated in protests. Iraqi women, who made great strides toward equal treatment under the Ba'athist regime between 1968 and the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war in 1980, have found themselves disadvantaged by almost thirty years of war and sanctions. The religiously oriented Shi'i parties that have won power in postwar Iraq seem more inclined to implement shari'a law than did the Ba'athist government of the 1970s.

Among the Muslim countries of the Middle East, Turkey, Tunisia, and Lebanon occupy the other end of the spectrum. Turkey abolished the shari'a court system under the leadership of Mustapha Kemal Atatürk. Convinced that religious forces stood in the way of Turkish progress, he opened the way for women to step into the public realm and urged them to dress in Western fashion. Already in the 1920s, newspapers pictured young Turkish women in ball gowns and bathing suits. Eventually, Turkey outlawed the wearing of the veil (even headscarves) for women and beards for men in public places. Tunisia adopted a Code of Personal Status shortly after independence in 1956, a set of laws that established the equality of men and women in virtually every domain except that of property ownership. The founder of the Tunisian Republic, Habib Bourguiba, saw himself as someone empowered to adapt the shari'a to the needs of the modern age. His successor as president of Tunisia, Ben Ali, never wavered from his support for the Code of Personal Status, even though he succumbed to the Islamizing pressures of the 1980s and 1990s by building new mosques and issuing elegant editions of the Qur'an. After the overthrow of Ben Ali, the electoral success of an Islamic party, Ennahda, caused concern among secularists about the protection of gender equality. In Turkey, while the government of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan brought Islamists to power and encouraged Islamizing tendencies in the country as a whole, it also enhanced the liberty of women to dress as they wish in universities and other public places. The strength of Christianity in Lebanon makes it unlikely that any government would seek to impose shari'a rules.

To sum up, religion itself cannot suffice as an explanation for the diverse ways that Muslim governments implement the shari'a in these countries. Authoritarian governments have not been uniform in their approaches, and there is no certainty that democratization of these same countries would produce uniform attitudes toward shari'a law.

Islam and Judaism are similar in the degree to which law has been fundamental to both—that is, while Christianity has emphasized belief as the primary criterion of adherence, Islam and Judaism have emphasized conformity to rules governing behavior. Just as the shari'a constitutes an issue for Muslim states, so the Jewish law, the *halakha*, represents a problem for the state of Israel. From the beginning of the state, legislation proposed by the cabinet, approved by the Knesset, and enforced by the courts has taken precedence over the *halakha*. The assassin of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995 claimed Rabin was violating Jewish law by proposing to trade land for peace with Palestinian Arabs. Israeli courts negated the assassin's claims and those of rabbis who had been denouncing Rabin's intentions.

Aspects of Jewish law have found their way into the civil code in Israel through the work of religious parties in the Knesset. Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox parties, essential to coalition

governments, have been able to influence budgets and advance legislation to protect yeshivas, religious education more generally, the definition of Israeli citizenship, and the authority of Orthodox rabbis. Democratic politics in Israel, reflecting the impact of immigrants from the Middle East, have pushed the state toward privilege for the religiously driven settler movements and the ultra-Orthodox. It is the court system, and especially the Supreme Court, that has most systematically championed notions of equality between the sexes and among religious groups, often challenging religious interpretations.

Efforts to implement religious law raise questions about equality of citizenship. What is the position of a non-Muslim in a Muslim state or the status of a non-Jew in a Jewish state? At the extreme, religious minorities may be excluded from the body politic. That is the case of the Bahá'í faith in Iran and atheists in a number of countries. Some countries assert the freedom of belief but then make it a capital offense to abandon Islam (apostasy). In Muslim-majority countries, members of other religions of "the book"—Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians—rate better treatment than those of other persuasions. In Saudi Arabia, the Wahhabi movement has treated even non-Wahhabi Muslims—Shi'a, Sufis of all sorts, Sunnis who practice figurative art or who make music—as the enemy. The Saudis stand for not just Islam but a particular kind of Islam, Wahhabism, which has been intolerant of other visions and other religions from its beginnings in the eighteenth century.

State Regulation

States of the Middle East differ in the degree to which they have wrapped their nationalism in religion. They differ in the extent to which they invoke religious law to support their legislation and policies. They differ to a lesser extent in the ways that they seek to organize and control religious institutions. With few exceptions, the Muslim states have undermined the economic autonomy of religious establishments, made religious scholars into employees of the state, transformed mosques into state institutions, organized and regulated the annual pilgrimage to Mecca and national religious celebrations in the month of Ramadan, and ensured the propagation of religion in the public schools. As a rule, the more authoritarian states have been more intent on achieving state control of religious activity, but even the most democratic of the Muslim states in the area, Turkey, has achieved a substantial degree of state regulation in the name of secularism. Lebanon, where no single religion enjoys official status or even a dominant position, looks exceptional among the Muslim states. In Lebanon and Israel, the state has not so much colonized religion as religion has colonized the state. Arab publics dedicated to democratization in their countries seem deeply divided on whether future governments should be secular or linked to Islam.²²

State control of religion, though stronger in some states than others, has become the prevailing pattern, and state control always implies ambivalence. The state provides means and resources, but it also imposes restrictions. The typical Muslim state of the Middle East seeks the legitimacy that voluntary religious support could potentially provide, but it does not grant a degree of autonomy that could threaten legitimacy and crystalize opposition. It does not want religious education to be independent of state control and standards, but it supports religious institutions and education, thereby putting itself at the forefront of an apparent surge in religiosity, if only to undermine the potential for extremists to exploit this religiosity and resort to violence against the state. The typical state uses—the word *uses* is itself ambivalent—religion to promote citizenship and loyalty. The ambivalence extends to the use of state power to enforce religious principles, as in Iran and Saudi Arabia. Is the primary objective public morality, or is it control for the sake of political authority?

Even the celebration of Ramadan, a month of spiritual renewal, social interaction, and fasting, depends in part upon the state and redounds to the advantage of the state.²³ State-owned media try to capitalize on audiences as families gather with friends to break the daily fast. In general, programming emphasizes prayers and readings from the Qur'an as sundown nears, but then with deference paid to the appropriate religious sentiments, it shifts toward entertainment. Sometimes the state network produces original dramas with Ramadan as the setting, but often, the network rebroadcasts foreign productions that galvanize audiences but do not necessarily please religious authorities. Music, dancing, dramas featuring romantic dalliance, conspicuous consumption—all can evoke protest even as they draw spectators. Religion serves as the appetizer, state-sponsored spectacle as the main course.

Two states of the Middle East, Lebanon and Israel, constitute exceptions to this pattern of state control. In these relatively democratic systems, the flow of influence has been from religious groups toward the state. In both cases, the religious makeup of the population has conditioned the nature and function of the state. Religious diversity prevents both states from proclaiming an official religion and exploiting religion for political purposes, as do most states in the region. Muslims probably constitute a majority in contemporary Lebanon, but they are split among Sunnis, Shi'a, and Druze, whom some Muslims regard as post-Islamic. The Christian camp divides into Maronites (Roman Catholic), Greek Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and Armenian. To

proclaim any religious tradition as the official one would alienate significant minorities. In Israel, the Labor-Settlement movement that built the state resisted the adoption of a constitution that would have recognized Judaism as the state religion. Immigration from Middle Eastern countries has strengthened the religious parties in Israel, but even now, the adoption of an official religion would alienate an important part of the political spectrum in Israel. Religiously oriented parties have never been dominant in Israel, but they have exercised a critical voice in almost every political coalition.

In Israel, state involvement in religion goes well beyond the entanglement of state and religion in Lebanon because the religious parties have colonized parts of the Israeli state. But religion is less central in Israel than in Lebanon because voters are not obliged to vote for candidates segregated by religious preference. Most Israeli voters choose parties that are primarily secular in orientation. The Left tends to be the most critical of religion, but even the Right, though perhaps more observant of religious traditions, has traditionally put security above religion. The main effect of the confessional system in Lebanon has been government paralysis in the face of pressing problems. The Israeli government has preserved its capacity to act in the case of crisis on matters unrelated to religion and state. However, on issues involving the tug of war between the religious and the secular, Israel has made very little headway.

Religion and Civil Society

From the 1970s to the first decade of the twenty-first century, religious movements have become the most effective force in civil society and oppositional politics in the Middle East. With the decline of formerly dominant ideologies such as Arab nationalism, socialism, and secularism that promised to solve the various social, economic, political, and security challenges plaguing the region, advocates of religiously based remedies for the ills of their societies found a receptive market for their untested prescription of an ideal Islamic society. The Arab defeat by Israel in the 1967 Six-Day War signaled the death of secular Arab nationalism personified in the figure of Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser. Later, the oppressive and corrupt nature of Middle Eastern regimes, their inability to deliver on promised socioeconomic advances for their populations, and their reliance on Western backers led to further disillusionment with the ideologies associated with these regimes and frustration with the political realities of the region. In 1979, the Iranian Islamic Revolution that ousted the oppressive US-backed shah of Iran demonstrated the potential power of religious organizing. Finally, the demise of the Soviet Union deprived leftist oppositional actors of their material and ideological wellspring. Combined with the intolerance of authoritarian leaders for any significant oppositional activity and their harsh persecution of political activists, these trends led to the weakening of socialist, secular, and liberal avenues for political organizing. The increased reliance of secular and liberal nongovernmental organizations on foreign donor funding often discredited them as viable challengers of Western-backed regimes (see [Chapter 8](#)).

In this context, various strands of the Islamic movements that have maintained a grassroots presence in almost all countries in the region have come to represent the most sustainable and potentially transformative alternative to the dominant political configurations in the Middle East. The unrepresentativeness of most governments in the region makes assessing the political strength of Islamic movements a speculative exercise, but when governments have permitted free and fair elections—for example, in Turkey from 2002 to 2018; the Palestinian Authority in 2006; Tunisia in 2011 and 2014; and Egypt at the end of 2011—parties affiliated with Islamic movements have often done very well in comparison with other contenders.

It is imprudent to speak of Islamic movements—or *Islamists*, as members of such movements are often called—as if they belong to a monolithic trend with identical iterations in the varied contexts of the different countries of the Middle East and North Africa. Though they share a particular historical and ideological genealogy and employ a similar religious vocabulary, Islamic movements across the region reflect the specific realities of the countries in which they operate. It is important, however, to recognize both the shared features of Islamic movements throughout the region and their evolutionary divergence in important respects. A common feature of Islamic movements is their commitment to affording Islam a greater place in the individual lives of Muslims, in the public life of Muslim communities, and in the formal institutions of Muslim-majority states. In this respect, these movements are not different from religious movements of other faiths; similar efforts are common among Jewish, Christian, Hindu, and other religious activists around the world. Where different Islamic groups and movements differ enormously is in the interpretation of “Islam”; the extent of, or need for, its incorporation into individual, public, and institutional life; and the method by which this might be achieved.

The notion that Islam could provide the solution to modern challenges faced by Muslim communities dates back to Muslim reformers who, starting in the eighteenth century, sought to

respond to Muslim encounters with the West. Reformers saw these encounters as exposing the weakness and disadvantage of the Muslim world in comparison with a modernizing, scientifically, and technologically advanced West; they stressed the need for change if the Muslim world were to catch up and successfully compete with Western powers (see [Box 4.1](#) for an overview). A majority of their successors around the Muslim world would also subscribe, as a matter of practicality, to the idea that movements must operate within specific national contexts. Rather than trying to unify the *umma* or to reestablish the caliphate, most contemporary Islamic movements work to reform their own societies and states.

Box 4.1 Modern Religious Reformers

Modern religious reformers, such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838–1897) and Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905), sought to establish the compatibility of Islam with scientific and rational thought, with technological advancement, and with the social and political realities of modern life. The Muslim world lagged behind the West, they argued, because it had deviated from true Islam. According to them, this deviation grew from the blind following of tradition as developed by Islamic religious scholars (*ulema*) over centuries. Instead of unthinking acceptance of religious authority, the reformers argued for personal interpretation (*ijtihad*) of the sacred religious sources—the Qur’an and the *sunna* (the practice of the Prophet and his companions)—in a way that would make them accord with modern life and deliver the Muslim world from what the reformers considered a state of “backwardness.” Rashid Rida (1865–1935), a disciple of Abduh, continued in the path of reform, but with a more anti-Western stance than his mentor. Rida advocated an Islamic state ruled by Islamic law (*shari’a*) as the solution to the many problems facing the Muslim world, among which confrontation with the West and with Westernization figured prominently. The term *salafi*, or the *salafiyya* movement, which turns to the righteous religious forefathers (*al-salaf al-salih*) for models of correct conduct, refers to the reformist movement inspired by Abduh and developed into a more conservative tendency by Rida. Though the modern reformers called for the unity of the Muslim *umma*, they generally acknowledged the rising popularity of nationalism and the reality of distinct Muslim states.

One of the most influential contemporary movements, the Society of the Muslim Brothers, was founded by Hasan al-Banna (1906–1949), a schoolteacher in Egypt. The Muslim Brotherhood, founded in 1928, felt the influence of Abduh and Rida. According to al-Banna’s vision, the Muslim Brothers aimed to reform Egyptian society in order to bring it closer to Islam. He argued, however, that before state institutions could be reformed to better accord with Islamic law the practice and morals of individuals and society would need to become more Islamic. The Muslim Brothers engaged in welfare and educational work; established hospitals, mosques, and schools; and quickly drew a significant following. By 1949, the Muslim Brothers had established two thousand branches and enrolled almost five hundred thousand members across Egypt.²⁴ The vision of the Muslim Brothers also extended beyond Egypt; they fostered affiliated societies in Palestine, Jordan, Syria, Yemen, and elsewhere. Many of the most influential Islamic opposition movements in the region today are the ideological offspring of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers.

Originally supportive of Gamal Abdel Nasser’s coming to power in 1952, the Egyptian Muslim Brothers soon took issue with the Nasser government. In the context of opposition to Nasser and his repression of the organization, the writings of the Brothers’ chief ideologue, Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966), became a major force in the movement in the 1950s and 1960s. In militant publications, Qutb denounced the West and nominal, hypocritical Muslim rulers in terms that suggested “true” Muslims would be justified in using violence to achieve an Islamic state. From the South Asian Islamic scholar Mawlana Mawdudi, Qutb adopted the modern application of the concept of *jahiliyya*—the pre-Islamic age of ignorance—and used it to describe contemporary Muslim societies and all other regimes he considered to be the propagators of ignorance. Qutb popularized two important ideological themes: the concept of

excommunication (*takfir*) of political rivals, and the importance of *jihad*, which he interpreted as the uncompromising struggle against unjust rulers for the sake of implementing God's sovereignty. President Nasser's government imprisoned, released, rearrested, tried, and ultimately hanged Qutb for his writings, making him a martyr of the radical cause. Radical Islamic groups in Egypt and elsewhere in the Sunni world later seized upon Qutb's ideas to rationalize violent action, including the assassination of President Anwar al-Sadat of Egypt in 1981.

Most contemporary Islamic movements have included both the reformist and the more militant strands of their ideological forbearers. Contentious relations with authoritarian regimes in the region have often determined which of these strands, moderate or extremist, enjoyed greater prominence in different periods. In general, however, the bulk of activism by the most popular Islamic movements has been aimed at reforming society and politics by reviving and popularizing religious practice, engaging in social welfare work, and creating viable opposition to incumbent authoritarian regimes, rather than in militant revolutionary action. Very roughly, the activism of contemporary Islamic movements falls into three categories. The first is religious and social work. The second is political activity, often through an affiliated political party. The third is paramilitary violence, which is a main feature of only a very few movements. The Palestinian Hamas and the Lebanese Hizbullah, for example, both have their own well-equipped military wings. Unlike most other Islamic movements, however, these two organizations have operated within a context of foreign occupation and have usually maintained military capabilities, at least officially, for the sake of resisting occupation rather than imposing their Islamic vision on their own societies. Some Islamic movements have also been implicated in acts of violence, but usually, it has been smaller, breakaway radical organizations that have responded to state repression by violently attacking representatives of the regime, their fellow citizens, or even foreigners, as was the case, for example, with the most radical groups in Egypt and in Algeria during the 1990s. However, with the turmoil, repression, and violence that have followed the events of the popular Arab uprisings of 2011, militant Islamist militias have come to increasingly fill the chaotic vacuum that opened in parts of Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, and in the Sinai in Egypt.

Religious and Social Activism

Reforming society, the objective of many Islamic movements, starts with individual and community-wide efforts to live by Islamic values and cultivate Islamic virtues. These encompass both religious and social practices. Islamic movements have therefore worked to build mosques, promote religious education, offer religious lessons for children and adults, and make religious practice a more central aspect of the everyday lives of Muslims. In addition, the provision of social services has been an integral part of these movements' efforts. Dedicated to the notion that "Islam is the solution" for the problems of modern states and societies, the offshoot organizations of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt, Palestine, Jordan, Yemen, and elsewhere have established health clinics, hospitals, and schools, as well as a plethora of charities that offer material aid to the poor. Social welfare work has helped Islamic movements demonstrate the power of Islamic commitment as well as offer alternative institutions to those run by the un-Islamic state. Moreover, with the shrinking of state investment in social welfare that has characterized the structural adjustment and economic liberalization policies of the 1980s and 1990s (see [Chapter 7](#)), Islamic charity has come to fill the gap in social services. Exact figures are not available, but the number and influence of Islamic social institutions is considerable. For example, studies estimated that by 2003 there were 2,457 Islamic voluntary associations in Egypt and that 70 percent of the two thousand nongovernmental associations in Yemen were Islamic. In Jordan, the largest association to run schools, kindergartens, health clinics, and hospitals is the Islamic Center Charity Society, which is affiliated with the Muslim Brothers.²⁵ In the Palestinian territories, Islamic charities ran an estimated 40 percent of all social institutions in the West Bank and Gaza in the year 2000.²⁶ By 2003, 65 percent of primary and middle schools in Gaza were Islamic, and the Hamas-affiliated Islamic Society in Gaza, alongside other Islamic charities, financially supported at least 120,000 individuals on a monthly basis.²⁷

The practice of Islamic charity, which has a long history in the Middle East, has not been confined to institutions directly affiliated with Islamic political movements. Many independent Islamic charities operate in the region with no official ties to movements such as the Muslim Brothers. Nevertheless, taken together, diverse religious charities, associations, and institutions help further the agenda of contemporary political Islamic movements in several ways. First, they demonstrate Islam's power in alleviating some of the socioeconomic challenges experienced by many in the region. They also highlight the state's inability to adequately provide these services and advertise religious activism as a viable alternative. Second, through affiliated welfare institutions, activists gain access to potential recruits among the poor and the lower-middle classes. However, Islamic social institutions do not necessarily serve as venues for religious indoctrination or direct political recruitment of the poor.²⁸ Many Islamic institutions, run by middle-class professionals and attuned to middle-class needs, help build horizontal middle-class networks and create environments in which the Islamic movements can effectively carry out their work.²⁹ Third, religious welfare institutions—sometimes explicitly, sometimes unintentionally—help make the vocabulary and mode of action of Islamic movements resonate more effectively with the users of these services. Finally, the fact that Islamic charities and institutions provide vital services makes it difficult for states to completely shut down their activities.

Islamic organizations have drawn attention for the scale of their charitable endeavors in an age of diminishing state services, but they are not unique. The Jewish ultra-Orthodox Shas movement in Israel, for example, runs an extensive network of kindergartens, schools, charities, and welfare institutions across the country that supports thousands of families. In Egypt, the Coptic Church provides an associational life and social services that help preserve

and enhance the identity of a minority community.³⁰ Nonreligious organizations providing social services have also proliferated. In addition, following the 2013 coup in Egypt, which ousted President Morsi of the Muslim Brothers, unprecedented levels of repression and the strict outlawing of the Brotherhoods have undermined much of the charitable work and infrastructure of Islamic social activism associated with the movement. Scholars who have been doubtful about the political effectiveness of Islamists' social services provision now call for reevaluation of the connection between religious charitable work and political mobilization, especially given the swiftness with which many Egyptians turned against the Brotherhood following its brief stay in power.³¹

Political Participation

The undemocratic nature of most states in the region has restricted political participation by opposition groups. Even under these limiting conditions, Islamic movements have been able to organize and compete effectively in electoral politics to the extent permitted by the state. Islamic movements have run candidates in elections for professional associations, labor unions, and student councils. A 2010 study found that, when allowed to participate in parliamentary elections, Islamists have run in 140 different elections since 1970, either through an affiliated political party, by fielding independent candidates, or in coalition with other parties.³² This track record reflects the willingness of many Islamic movements to play by democratic rules and submit to the will of their people, even when these rules are severely slanted against them by authoritarian restrictions, manipulation, and rigging.

Despite this track record of participation, liberal and secular actors in the region, as well as Western policymakers, have been suspicious of the sincerity of the democratic commitment professed by Islamic movements. This suspicion stems from two assumptions. The first is that Islamists simply use the democratic political game as a tactical means for gaining power, after which, critics fear, they will abolish the same democratic system that had brought them to power and will seek to establish a theocratic state similar to the Iranian model. Such anxieties were among the reasons secular opposition groups, with approval from France and the United States, supported the military abortion of the Algerian election process following a first-round victory by the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in 1991. Critics of Islamic movements also cite the violent clashes between Palestinian Hamas and Fatah that followed the electoral victory of Hamas in 2006 and the subsequent takeover of Gaza by Hamas as a reason to doubt the democratic commitment of Islamic movements. Authoritarian regimes invoke the fear that these movements adhere to democratic principles only to win power—“one person, one vote, one time”³³ is the slogan—to justify their reluctance to implement liberalizing political reforms. Fear of Islamists’ authoritarianism may also help explain the support of large segments of the Egyptian population for the military coup against the government of the Muslim Brotherhood in 2013. Though hardly enjoying democratic credentials themselves, authoritarian governments try to convince both the secular opposition and the West that “the devil you know—the regime—is better than the devil you don’t know—the Islamic contenders.”³⁴ These fears, however, are largely speculative. The few examples often used in support of such arguments fail to address the integral part that incumbent regimes or their affiliates in the military, security services, and the bureaucracy have played in instigating and propagating the upheavals that followed these contested elections.

Scholars debate whether participation by Islamists in the electoral process might lead to the moderation of hard-line ideologies.³⁵ Jillian Schwedler defines *moderation* as

[a] process of change that might be described as movement along a continuum from radical to moderate, whereby a move away from more exclusionary practices (of the sort that view all alternative perspectives as illegitimate and thus dangerous) equates to an increase in moderation.³⁶

The exigencies of running in election, some scholars argue, create incentives for Islamists to moderate their positions. For example, in order to win seats Islamists must appeal to diverse voters, including those who do not necessarily subscribe to their religious agenda.³⁷ In some

cases, they must also cooperate and even create coalitions with opposition forces that hold views directly opposed to an Islamist ideology, such as secular and socialist or communist groups.³⁸ Inclusion of Islamists in the democratic process can also give rise to internal debates about strategy within the movements between hard-liners and moderates or between the older and younger generations.³⁹ Inclusion may also prevent radicalization by offering legitimate forms of participation to Islamists and others who are critical of the existing political situation in their countries and are committed to changing it.

While some scholars argue that inclusion leads to moderation, others think that the causal direction is actually the reverse, that the ideological moderation of Islamists leads them to seek participation and not the other way around. During the late 1990s and early 2000s, for example, Islamists in Turkey, Egypt, and Morocco moderated their political stances, advocating participation and compromise instead of revolutionary overhaul of the political system, even under conditions of exclusion or the absence of meaningful democratic reforms.⁴⁰ Some scholars argue that, in fact, this moderation by Islamists and their inclusion or even co-optation by authoritarian regimes might have the paradoxical effect of reducing the pressure on authoritarian incumbents to pursue genuine democratic reform.⁴¹ However, there is some evidence that inclusion is strongly associated with political liberalization. As Islamists participate in the political game more openly, they become less of an “unknown threat” to other, mostly secular, opposition groups and therefore cease to be the “Islamist menace” that authoritarian regimes can use to defer reforms.⁴²

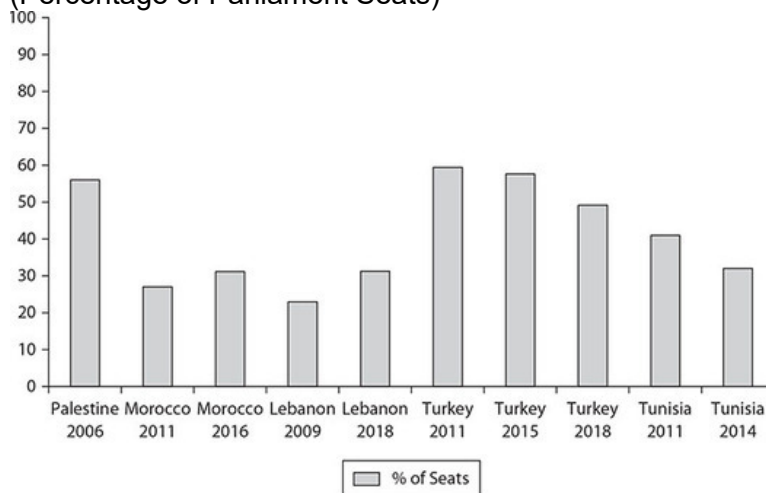
Whether inclusion leads to behavioral moderation or ideological moderation leads to participation, it appears that religious parties in the Middle East generally abide by democratic rules when given the opportunity to do so. For instance, when Islamic parties have competed in elections that required a quota for women candidates, as in elections in the Palestinian Authority, Jordan, and Tunisia, they did not contest the rule and fielded women as candidates. Israel’s experience offers an important lesson as well. Religious parties have freely participated in Israeli elections from the establishment of the state. Since the late 1990s, religious parties have held almost a fourth of the seats in the Israeli parliament, the Knesset. These parties have exerted their significant power to maintain and strengthen the religious character of the state, but they have not sought to abolish the democratic system itself and have continued to participate in repeated elections. The case of the Turkish Justice and Development Party (AKP) serves as still another indicator of how Islamic parties might perform after winning free democratic elections. In power since 2002, the AKP had removed all reference to religion in its party platform by 2011, referring to itself simply as a “conservative” party. At the same time, President Erdoğan of Turkey worked to consolidate his power in increasingly authoritarian ways. His brutal repression of political opponents, including other Islamist groups like the Gulen movement, bore more resemblance to the actions of other authoritarian leaders in the region—secular or religious—than it did to implementation of a uniquely “Islamic” model.

Even if many Islamic movements are at least somewhat committed to procedural democracy, some critics see their agenda of increasing the role of religion in public life and state institutions as inherently incompatible with liberal democratic principles. Islamic parties often mention in their electoral platforms and their campaigns that they intend to ensure that shari’a assumes its proper role. They usually leave unspecified both the extent to which shari’a law would be implemented and the procedure by which this would be achieved.⁴³ Critics fear that the interpretation of shari’a law pursued by Islamic parties could undermine women’s rights, the rights of minorities, freedom of expression, and freedom of religion. The Freedom and Justice Party, affiliated with the Egyptian Muslim Brothers, for example, mentioned in its 2011 election platform that it would support international human rights conventions “so long as they are not

contrary to the principles of Islamic law.”⁴⁴ Similarly, the provisional constitution adopted in Tunisia after the revolution of the Arab Spring requires that the head of state be Muslim.⁴⁵ While concerns about Islamic movements for their lack of adherence to liberal democratic values are not unfounded, it is also important to keep in mind that the record of authoritarian incumbents in the protection of civil, political, and human rights is poor. For instance, in most Middle Eastern countries, including non-Muslim Israel, religious law already governs many personal status matters such as marriage, divorce, and citizenship with provisions that discriminate against women. A nonliberal approach to rights is common to incumbent regimes, Islamist contenders, and, possibly, the majority of people in the region.

As [Figure 4.4](#) shows, contemporary Islamic parties often perform well in elections that are relatively free and fair. In some elections in Palestine, Egypt, Tunisia, Turkey, Morocco, and Lebanon, Islamic parties or coalitions led by Islamic parties won more seats than other contenders. Why do Islamists seem to do relatively well in elections? The most widespread popular perception is that Islamists succeed in the ballot boxes because the poor, who benefit from Islamic social services, tend to support them.⁴⁶ But more recent studies point in other directions. Tarek Masoud⁴⁷ and Janine Clark,⁴⁸ for example, find that Islamist movements are generally run by and appeal to the educated, professional middle classes who are less concerned with economic need and more interested in social and political change. Other scholars suggest that Islamists do well because they have several organizational advantages over other opposition contenders. From their extensive experience in the management of vast networks of social services, Islamic movements possess logistical skills, experience, and presence that is superior to what any other opposition group might muster. They also have better resources as they mobilize devoted volunteers and Islamic charity—*zakat*—while their secular civil society competitors rely on salaried positions and limited donations from the international community and appear tainted through their association with the West (see [Chapter 8](#)). A vote for an Islamic party is therefore not always a vote for an Islamizing agenda. Because they are often the most organized alternative to undemocratic and corrupt incumbents, Islamic parties at times also win protest votes from citizens who do not share the religious commitments of the parties. Yet after they are elected and confronted with the burdens of governance, Islamists tend to lose the support of protest voters, as has been the case, for example, with the Muslim Brothers in Egypt, Ennahda in Tunisia, and Hamas in Palestine.

Figure 4.4 Seats Won by Islamic Parties/Coalitions in Selected Recent Elections (Percentage of Parliament Seats)



Source: Compiled from Inter-Parliamentary Union data, <http://www.ipu.org>, and other news sources.

Partly to counter the appeal of Islamists, authoritarian incumbents in the region have in their turn also attempted to bolster the religious credentials of their regimes by employing so-called moderate religious rhetoric and supporting loyal religious education and religious institutions. Their actions have further contributed to the ascendance of religious discourse in the public sphere. It is yet unclear whether this last phenomenon has helped boost support for Islamists by rendering their religious vocabulary the most dominant one in the public square, or whether, on the contrary, as other scholars argue, this has led to greater disillusionment with religious rhetoric.⁴⁹

Momentarily, the Arab Spring promised a more democratic political process in the Middle East that would permit scholars to better estimate popular support for religious parties measured through their electoral performance. It could have also given us an opportunity to observe how Islamists perform in power or in governing coalitions across the region. However, the aftermath of the uprisings has been characterized across the region—except for Tunisia—by increased political violence, repression, and conflict, which make formal politics again a largely unrepresentative reflection of popular political preferences.

Contextualizing Violence

In the media and the popular imagination, the specter of violence hovers over Islamic movements. Especially since the 9/11 attacks, violent action by groups who self-identify as Islamic is perceived as senseless, irrational, and indiscriminate. The recent appearance and growth of ISIS and its brutal violence provides additional, gruesome material for this narrative. For analytic purposes, the Islamic groups that do engage in violence can be divided into three types. The first type includes nationalist movements engaged in an armed conflict against a foreign occupier. The most well-known and popular among these are Hamas and Hizbullah. The second type involves small, radical groups that use violence against oppressive authoritarian governments in their own countries. These are usually isolated, clandestine militias that do not enjoy mass support. Their violence tends to flare up when state repression increases and no peaceful avenues for change seem available. It is also often short-lived, as violence against civilians tends to alienate local populations. Finally, the third group includes transnational terrorist networks such as al-Qa'ida, and more recently the Islamic State, that employ indiscriminate violence in the service of abstract causes and use domestic conflicts and weak states to further their transnational agendas. Complicating matters, many of these various groups—from nationalists to transnational jihadists—often receive support from various authoritarian governments in the region as part of the latter's regional geopolitical interests.

Islamic nationalists resort to violence essentially against external occupiers rather than against internal secular rivals. However, the fact that they maintain their own militias makes internal political competition riskier for their opponents; the threat of internal violence remains a possibility. Hamas developed out of the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brothers that, until the outbreak of the *intifada* (uprising) in 1987 against the Israeli occupation, was primarily engaged in religious and social work. In the 1980s, Hamas combined its commitment to promoting an Islamic society with the cause of liberating Palestine, couching the latter in religious terms and adopting a discourse of religious jihad against the foreign occupier. For Hamas, regaining Muslim control of Palestine became a religious duty. In the 1990s, Hamas executed attacks, including suicide missions, against Israeli military and civilian targets, killing many and contributing, alongside Israeli violations, to the death of the Oslo peace process, which had begun in 1993. Faced with retaliation from both the Israeli army and the Palestinian Authority, Hamas turned back to focus on its religious and social activities in the late 1990s. The outbreak of the second *intifada* in 2000, which triggered severe violence from Israel and from secular Palestinian factions under the leadership of Fatah, brought Hamas back into the armed struggle against Israel. Hamas has maintained that it endorses violence only to end Israeli occupation and not to impose its religious vision on Palestinians. In 2006, Hamas participated in the national election of the Palestinian Legislative Council, signalling its intention to become a legitimate political party that participates in the democratic game. Its unexpected victory in the election led to a short-lived unity government with Fatah, which soon disintegrated as a result of internal rifts and external pressures. In the aftermath of the disintegration, violent clashes between Fatah and Hamas ensued; Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip in 2007, while Fatah dominated the West Bank. In 2018, more than a decade later, the Fatah-Hamas split between the West Bank and Gaza still persisted.

While armed nationalist Islamic movements can destabilize a country, their resistance to occupation, their vast social services, and their reputation for honesty in a context of widespread corruption mean that they continue to enjoy significant popularity in some places. In Lebanon, the armed group Hizbullah was established to resist the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon that began in 1982. Building on a network of religious and social services it

provided for the underprivileged and underrepresented Shi'i community of Lebanon, Hizbullah became not only a religious resistance militia but also a popular representative of Shi'a in Lebanon. In 1989, with the end of the civil war that had raged in Lebanon since 1975, the Taif Accords stipulated the disarming of Lebanese militias but exempted Hizbullah, thus permitting Hizbullah to continue its resistance against the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon. By 2000, Israel withdrew from the south in what Hizbullah considered a victory of its armed resistance. Despite the absence of direct occupation, Hizbullah maintained its arms for the stated purpose of continued defense against potential Israeli attacks and for the liberation of a small disputed area, the Shabaa Farms, still under Israeli control. It also participated in Lebanese elections and has become one of the strongest political parties in the country. Like Hamas, however, Hizbullah's military capacities, thought to be greater than those of the Lebanese army, contributed to internal instability; the Lebanese state, like the Palestinian Authority, did not monopolize the means of violence. In 2006, Hizbullah's kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers led to a devastating Israeli attack on Lebanon that targeted civilian infrastructure and caused massive destruction. In 2008, Hizbullah forces took control over downtown Beirut in a show of military might that was meant to intimidate internal political rivals. Though resolved without violence, the incident demonstrated that Hizbullah's weapons could, under certain circumstances, be used internally. These nationalist groups garner material support from regional players as well, further destabilizing domestic politics. Hizbullah has historically received tremendous military support from Iran and Syria and in turn has dragged Lebanon into the Syrian conflict post 2011. Hamas has been variously funded by Iran, Syria, and Qatar, who have assisted the organization for reasons that are not strictly about genuine support for the Palestinian people. It is important to note, however, that in the cases of Palestine and Lebanon, non-Islamic factions, including the dominant secular groups, have also used force internally to fight political rivals and have been supported by various external players.

Radical revolutionary organizations constitute the second type of Islamic groups that have resorted to violence. They have sought to replace what they consider insufficiently Islamic governments by violent means. These groups have been relatively small and garnered limited support within their countries. Moreover, such groups have resorted to violence not simply as a result of their radical ideology but in response to actions of the state. Their violence has often been brief, suppressed by the state and even renounced by their own leadership. Militant activities in Egypt and Algeria in the 1990s, which were among the most visible and violent instances of radical Islamic insurgencies, demonstrate these three aspects of Islamic militant violence.

In the 1990s, the radical group al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya, which advocated the establishment of a purely Islamic state, executed vicious attacks against government representatives, Egyptian civilians, and in extreme cases, foreign tourists. Earlier, the group had cooperated in the assassination of Egyptian president Anwar al-Sadat, but in the 1990s, its violence greatly intensified. Between 1992 and 1997, it was responsible for 1,442 deaths and 1,799 injuries.⁵⁰ These attacks came in response to the increased repressiveness of the Egyptian regime, which closed off alternatives to legitimate, nonviolent contestation of the status quo. The regime also arrested and imprisoned Islamist activists, without discrimination between moderates and radicals, contributing to the frustration of many activists and their turn to violence.⁵¹ Rising violence by al-Gama'a, and in particular its gruesome massacre of foreign tourists at Luxor in 1997, which hurt the Egyptian tourist industry, quickly turned many sympathizers away from the group. In addition, unrelenting retaliation by the state decimated the organization's military capacities and available personnel. Later in 1997, the Gama'a declared a unilateral ceasefire and began a process of deradicalization that included publishing twenty-five volumes by Gama'a leaders, who denounced violence and advocated a nonviolent

religious and political ideology.⁵² Since the 2013 military coup under now-Egyptian president Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, the intensification of the state's brutal repression of Islamists of all kinds—from the moderates to the more radical—has created a new round of militant radicalization that may mirror the events of the 1990s.

In Algeria, the military coup that followed the Islamic FIS victory in the 1991 election brought severe repression of Islamic activism. In 1992, thousands of FIS activists were arrested, and by 1996, half of the 43,737 prisoners in Algeria's 116 prisons were held on charges of terrorism.⁵³ "The gravest development, however, was the almost daily killing of Islamists, either through manhunts or clashes during searches. Many human rights organizations condemned the military regime's use of torture, 'disappearances,' and the extrajudicial killing of suspected Islamists."⁵⁴

One result was a radicalization of Islamic activists, who increasingly turned to armed resistance in the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS), the military wing of the FIS, and in more extreme groups such as the Armed Islamic Group (GIA). The armed uprising quickly deteriorated into indiscriminate violence against civilians and threw Algeria into a bloody civil war. As in Egypt, the loss of civilian life in the widespread violence, alongside effective violent repression by the state, eventually brought an end to the insurrection. In 1997, the AIS declared a unilateral ceasefire, which signaled the return of many Islamist activists to nonviolent activity.⁵⁵

Transnational terrorist networks such as al-Qa'ida and ISIS make up the third type of Islamic groups given to violence. The scale of their attacks against Western targets and the brutality of their violence against Shi'a, other religious minorities, and ideological rivals has drawn great international attention. Although such transnational networks have recruited from among the ranks of radical Islamic groups in the Middle East, their objectives and mode of operation are distinct from those of Islamic nationalists and radical local revolutionaries. Local groups restrict their activism to their own country and aim at regime change rather than international upheaval. Transnational terrorist networks such as al-Qa'ida, like the local groups, also hope to establish an Islamic state or states but believe that in order to overturn existing regimes they must also target the Western powers that lend material and military support to these regimes. Their ideology, influenced by the writings of Sayyid Qutb, rests on the idea of offensive jihad and is captured in the now-famous document of 1998 titled "Jihad against the Jews and the Crusaders" and attributed to Osama bin Laden. The document asserts that

[to] kill the Americans and their allies—civilian and military—is an individual duty incumbent upon every Muslim in all countries, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque and the holy mosque from their grip, so that their armies leave all the territory of Islam, defeated, broken and unable to threaten any Muslim.⁵⁶

Egyptian radicals such as Ayman al-Zawahiri of the Islamic jihad organization, Omar Abdel-Rahman of al-Gamaa al-Islamiyya, Saudi ideologists such as Osama bin Laden, and fighters from other Arab countries met in the 1980s during the Islamic resistance campaign—supported by the United States—against the Soviet incursion into Afghanistan. After their victory over the Soviet Union, armed veterans of the Afghan campaign returned to their countries with the message of transnational jihad. Heavy and effective repression in Egypt, Algeria, and elsewhere led them to move their fight to other international arenas such as Bosnia, Kosovo, Kashmir, and Chechnya and to weak states such as Pakistan, Yemen, and later Iraq, Syria, and Libya. The name *al-Qa'ida* has become a sort of a franchise that independent radical

groups around the world adopt in their struggle for a plethora of different objectives.⁵⁷ In the aftermath of the 2011 Arab Uprisings, al-Qa'ida subsidiaries such as Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria and al-Qa'ida in Iraq, later known as ISIS, began to employ a new method—the conquering and administration of territories.

Most notorious among these groups is ISIS, which focused on the occupation and administration of territory, the erasure of national borders, and the extreme persecution of religious minorities as well as rival Sunni groups. ISIS traces its origins to al-Qa'ida in Iraq, a subsidiary of al-Qa'ida since 2003 under the leadership of Jordanian militant Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. As early as 2005, Ayman al-Zawahiri, an al-Qa'ida leader, warned al-Zarqawi that his indiscriminate violence against Muslims and particularly his atrocities against Shi'a were harmful to the jihadi cause. Under the leadership of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi since 2010, ISIS gained strength through alliance with former Ba'athists leaders and military officers as well as the recruitment of disgruntled Iraqi Sunnis feeling increasingly marginalized by the policies of Iraq's former prime minister Nuri al-Maliki. The group also expanded its operations into Syria with the onset of the civil war there. In 2013, however, ISIS's demand to merge with Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria and the group's extreme brutality have led al-Qa'ida to disassociate itself from the group.⁵⁸ In 2014, ISIS arguably became the most powerful terrorist group in the region. Using the expertise of former Ba'athists and recruitment of thousands of foreign fighters, it was able to gain control over large swaths of territory in Iraq, most notably Iraq's second-largest city of Mosul, and in Syria. With military equipment it captured from the Iraqi army, a stream of revenue from oil fields under its control and from ransoms and taxes, and an effective social media presence that drew foreign recruits from the Middle East, Europe, Russia, and elsewhere, ISIS briefly appeared as a formidable threat. It quickly provoked mobilization of an international coalition that through airstrikes largely decimated the organization. The response reconfigured international alliances because the United States, Russia, and Iran considered ISIS a common enemy. By 2018, ISIS seemed more a passing phenomenon than a permanent presence in the region. With respect to religion, its extreme theology that included the expulsion and killing of religious minorities, the resurrection of the institution of slavery, and severe social repression had appalled the majority of Muslims across the world, even as it found some resonance among small numbers of disaffected, mainly young Muslims inspired by its purported reestablishment of a mythical Islamic caliphate.⁵⁹ In the aftermath of this episode, it became clear that ISIS benefitted more than anything else the interests of authoritarian regimes in the region. The extreme "Islamist" menace enabled every stripe of dictator—from Asad to Sisi—to intensify the crackdown on all religious (and nonreligious) opposition. The idea that the Middle East's options are either the "devil you know" in the form of incumbent authoritarians or a worse devil in the form of ISIS helped to bolster authoritarian regimes and fortify international support for them from both the West and Russia.

Despite their dominance of media attention, transnational terrorist networks, together with local radical groups, represent only a small minority of Islamist activists and cannot compete with the more mainstream social and political Islamic groups in terms of popularity and support. Nonviolent transnational Islamic activism enjoys significantly greater support and influence in the Middle East than the networks dedicated to violence. Transnational Islamic activism promotes the spread of religious knowledge through the influence of popular religious authorities—such as the religious scholar Yousef al-Qaradawi—and the use of the Internet and satellite television channels such as al-Jazeera. Transnational Islamic charity networks and growing lines of communication between religious activists in the Middle East and the wider Muslim world, Europe, and the United States appear to be gaining in significance at a time when the violent groups are relegated to failed states or territories without effective government. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC),⁶⁰ for example, an

intergovernmental body with fifty-seven member states that serves as a sort of UN of the Muslim world, has also exerted efforts to create a forum for international Muslim solidarity.

Conclusion

Scholars writing about the Middle East between World War II and the Iranian Revolution of 1979 paid scant attention to religion as a dynamic factor in the region. They emphasized the importance of understanding religion as an enduring aspect of culture, but one that seemed to be diminishing in importance with an acceleration of social, economic, and political change. The ascendant ideologies of liberalism, socialism, Zionism, and Arabism were predominantly secular, although some forms of Arabism and Zionism evoked religious commitment. Already after the Six-Day War of 1967 and especially after the Iranian Revolution of 1979, religion began to attract more attention. At the moment—at the close of the second decade of the twenty-first century—religion seems central to much that is happening in the region. States rely on it for identity and legitimacy; civil organizations use it to goad members into action; radical groups engage in violence in the name of religion; and individual Middle Easterners appear more committed to religion than in previous generations. The increased centrality of religion has not, however, recast political order in the region. Islamic groups have challenged regimes in both violent and nonviolent ways, but in doing so, they have necessarily reinforced the nation-state framework at the expense of the *umma*, the community of all believers—Osama bin Laden, al-Qa'ida, and ISIS notwithstanding.

These developments confirm that religion is a dynamic rather than a static force in the region. Human beings continually reshape their religions, claiming all the while that it is religious belief that impels them to do so. Understood in the broadest sense, Islam is not what it was a century ago; neither is Judaism or Christianity, for that matter. Citizens of this region have availed themselves of religion for social and political purposes in ways previous generations would not have imagined, transforming the nature of religion in the process. It is not a certainty that this trend will continue. Neither is it a certainty that this trend will come to be seen as a temporary deviation from the long-term pattern of secularization, as some modernization theorists think it will. To extrapolate from contemporary events is hazardous.⁶¹

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5 Actors, Public Opinion, and Participation

Janine A. Clark¹

Political Participation is a Multifaceted Concept, and its dynamics are shaped by context. As in other world regions, in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) most citizens participate in formal and informal politics in hopes of improving their everyday conditions. MENA citizens commonly talk about the importance of participation for improving the political and economic situation and working toward a better human rights and democratic record. Securing employment and achieving better pay or resources are also often considered political acts—especially in this region, where parliamentarians are more likely to be effective as service providers than as policymakers. For many, political activity has an immediate, economic dimension. However, while the broader population may be motivated to participate by material interests, activists—whether through political parties, civil society, or social movements—seek immaterial interests as well. The 2011 Arab Spring reflected these two goals, as people came together demanding both “bread” and “dignity.”

This chapter examines citizens’ motivations for participation, as well as the pathways through which they engage in political action. These spheres are sometimes formal avenues, such as political parties, elections, and civil society organizations; more often, they are not. The chapter begins with a discussion of citizens’ attitudes and interests. It then examines their participation in formal venues, assessing the limitations of electoral and civil society activity. The third section turns to informal political venues and examines how seemingly apolitical activities form an important type of political participation in the region. The chapter concludes with an examination of how relatively new technologies and social media are shaping patterns of political engagement across the region.

Citizen Attitudes in the MENA²

A variety of political attitudes structure patterns of political participation in the MENA. MENA citizens are concerned about the economy and the corruption that plagues their political systems. They also show distress regarding possible terrorist attacks. They have little trust in political parties or parliaments but remain strong supporters of democracy.

The Economy and Corruption

MENA citizens agree that the economic situation and corruption are the most important problems facing their countries. The recent Arab Barometer poll found that the vast majority of Egyptians and Moroccans stated that the economy was one of the top-two challenges facing their country. Lebanese and Algerians were the least to express this concern, although even in these countries the economic situation worried the majority of respondents. Citizens are less concerned with corruption, although it is the second-most important problem, worrying nearly half of the respondents across the countries (see [Table 5.1](#)).

Transparency International (TI) data also reflects citizens' concern regarding corruption.³ TI found that one in three people in the MENA reported paying a bribe over the last year. It finds, moreover, that fewer citizens of North Africa felt that corruption had increased a lot or somewhat over the past year (46 percent) than those of the Mashrek and the Arab Gulf, where 80 percent stated that it had. Ninety-two percent of Lebanese stated that corruption had risen, the highest of any country in the survey. The Lebanese and the Yemenis are particularly critical of government efforts to address public sector corruption, with 67 percent of Lebanese rating their administration's efforts as either very or fairly bad; among Yemenis it was 91 percent.

These economic concerns prompt citizens to consider leaving the country. The Arab Barometer finds that nearly one-quarter of all MENA citizens consider emigrating. The desire to emigrate is highest among Lebanese (30 percent), followed by the Palestinians (28 percent) and Moroccans (27 percent), and lowest among Egyptians (18 percent). In Algeria, the reasons for considering moving are divided between economic reasons (45 percent) and both economic and political reasons (28 percent), but in other countries, the vast majority think of leaving for economic reasons.

Democracy

As shown in [Table 5.1](#), few citizens rank “achieving democracy” as one of the top-two challenges facing their countries. Algerians were more likely to see democracy as a challenge than Jordanians. This does not mean that people of the MENA are content with the state of democracy in their countries. Across the region, citizens rate the extent to which they think their country is democratic as 5 out of 10, with 10 being “democratic to the greatest extent possible.” Citizens are aware that their countries are not democratic, but in the current climate, they do not see this as a top priority.

Table 5.1 Top-Two Problems Facing the Country Today

Table 5.1 Top-Two Problems Facing the Country Today

	Country						
Category	Algeria	Palestine	Jordan	Lebanon	Morocco	Tunisia	Egypt
Economic situation	65	82	79	64	85	75	88
Financial and administrative corruption	54	43	39	44	46	46	48
Achieving democracy	12	6	1	4	6	4	3
Internal stability and security	23	39	15	15	19	21	16
Foreign interference	26	15	9	11	4	10	11
Religious extremism	13	10	12	12	14	34	13
Other	2	3	39	46	6	8	1
No other challenge or Don't know	1	1	5	1	3	1	1

That said, MENA citizens continue to support democracy. The vast majority (82 percent) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “A democratic system may have its problems, yet it is better than other systems.” When asked if the statement “Democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government” was closest to their own opinion, they differed more in their responses. Jordanians (66 percent) stand out as having the greatest support for this statement. Only 16 percent agreed with the statement “Under some circumstances, a nondemocratic government can be preferable,” and 15 percent agreed with “For people like me, it does not matter what kind of government we have.” The Lebanese also showed very high support for the statement that democracy is always preferable. Algerians are at the other end of the scale, as 39 percent felt the statement was closest to their opinion, while 36 percent stated that under some circumstances a nondemocratic system is preferable. Palestinians (42 percent) demonstrated relatively less support for the preference of a democracy under any circumstances.

Security and Terrorism

MENA citizens also express widespread concern about terrorist attacks. As shown in [Table 5.2](#), when asked how worried they were about the possibility of a terrorist attack nearly all Tunisians and Egyptians said “very much.” Jordanians express the least degree of concern, but even there, 65 percent of respondents were worried. Moreover, the percentage of Jordanians who feel their personal and family safety and security are ensured or fully ensured has increased since 2011.

Trust in Institutions

Arab citizens' trust in institutions mirrors their greater concern for security over democracy. Across the region, we find that citizens express trust in security organs, while they distrust institutions related to democracy.

When asked about their trust in public institutions, MENA citizens overwhelmingly rank the armed forces and the police as the top-two institutions they trust a great deal or quite a lot. At the top of the scale, 98 percent of Jordanians have a great deal or quite a lot of trust in the armed forces and 95 percent in the police. In the former French colonies of Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, and Lebanon, citizens trust the armed forces significantly more than the police. Eighty-four percent of Lebanese express trust in the armed forces and 50 percent in the police. Palestinians express much less trust in both the army and the police than citizens of other states in the Arab Barometer survey. Palestinians trust the police (44 percent) and armed forces (41 percent) a great deal or quite a lot (see [Figure 5.1](#)).

MENA citizens trust the legislature and political parties much less. Egyptians express the greatest trust in political parties, with 19 percent saying they trust them a great deal or quite a lot; only 7 percent of Jordanians hold these views. As discussed in [Chapter 3](#), such lukewarm trust in political parties across the region can be attributed to the ineffectual roles political parties have played in parliaments, a result of low parliamentary autonomy and efficacy. Indeed, elected councils of representatives (parliaments) do not fare much better, and MENA citizens rank them as the second-least trusted institution (see [Figure 5.2](#)).

Lebanon stands out for the fact that its citizens have exceptionally low trust in all institutions other than the army and the police and that they have relatively high trust—in terms of ranking—in political parties. Only 15 percent of Lebanese express a great deal or quite a lot of trust in political parties, yet political parties rank as their third-most trusted institution.

Table 5.2 Concerns over a Terrorist Attack in Your Country

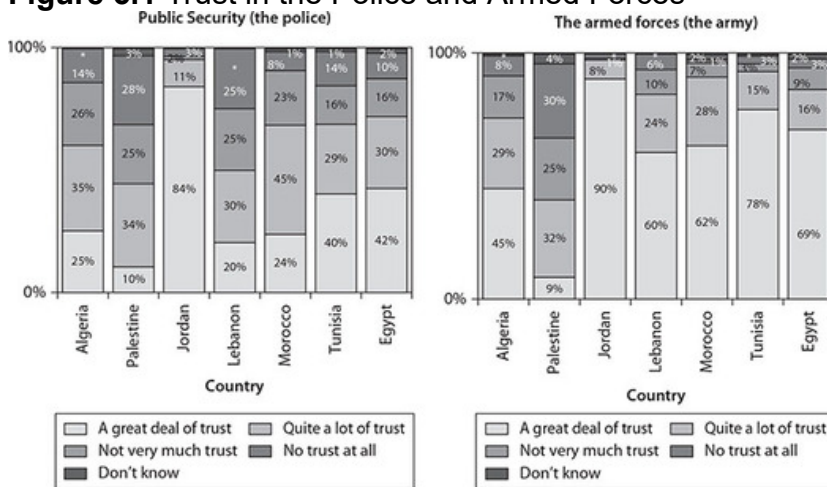
Table 5.2 Concerns over a Terrorist Attack in Your Country

To what degree are you worried about a terrorist attack in your country? (%)								
		Country						
Category	Total	Algeria	Palestine	Jordan	Lebanon	Morocco	Tunisia	Egypt
Very much	69.7	72.8	67.9	42.6	64.8	63.5	96.8	79.7
Much	16.7	15.9	20.5	24.4	23.3	19.2	1.3	12.3

To what degree are you worried about a terrorist attack in your country? (%)								
		Country						
Category	Total	Algeria	Palestine	Jordan	Lebanon	Morocco	Tunisia	Egypt
Not much	5.3	5.4	5.9	7.2	6.4	7.9	0.1	4.4
Not at all	7.7	5.5	5.0	25.6	4.8	8.2	1.5	3.6
Not applicable	0.3	0.4	0.3	-	0.6	0.3	0.1	-
Don't know	0.2	0.0	0.4	0.2	0.1	0.9	0.1	-
(N = 100%)	8,394	1,200	1,196	1,200	1,200	1,197	1,201	1,200

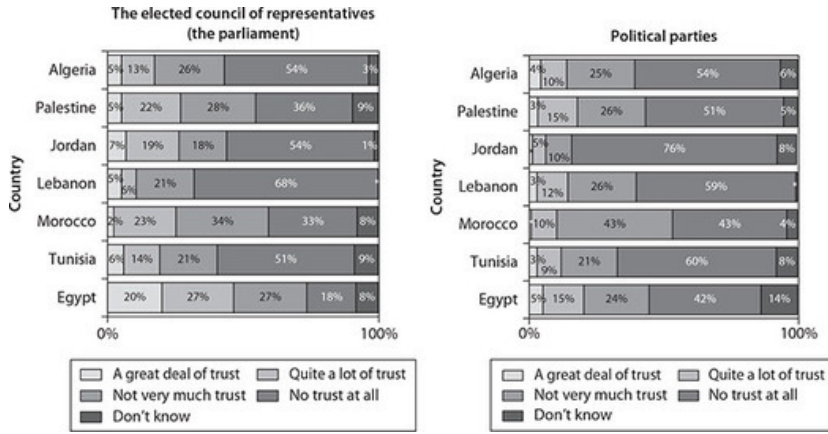
Source: Arab Barometer data. Used with permission.

Figure 5.1 Trust in the Police and Armed Forces



Source: Arab Barometer data. Used with permission.

Figure 5.2 Trust in the Parliament and Political Parties



Source: Arab Barometer data. Used with permission.

Relations with the United States

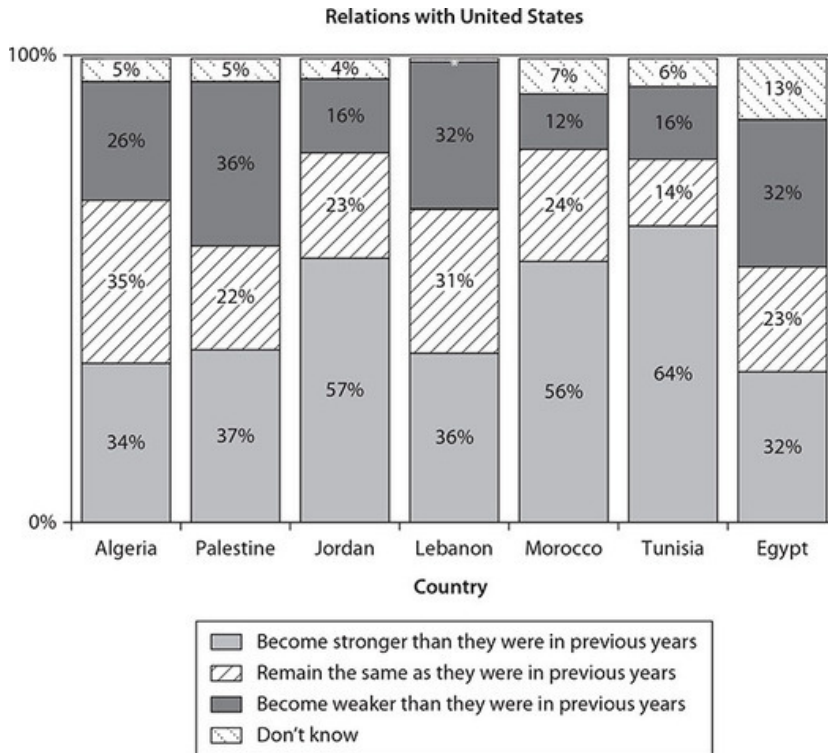
Citizens are divided over whether they prefer stronger economic relations with the United States. When asked if they want their country's relations with the United States to become stronger, remain the same, or become weaker, relatively similar numbers of Algerians, Egyptians, Lebanese, and Palestinians choose each response. Jordanians, Moroccans, and Tunisians overwhelmingly support stronger economic relations with the United States (see [Figure 5.3](#)).

At the same time, when asked about the influence of the United States on the development of democracy in their country, only Moroccans responded positively; 28 percent said it was very or somewhat positive, and 30 percent stated it was neither positive nor negative. Tunisians, Jordanians, and Algerians were relatively divided on the issue, while Lebanese, Palestinians, and Egyptians were resoundingly negative, as shown in [Table 5.3](#).

When asked "What policy do you think would be the most positive thing that the United States could do in your country?" most MENA citizens say that the United States should not get involved (see [Figure 5.4](#)). This sentiment is particularly strong in Egypt (62 percent) and Tunisia (50 percent). Across the MENA, the second-most common response was resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict, according to 38 percent of Palestinians and 34 percent of Jordanians.

The Lebanese, Tunisians, and Moroccans in relatively large numbers also would like the United States to promote economic development (26 percent, 10 percent, and 19 percent, respectively).

Figure 5.3 Relations with the United States



Source: Arab Barometer data. Used with permission.

When Jordanians and Lebanese were asked what they think the influence of the United States has been on the conflict in Syria, both responded very negatively: 69 percent of Lebanese and 52 percent of Jordanians responded very or somewhat negative. In Lebanon, this included 50 percent who responded very negative.

Postrevolutionary Tunisia and Egypt

If we look in-depth at Tunisia and Egypt where the outcomes of their 2011 revolutions have been dramatically different, survey results show that both Tunisians and Egyptians share much consensus regarding their views on democracy but differ regarding the economic situation and satisfaction with the government. Most Egyptians (59 percent) feel that the economic situation is much better or somewhat better than it was just prior to the uprising and the 2013 coup. In contrast, only 15 percent of Tunisians rate the economy as being good or very good, a decline from 27 percent shortly after the 2011 uprising. Similarly, the percentage of Tunisians who expect the economy to improve over the next three years to five years has decreased from 78 percent just after the revolution to 55 percent in 2013 to 49 percent in 2018.

Yet Tunisians continue to have confidence in the democratic system. Eighty-six percent of Tunisians agree that democracy is the best system of governance—an increase from the 70 percent who agreed with the statement shortly after the revolution. Fifty-three percent of Egyptians agree with the statement “Democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government.” Egyptians continue to prefer a “parliamentary system in which nationalist, left-wing, right-wing, and Islamist parties compete in parliamentary elections,” although support for this has fallen to 39 percent as compared to 69 percent in 2013.

Table 5.3 Influence of the United States on the Development of Democracy in Your Country

Table 5.3 Influence of the United States on the Development of Democracy in Your Country

Do you think the influence of each of the following on the development of democracy in your country has been . . . ? (%)								
		Country						
Category	Total	Algeria	Palestine	Jordan	Lebanon	Morocco	Tunisia	Egypt
Very positive	5.5	6.9	4.8	7.0	4.0	5.3	8.4	2.3
Somewhat positive	16.3	14.4	14.9	20.8	12.2	21.9	19.0	10.7
Neither positive nor negative	25.4	30.2	19.4	35.3	21.4	30.0	27.3	14.4

Do you think the influence of each of the following on the development of democracy in your country has been . . . ? (%)								
		Country						
Category	Total	Algeria	Palestine	Jordan	Lebanon	Morocco	Tunisia	Egypt
Somewhat negative	20.4	25.5	23.8	17.9	26.6	10.8	16.5	21.9
Very negative	21.1	18.2	33.8	12.0	35.5	3.9	15.3	29.1
Don't know	11.2	4.8	3.3	6.9	0.4	28.1	13.5	21.6
(N = 100%)	8,352	1,190	1,197	1,193	1,199	1,191	1,192	1,190

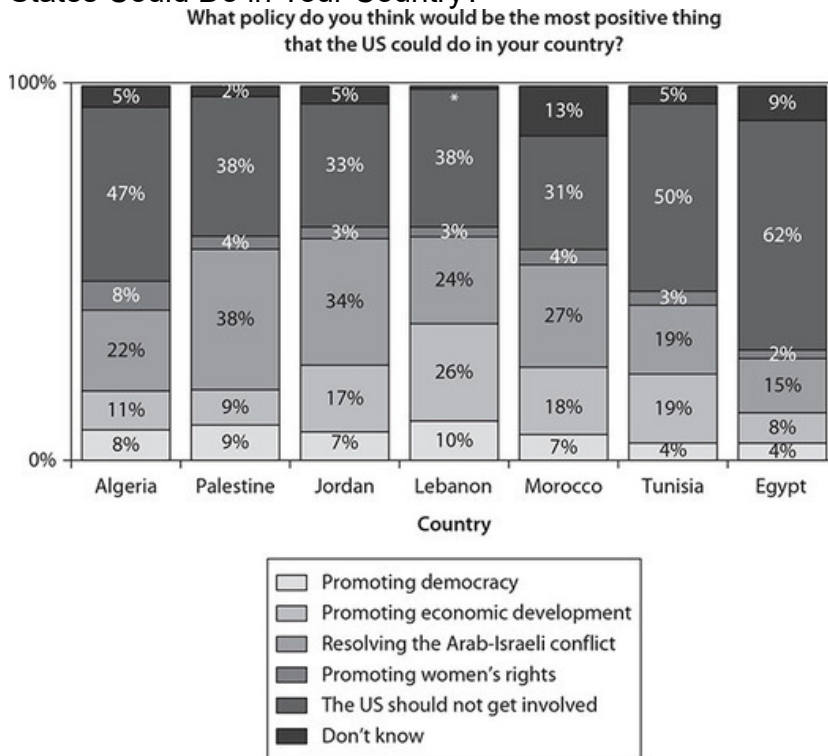
Source: Arab Barometer data. Used with permission.

As Tunisians continue transitioning to democracy, there is a growing concern among Tunisians whether or not democracy is appropriate for their country. Part of this decline may be related to the fact that 73 percent of Tunisians agree or strongly agree that their fellow citizens are unprepared for democracy, a substantial increase from the 2011 and 2013 surveys.

At the same time, support for political Islam has decreased. Half of Egyptians believe that laws should be based equally on shari'a and the will of the people; this is down from 68 percent in 2013. Similarly, while 70 percent of Egyptians agreed or strongly agreed that the government and parliament should enact laws mostly or entirely based in accordance with Islamic law in 2013, this dropped to 34 percent in 2016. The number of Egyptians who believe that religious leaders should have influence over government (16 percent) or should hold office (25 percent) has remained the same since 2013 but is significantly lower since 2011. The declining percentages may reflect the impact of the Freedom and Justice Party's time in power. Tunisians also have similarly low levels of support for political Islam. Only 11 percent support the Islamist party, Ennahda. This is equal to the secular party, Nidaa Tounes (12 percent).

The Afrobarometer⁴ findings also reveal a sharp increase in the number of Egyptians who see their country as democratic and are satisfied with the way democracy is working. Yet at the same time, they perceive lower levels of political freedoms and have lower levels of support for democracy and elections. This may be explained by what appears to be growing support for a strong executive: popular support in the president has almost tripled since 2013.

Figure 5.4 What Policy Do You Think Would Be the Most Positive Thing the United States Could Do in Your Country?



Source: Arab Barometer data. Used with permission.

As with other citizens in the Arab world, Tunisians and Egyptians remain worried about their security (see [Table 5.2](#)). However, there has been a significant increase in the percentage of Egyptians who say their security is ensured or fully ensured since 2013 (nearly 80 percent as compared to 20 percent in 2013). More Tunisians (71 percent) state that they feel the security of their families is secure than in either 2013 (52 percent) or in 2011 shortly after the revolution (66 percent).

While overall Egyptian satisfaction with the government has increased since 2013, Tunisians have significantly lower levels of trust in public institutions than in 2011 or 2013. The decline in trust of government appears to be related to its perceived failure to address key challenges facing ordinary citizens. Fewer Tunisians state that the government is doing a good or very good job at managing the economy, reducing inequality, or creating jobs than in either 2013 or 2011. The most precipitous decline is among those who say that the government is cracking down on corruption to a great or medium extent.

Postreform Jordan and Morocco

If we examine the monarchies of Jordan and Morocco, both of which have undergone reform processes in response to protesters' demands in 2011, we find that both Moroccans and Jordanians rate the highest in terms of the perception of what their respective governments are achieving.

Jordanians' views on a wide variety of issues have remained consistent or have improved since 2011. In 2011, 44 percent of Jordanians stated that the economic situation was good or very good, and in 2016, this number rose to 46 percent. Regarding the economy, 68 percent agree that the economic situation is either much better or somewhat better than in 2011, and 53 percent state that the government is doing a good or very good job at managing the economy. Importantly, 55 percent believe that the government is cracking down to a large or medium extent on corruption. This is a significant increase over previous surveys.

Moroccans also are increasingly optimistic about their country, as 66 percent evaluate the current economic situation as very good or good, and 32 percent say it is much better or somewhat better than in 2011. However, Moroccans are divided on their government's performance at managing the economy—42 percent state the government is doing a very good or good job, but 43 percent say it's doing a bad or very bad job.

While Jordanians are marginally more supportive, both Jordanians and Moroccans express relatively strong support for the extent to which they believe their country is democratic. On a scale of 0 to 10, with 10 being a complete democracy, 75 percent of Jordanians and 58 percent of Moroccans ranked their country as 5 or above.

Post–2011 Algeria

Algeria experienced a series of limited protests between December 2010 and early 2012. Until 2019, when the country experienced its own Smile Revolution, forcing its president to step down (see [Chapter 9](#)), Algerians remained among the least mobilized of MENA citizens—at least on a mass scale. Yet public opinion in 2016 suggested that there were growing frustrations with the political status quo.

In 2016, Algerians rated Algeria as less democratic than previously. On a scale of 0 to 10, with a 0 being a complete dictatorship, 65 percent of Algerians ranked the extent to which their country is democratic at 5 or less. At the same time, more Algerians believed democracy is appropriate for their country, as 70 percent of Algerians gave a ranking of 5 or higher.

In 2016, Algerians also were less likely to be satisfied with the government. While 70 percent rated the government's performance at providing security in the country as good or very good, the government did not fare well in other areas. A majority of Algerians gave a bad or very bad rating regarding the government's performance in several criteria: keeping prices down (82 percent), creating employment opportunities (78 percent), narrowing the gap between rich and poor (76 percent), managing the economy (67 percent), improving health services (60 percent), and addressing educational needs (57 percent).

Sixty-five percent of Algerians felt that their household economic situation is good or very good. Along with Morocco, this was the highest ranking of all countries in the Arab Barometer survey. Yet Algerians expressed significant economic anxiety and perceived the economy as worse than before. Only 27 percent of Algerians ranked their country's economic situation as either good or very good, a significant drop from previous surveys (66 percent).

Formal Avenues of Political Participation

Formal avenues of political participation, whether political parties or associational activities, exist across the MENA; however, not all avenues are present in every country in the region. Moreover, regime strategies to induce political participation in line with regime preferences or to limit engagement have changed over time. In the context of political pressures emerging from the Arab uprisings of 2011, these changes continue both in regimes that collapsed and in those that have managed to maintain power but, in the process, instituted partial reforms.

After independence, most MENA regimes instituted projects of state corporatism as a way to manage participation and foster development. In such cases, especially in the late 1960s and 1970s, regimes directed political participation through state-controlled professional syndicates, labor unions, and political parties. By creating spaces where political activity was legitimated, regimes attempted to micromanage the content and form of such political participation. In return, proregime segments received perquisites and benefits. Relying on state corporatism further distances citizens from the states and from the possibilities of holding authoritarian regimes accountable.

However, as the resource base dwindled and Islamist elements penetrated these associations, the corporatist model became far less effective.⁵ Multiparty competition gradually increased after the 1980s. Well before the Arab Spring uprisings, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, Jordan, Yemen, Kuwait, Lebanon, and Palestine began holding multiparty, parliamentary elections.

Political Parties and Elections

Political parties are one of the most obvious arenas for direct political engagement. Through political parties, people can articulate their interests, mobilize their votes, and allocate their support to certain policy positions and interest groups. Political parties also play an important, albeit somewhat limited, role in political society. Some existing political parties predate the independence era and survived authoritarianism. Many others did not survive and were either liquidated or co-opted by existing regimes.

During the populist era (1960s and 1970s), regimes often only allowed proregime parties, such as the National Liberation Front (FLN) in Algeria, or gave them constitutional and political advantages, thus discouraging the entry of other parties. The latter was the case with the Ba'athist Party in Syria and Iraq and the Neo-Destour in Tunisia. By the late 1980s, in the face of economic crisis and structural adjustment pressures many regimes allowed for additional political opening and liberalization. This led to the entry of new political parties.⁶ Since the 1990s, the number of political parties in the region has mushroomed.

What Do Regimes Gain from Permitting Political Parties?

Rather than a sign of a burgeoning democracy, the holding of elections is often a survival strategy or what Holger Albrecht and Oliver Schlumberger call a strategy of adaptation for authoritarian regimes.⁷ In other words, elections can help maintain authoritarian regime stability. They allow leaders to manage political elites by bringing them into the political process, thus keeping them accountable to the existing regime.⁸ Authoritarian leaders often manipulate elections so that the electoral process results in outcomes that give domestic credibility and legitimacy to leaders in power. By uniting potential supporters and would-be opponents in an election context, authoritarian regimes are able to remain durable and stable across time.⁹

Examining Egypt under Mubarak, Holger Albrecht demonstrates how the opposition, particularly opposition political parties, indirectly acts as a pillar of authoritarian rule.¹⁰ First, the opposition contributes positively to the regime's quest for political legitimacy and its image as a relatively liberal authoritarian regime. Second, the opposition provides a "rent-seeking" function. By tolerating the opposition and creating an image of pluralism, the authoritarian regime fulfills the expectations of and demands by Western governments and international institutions. This helps attract political rents, particularly development funds from abroad. The third authoritarian dimension of opposition is co-optation. Parties serve as transmission belts for the co-optation of social groups and interests not represented by the regime. Fourth, political opposition provides a "channeling function." Political parties channel dissent, making it easier for authoritarian regimes to assess discontent among the population and measure the potential for a social crisis to develop. Finally, the opposition provides a potential moderating function. Inclusion in the political system has the potential to deradicalize the opposition.

Scholars examining Islamist political parties identify three dynamics by which inclusion in electoral politics can lead to moderation.¹¹ The first involves electoral incentives. Opposition parties broaden and moderate their positions in order to attract votes beyond their narrow core constituency. The second dynamic relates to institutional structures. Opposition parties must mount campaigns, raise funds, and develop policies. This requires practical leaders and good administrators, not revolutionaries and underground cells. Third, once in power, opposition parties must deliver services, leaving little time for ideology, political rigidity, or radicalism.

Why Are Political Parties Weak in the MENA?

In the MENA, parliaments are not authorized to design, pass, and implement policies without the heavy-handed role of the executive. Because they cannot influence meaningful policy changes, incentives for parties to develop wide and encompassing issue-oriented politics or outlooks are lacking. As a consequence, political parties in authoritarian MENA countries are weak: vehicles of clientelistic redistribution, agents that promote personalistic ties and relations. After the Arab Spring, countries like Egypt and Tunisia witnessed a surge in the number of new political parties, following the easing of restrictions on registering and participating in political parties. Yet many of the new parties that formed were not well experienced, largely because they emerged out of authoritarian environments that had suffocated political activity, and thus, also did not have well-developed political platforms with wide appeal to the population.¹²

Reaching out to citizens under authoritarianism is a significant challenge. Typically, parties form around issues and mobilize citizens in support of demands. Yet political parties in authoritarian countries in the MENA have not developed into organizations that espouse issue-based platforms for several possible reasons. Opposition leaders are often co-opted by the regime. The activities of opposition parties are often restricted or hindered. In addition, elections are commonly rigged so that opposition parties obtain few seats in parliament. Opposition parties furthermore have very few channels through which to launch complaints of electoral harassment or wrongdoing.

Once they gain access to parliament, their ability to influence policy remains limited owing to executive oversight of the legislative body. Authoritarian rulers “wall off” the executive branch so that no act of legislature can transform the system. In much of the region (with countries like Israel being clear exceptions), the cabinet is appointed from outside the parliament, and it must approve all legislature passed in parliament. The executive is not accountable to the elected parliament or legislative assembly. Because of weak legislatures, political parties are unable to influence meaningful policy changes.

Many political parties thus remain personalistic, tribal, kin based, and narrow, lending themselves to a model of clientelistic distribution rather than constituency interest aggregation. Parties are primarily sources of patronage and *wasta* to government services that tend to retain constituent loyalty at election time through the distribution of clientelistic perquisites and benefits.

Party identification and policy issues often have less influence on voting behavior than the possibility of receiving *wasta*. For example, in Jordan, access to state resources is the primary motivation for participation in elections. Citizens do not necessarily possess democratic aspirations or policy preferences when they vote; instead, they hope to leverage more benefits from existing regimes. Under this system of “competitive clientelism,” as Ellen Lust calls it, voting revolves around patronage with constituents determining their voting preference based on their perception of who can deliver the goods.¹³ Furthermore, those individuals with personal relations with candidates are more likely to vote as they anticipate that they are more likely to benefit from the candidate’s patronage.

In the end, national elections reinforce rather than undermine the authoritarian regime by providing elites an opportunity to compete over special access to a limited set of state resources that they can then distribute to their clients. Political parties tend to have a proregime bias because, more often than not, they are rewarded for catering to the regime, and it is these benefits that keep party constituents happy.

Why Do Opposition Parties Participate in Elections?

If opposition parties are weak, restricted in their activities, and ultimately play an indirect role in supporting authoritarian regimes, why do they participate in elections? Despite being limited or controlled, elections can be considered “moments of opportunity” in an otherwise repressive environment.¹⁴ In his study of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt under Mubarak, Samer Shehata observes that elections and campaigns provide opportunities for groups that otherwise face serious restrictions on political activity to engage in politics. While protest marches, rallies, campaign posters, and even political meetings are often restricted in authoritarian regimes, these activities are tolerated during election periods.

Authoritarian regimes must reconcile their desire to appear democratic with the necessity of limiting any real electoral competition. In resolving this dilemma, they often allow relatively more freedom, albeit still limited, during election periods. This similarly was the case in Tunisia under the former president, Ben Ali. Opposition parties were allowed to run against the president’s party in order to give the appearance of genuine political competition. In Egypt, as elsewhere, elections under Mubarak meant increased repression of opposition parties, but they were simultaneously periods of increased oppositional political activity.

Public Participation in Political Parties

Given the lack of trust MENA citizens have in political parties, it is not surprising that few citizens state that they are members of a political party. In Jordan and Egypt, where respondents expressed the least amount of trust in political parties, fewer than 1 percent of citizens claimed to be party members. Political party membership among Palestinians and Lebanese is significantly higher (14 percent and 12 percent, respectively), which is consistent with higher percentages of Palestinians and Lebanese who trust political parties (17 percent and 15 percent, respectively). In comparison,

party membership in Canada and Europe is 2 percent in the case of the former and just under 5 percent in the case of the latter (membership levels range between as high as 17 percent and as low as less than 1 percent). In the United States, where citizens can state a party preference when registering to vote (and in this sense, it is difficult to speak of party membership), the proportion of voters calling themselves “independent” reached 42 percent in 2017.

Civil Society

Civil society is a term that is increasingly popular—not only with academics but with government officials, aid workers, international agencies, and a wide variety of other professions. Yet it remains a term that is difficult to define and one that is contested. It is often referred to as the “third sector,” separate from the state and from the market or business. It is the sphere of associational activity that, as is discussed in the following text, is commonly understood as being central to the democratization process. Taking a dominant conceptualization of civil society, this chapter defines civil society as those voluntary groups, associations, or organizations that are engaged in nonstate activities and that through their activities, either directly or indirectly, redefine the boundaries between state and society by increasing the separation between the two. However, we shall see that in the MENA, many scholars also include mosques and discussion groups as part of civil society as these too perform many of the democratizing functions of organizations more typically included in definitions of civil society.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, there is a rich history of civil society in the MENA. During the colonial period, the middle-class and professional sectors galvanized civil society activity as a means of mobilizing toward independence,¹⁵ and these associations were vital in training and producing the national leaders. After independence, and even in the authoritarian regimes of the region, civil society remained. The Arab Spring gave a new lease on life to civil society organizations (CSOs), with hundreds of new such organizations registering in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. The Libyan case is particularly important because it was not what could have been called a “civil society” before the 2011 revolution. Between 2011 and 2014, a plethora of CSOs established for the first time, ranging from sports to environmental to professional associations. With the breakdown of security in 2014, many CSOs are now inactive, and many of the activists have fled the country. However, an active network of CSOs remains.

Democratization and the Civil Society Debate

Civil society remains important for bottom-up approaches to democracy. In addition to contesting ruling regimes, civil society is useful for enhancing democratization through various direct and indirect mechanisms. Social scientists offer four different kinds of propositions to explain the relationship between associational life and democracy.

The first claim is that civic organizations serve as agents of democratic socialization, and they increase members’ support for democratic institutions and generate such values as moderation and tolerance, which are important for deliberation. Larry Diamond posits that members who participate in civic organizations are more likely to learn about the importance of tolerance, pluralism, and respect for the law. They also learn about their potential political roles in society and that they have a right to be represented in their governments.¹⁶ In *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville attributes the success of US democracy to the country’s rich associational life.

Associations serve as “schools for civic virtue,” he wrote. Habits of association foster patterns of civility important for successful democracies.¹⁷

A second claim is that associational life can effectively increase the levels of social capital among members—that is, trust and norms of reciprocity increase in organizations and thus increase the likelihood of cooperative ventures among members of society as a whole. In *Making Democracy Work*, Robert Putnam argues that membership in horizontal voluntary associations enhances social capital (interpersonal trust) necessary for cooperative ventures in society as a whole, which in turn leads people to “stand up to city hall” or engage in other forms of behavior that provide an incentive for better government performance. Putnam, for instance, finds that political institutions in northern Italy are more accountable and more efficient than political institutions in southern Italy. The success of local governance in northern Italy, he claims, is highly correlated with associational activity that cuts across social cleavages and interests, bolstering the levels of pluralism, tolerance, and especially social trust and reciprocity in northern Italy. Putnam correlates the density of horizontal voluntary associations with strong and effective local government: “strong society; strong state.”¹⁸

In democratic societies, this theory works well for the reinforcement of democratic rule. In nondemocratic societies, however, it is not clear how social capital can enhance the democratic governance of a regime. As social capital in democratic settings may create opportunities for citizens to collectively seek the help of democratic institutions, so too can the same logic apply in nondemocratic regions, where citizens can seek local public officials through any available avenue, whether it is formal (directly through the state) or informal (through clientelistic channels). As associational life in northern Italy promotes civic engagement in ways that are important for the efficiency of northern Italy’s local governance, so too can associational life in southern Italy promote civic engagement in ways that sustain the inefficiency of local governance there.¹⁹

A third claim is that associations foster democracy by mobilizing ordinary citizens into the political process. In the pluralist tradition of political science, policy results from competition among organized groups in the public arena; thus, associations are critical for representation of a diversity of interests in the public sphere.²⁰

Associations in nondemocratic regions can link citizens to states; however, this depends on the available avenues to do so. If associations directly seek government channels but find officials apathetic to their concerns, they may develop ideas and attitudes about participation that do not conform to the anticipated generation of attitudes in democratic states. Having been shunned from government offices, members may distance themselves from seeking government help. If, in contrast, the association has strong connections to government through clientelistic channels, members may learn that to derive benefits, resources, and responses from government they need to seek informal channels to represent their interests. In these cases, associations can very well reinforce clientelistic tendencies. The attitudes and behavior of associational members may exhibit their support for clientelistic forms of participation as well.

A fourth claim is that civic organizations that have substantial memberships can place the necessary constraints on authoritarian governing structures. Civic organizations can serve as key sites for citizen mobilization and expression. Associations can serve as counterweights to centralized governing apparatuses by mobilizing sectors of society to oppose authoritarian tendencies.²¹ This concept has been at the heart of much of the literature on mobilization, opposition-regime relations, social movements, and revolutions.

This formulation accounts for much of the work explaining civil society successes in bringing about democratic outcomes. The ability of civic organizations to serve this monitoring role depends on the context in which the organizations operate. Many states severely restrict the freedom of association for fear of the plausible monitoring role associations can play or co-opt CSOs so that they become part of the regime apparatus. In democratic settings, freedom of association guarantees that a variety of interests and views will enter mainstream public life.

Associations can play important roles in linking their members to activity that is supportive of broader democratic outcomes and participation. In nondemocratic settings, like many states in the MENA, the ability of associations to function freely often depends on the program and the association. Where associations might be seen as disrupting the status quo, they can face restrictions on their activities or be disbanded altogether. The fact that associations supportive of the nondemocratic regime in power enjoy rights and privileges that are not guaranteed to associations in the opposition raises the issue as to what type of civic engagement these progovernment associations espouse. Those that are supportive of the nondemocratic regime may promote values that are not critical of the nondemocratic policies of the regime, or they can reinforce clientelistic behavior—both of which are at odds with the findings that associational life can promote democratic citizenship and outcomes.

Mapping Civil Society

Civil society in the MENA includes a variety of associations: professional associations, charitable societies, business groups, trade unions, private societies, social clubs, sporting clubs, youth centers, medical clinics, and literacy and empowerment centers. In contrast to a lack of trust in political parties, citizens of the MENA tend to trust CSOs. CSOs in the MENA comprise both secular and religious organizations, mosques, and mosque-based networks of activity. In many states, secular and religious associations compete with one another. In Egypt, Jordan, Yemen, Morocco, and Lebanon, Islamic organizations are extremely well organized. They offer effective services and avenues for delivery, and they are capable of mobilizing their constituents, catering to their needs, and understanding their frustrations.²²

In the aftermath of World War II, civil society activity became a direct casualty of populist regimes. Civil society activity, not directly linked to the goals of regimes, was drastically curbed. This pattern occurred in most one-party states—Egypt, Iraq, Sudan, Yemen, Algeria, Mauritania, and Somalia—and in some monarchies like Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, and several Gulf states. These regimes established social contracts

with their citizens. According to Saad Eddin Ibrahim, under these new populist regimes, “explicit” or “implicit” social contracts were orchestrated between centralized states and their citizens. States attempted to advance socioeconomically, create government jobs, advocate social justice, achieve independence from external influences, and work for the liberation of Palestine in return for citizens’ support of these populist strategies, or at least their acquiescence.²³

As such, civil society activity was seriously limited and constrained. A plethora of laws and decrees were passed to limit civil society activity, and the dominant political parties co-opted and annexed organizations to consolidate their rule. In the 1960s and 1970s, the organizations of modern civil society suffered from both internal state control and international isolation. Yet the populist social contract would come to an end with the 1990 Gulf crisis and the hegemonic influence of the United States in the region. Wars and conquests left several MENA states lacking legitimacy and domestic support. These levels of legitimacy were once vital to keeping the social contract alive.

Within this new environment of reduced legitimacy, civil society has gradually been playing a new role. Several CSOs have sprung up in the region. According to Ibrahim, the number of civic associations is estimated to have grown from twenty thousand in the mid-1960s to about seventy thousand in the late 1980s. One-third of these civic associations were located in Egypt alone. In the 1990s, CSOs began playing a stronger role in political development and contestation;²⁴ however, in recent years, their activities have been severely curbed and controlled once again. In Egypt, for example, under President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, even the most innocuous CSOs are no longer considered acceptable.

As International Monetary Fund structural adjustment policies began to be implemented in the 1980s, regimes allowed for greater political freedoms. This also enabled greater civil society activity. An important component of this civic boom is that international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have played a more prominent role in the MENA.²⁵ The 1980s and 1990s also witnessed states coming under the pressure of international monetary organizations and donor countries to structurally adjust their economies, resulting in increasing inequalities and growing poverty levels across the region. As the material grievances of citizens increased, so did the urgency of addressing these realities. Thus, charitable CSOs began to grow in number as well. In many instances, regimes promoted the growth of civic associations to help with the worsening economic conditions. After the economic reforms of this period, for example, the Moroccan state recognized that resources often used to appease the public were in gradual decline. Allowing the emergence of civic associations, the regime rationalized, would place more of the financial burden of demands on civil society actors. The regime needed a partner to meet the economic woes of the populace—and what better way to do this than to expand the number of state partners (opposition or not) within the civic sphere?²⁶

During these economic transformations, one of the major segments of civil society that has suffered has been organized labor. While economic liberalization policies favored privatization at the expense of labor and led to higher levels of unemployment,

organized labor lost much of the power that it possessed during the years when MENA states could afford to hold on to bloated bureaucracies. The leaders of organized labor unions have become less influential in recent years. Although trade unions protested the ways in which economic adjustment affected their members, in the end the forces of economic liberalization won out. Labor unions today are quite weak and ineffective and certainly do not possess the legitimacy and popularity they once enjoyed.

Islamists also found this void quite lucrative for their own mobilization strategies and altruistic agendas. Many of the new civic associations that sprang up to address growing inequalities were dominated by Islamist actors and championed by the Muslim Brotherhood across the region. Hizbullah also played a key role in mobilizing the associational terrain to address growing economic disparities across Lebanon.

Charitable societies play an important role in the distribution of *zakat* (alms), educational supplies, basic food items, and clothing. For many women who are still unable to access urban centers for education, CSOs serve as key sites of empowerment, skills enhancement, literacy, and the opportunity to socialize and integrate in local communities outside the realm of the household. Arguably, these venues remain crucial for the empowerment of women.

The 1980s and 1990s also witnessed the growth of professional civic associations. This was a direct result of the growing levels of education across the region. These associations include lawyers' societies, medical associations, and other professional groupings. In the absence of a free media and fully representative parliaments, the sector of professional associations provided a forum for open political engagement and discussion.²⁷

Building on this infrastructure, civil society also played a key role during the Arab uprisings in 2011, and the uprisings themselves sparked the creation of several new CSOs. A study of the demonstrations in both Egypt and Tunisia found that significant numbers of protesters were involved in civil society associations.²⁸

Challenges and Opportunities of Civil Society, Post–Arab Spring

Civil society activity serves as an important outlet for intellectual growth, civic and political engagement, deliberation, associationalism, and mobilization. However, it continues to face ever-growing restrictions and ongoing manipulation by the authoritarian regimes in the region. CSOs risk becoming folded into the domains of the regime, but they also risk marginalization if they are isolated from political society. In many of the states in which the authoritarian regimes were toppled in 2011, civil society now faces the challenge of remaining alive and relevant in times of civil war. Even in Tunisia, civic associations still find themselves having to navigate a web of government regulations and restrictions. They have to negotiate their principles against the overwhelming needs of resources to keep their programs alive. They have to navigate a civic terrain divided by clientelistic perquisites and benefits.

Civic associations also look for international collaboration and linkages. Yet the geopolitics dominating the MENA, where accepting US funding is often perceived as collusion with US security interests in the region, has reduced the funding options available to civic leaders. Despite these challenges, however, the civic terrain continues to be vibrant and dynamic, attracting significant segments of the population.

This is important, for civil society associations not only are critical for promoting accountability and democracy; they serve a variety of other significant functions as well. First, where states are increasingly reducing the social contract between state and society, CSOs have filled an enormous gap. Civil society networks offer much-needed services and goods to constituents. Second, CSOs also remain effective outlets of political society, even when they are not directly contesting the state. In CSOs, citizens meet, debate, engage, and discuss local and national political developments. In Israel, CSOs work toward bridging the rift between Jewish and Arab Israelis. For many citizens across the developing world, associational life and activity are the only forms of active political or community involvement. Outside these associations and organizations, citizens possess very few channels for political recourse and may remain marginalized from the elite-dominated political world. Civil society offers particularly important spaces for otherwise marginalized segments of society to meet and interact. For many young women, participation in a local civic association or sports club remains the only way to get out of the house and develop skills and capacities that are not found at home.

Social Movements

Citizens also engage in social movements to demand broad social and political change. While this engagement is closely related to civil society, it is important to examine how and why activists choose to mobilize in social movements. This section examines participation in more loosely organized networks that often characterize such movements, drawing on theoretical literature to explore engagement and its implications.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Social movement theory has its origins in Marxist theory. It revolves around the conception of power as centralized and mobilization as being driven by class issues. Under this classic version of the theory, economic factors are seen as creating conditions that divide the working class and landowners. This economic inequality between the “haves” and “have-nots” is then seen as driving the working class into forming interest groups to mobilize for their economic rights and material interests.²⁹

Social movement theory later evolved into focusing less on the economy and class divisions and more on mobilization among various interest groups. In new social movement theory, groups of people are conceived as rational actors who form organizations to mobilize for issues that matter to them. Such organizations include activist groups, women’s cooperatives, and unions. A key theory in this context is resource mobilization theory, which looks at how people operating under an organization engage in instrumental action to secure resources for their organization in order to mobilize for issues.³⁰ Networks are an important component of this theory, as social networks are seen as ways through which activists share information and resources. Unlike the Marxist conception of power dynamics within activist organizations, the focus on networks sees power as diffuse and shared among different members of those networks.³¹

Mobilization in Contemporary Social Movements

Social movements have been prevalent across the MENA, and social networks form an important component of those movements. Women's rights groups, for example, are active in Iran, Lebanon, and even Saudi Arabia, where they have formed civil society networks calling for changes in personal status laws (in the cases of Iran and Lebanon) and in electoral law (asking for women's right to vote in Saudi Arabia). Youth networks have also been active, often using social media to highlight issues of importance to the younger generations. These included the youth campaigns that emerged in Egypt between 2004 and 2011, which used blogs and later Facebook to bring the young together and to mobilize.

Such networks in Egypt deserve further attention since they have helped inspire similar networks across the MENA. The origin of those networks can be traced back to the Kifaya movement, which started in late 2004. Kifaya—The Egyptian Movement for Change—was a popular movement calling for political change whose existence was catalyzed by the possibility that then-president Hosni Mubarak would be extending his presidential term—after having ruled Egypt for over three decades without ever having gone through an election—and that his son Gamal might be his political successor. Kifaya activists came from different social backgrounds, and most were youth not affiliated with political parties. They took part in demonstrations, signed petitions, and launched blogs to call for freedom of expression and human rights and make public their rejection of the potential Mubarak succession plans. Kifaya activists were met with crackdowns by the regime, but they continued to mobilize even after the 2005 presidential election—which the regime orchestrated to guarantee a win for Mubarak. Activists documented and declared their objection to electoral fraud and incidents of police brutality, and they collaborated with Muslim Brotherhood youth on issues of common interest, such as rallying against political detentions. This youth mobilization later gave birth to the movement that began in 2008, whose first activity was a national strike on April 6, 2008, in support of workers' rights. The April 6 movement started as a Facebook-based network, but its activities expanded over the years to include more effective offline action, mainly lobbying and street protests. Its members played a key role in mobilizing people for the January 25 protest that formed the start of the Egyptian revolution in 2011.³²

The combination of online and offline methods of mobilization used by Egyptian activists since 2004 helped inspire activists across the region. Using the media—first, blogs and then social media—to publicize demands and organize protests became prevalent as witnessed in various antiregime protests in Tunisia in 2008,³³ during the Green Movement in Iran in 2009—where people protested against what they perceived as the fraudulent reelection of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as president—and during the Arab Spring. In 2011 in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Libya, Yemen, Morocco, and Syria, social networks similar to the Egyptian ones described here emerged, demanding political reform. What characterizes all those networks is first, that they were diffuse in terms of the distribution of power among their diverse members. Their demands, actions, and platforms were bottom-up and grassroots based, as opposed to being

directed by leaders from above. In many cases, the movements had many leaders or were leaderless. Second, their members came together because of their agreement on a common cause, as opposed to official political party affiliation or belief in a certain ideology.

Identities and Demands

Resource mobilization theory focuses on how these different kinds of networks mobilize through examining their structures and ways of obtaining resources, but it does not explain the ways through which members of social movements construct meanings and identities. *Construction* here refers to the cultural context of social movements, which in turn impact the movements' grievances and goals. Social constructionism theory addresses this through emphasizing the role of cultural processes in social movements.³⁴ It draws attention to how the cultural context impacts who mobilizes and how, including how activists portray themselves and their ideas to the world.³⁵ In this theory, cultural frames affect the identities that activists have and the symbols they use to communicate their identities to the world.

Applying social constructionism to political participation in the MENA, one begins to see differences in how different groups express themselves and the different frameworks they use. Although women's rights groups in different countries may mobilize for a similar issue, the way their demands are articulated and the activities they use for this purpose vary in different countries. Women's rights groups in Yemen, for example, often use a religious framework in the way they define themselves and their demands (invoking Islam as a religion of equality between men and women), while most women's rights groups in Lebanon do not. Moreover, in addition to mobilizing in the formal political sphere (e.g., through Lebanese women's groups' lobbying of parliament to change personal status laws), mobilization can take place in the cultural sphere through symbolic action (e.g., through the staging of public events or the wearing of symbols referring to the group demand).³⁶ In Lebanon, for instance, women's rights activists distributed handbags with slogans about personal status law reform on the streets in order to spread their message.

Steven Buechler summarizes a number of key trends within new social movement theory that can help with understanding the dynamics of social movements in the MENA.³⁷ The first trend is the already-mentioned attention to symbolic action in civil society. For example, in 2008, Kifaya, which was also a movement against human rights violations and corruption and for freedom of expression in Egypt, staged public action in a religious shrine in Cairo (Sayyeda Zeinab) whereby people swept the floor of the shrine while calling out for freedom from tyranny. In this action, the activists used a traditional symbolic act (sweeping the floor of shrines) as a way to highlight an issue of importance to the movement.³⁸

The second trend is the focus on the goal of social movements as being about achieving self-determination for people rather than about increasing people's power within an existing status quo.³⁹ Lebanese protesters who demonstrated against the occupation of Lebanon by Syrian troops in the spring of 2005 did not aim to enhance their influence relative to that of the occupier but to highlight the importance of citizens' self-determination and sovereignty, which constituted a challenge to the status quo. In

other words, the goal was not to alter the balance of power while keeping the political milieu intact but rather to change the political milieu itself.

The third related trend is the focus on postmaterialist values rather than materialist gains.⁴⁰ Unlike Marxist frameworks that see group mobilization as being about enhancing economic resources, new social movement theory focuses on issues, such as Kifaya's and the April 6 movement's focus on human rights and freedom.

The fourth trend is viewing activist groups as undergoing a complex process of constructing collective identities, as opposed to having clearly defined, structured identities.⁴¹ Kifaya's members came from a variety of backgrounds—religious and secular, young and old, affiliated with political parties and unaffiliated—but who all constructed a common identity as reformists. A similar process of identity creation took place in Iran in 2009, with the Green Movement that formed in opposition to the reelection of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as president also being an unstructured movement with members from diverse backgrounds.

The final trend is the recognition of the existence of temporary networks as a component of mobilization, rather than seeing successful mobilization as being solely the product of centralized organization.⁴² The 2011 uprisings perhaps best illustrate this point.

A key dimension of all the uprisings was that they were popular protests by citizens reclaiming their sense of dignity, who came together not just from organized networks but also from informal networks. For example, in Egypt the April 6 movement, which had formed in 2008 as a social media-driven youth opposition movement, was a loosely organized group that played a key role in the January 25 revolution, while in Yemen, the Islamist party Islah played an active role in the demonstrations. But in addition, informal networks of people from a wide variety of socioeconomic backgrounds also took part in the protests. A significant number of those people were citizens who did not belong to organized groups. In this sense, although social movement theory is certainly useful for understanding the dynamics of political participation during the Arab uprisings, it does not explain the full range of activities that could be characterized as such—not only during the uprisings but also before then.

Informal Political Participation

In the absence of effective states to represent citizen interests and where the rule of law tends to be weak, informal networks and institutions remain the most reliable and effective outlets for exercising one's voice. Informal political participation is the most common type of political engagement in the MENA. This kind of political participation takes place in everyday life, through informal networks and institutions that include family life, kinship networks, and tribalism. Informal political participation includes political discussion groups in the home as well as more organized discussion forums. It also may include Qur'anic study groups, the creation of networks, or even working in a charity. Through informal "avenues of participation," as Singerman calls them, and other forums, participants critically discuss public policy in ways they cannot do in the formal political sphere, participate in the creation of new ways of thinking about politics, create informal pathways to decision-makers to let their opinions be known, or influence election outcomes. Informal political participation is never far from formal political participation, and it forms the often-invisible backbone of social and political change of the type witnessed in the Arab Spring. The intent of informal political participation is not necessarily mass political change as was attempted in 2011. In fact, many participants in these discussion groups and networks may not even view their own actions as political. However, the Arab Spring would not have been possible without these types of informal political activities that created a shared sense of what needed to be changed politically and of community connected together via family, neighborhood, mosque, or virtually.

Why Is Informal Political Participation So Common?

Informal political participation is an important type of political participation in the context of states that are overly present in the formal political sphere and largely absent in the economic lives of MENA citizens. Political parties are weak, and in some cases nonexistent. CSOs are commonly prohibited from any sort of political activism. Civil society activism in general has become increasingly risky for those who take part. In this context, informal political participation offers opportunities for free speech and association outside the eyes and ears of the state.

Informal political participation allows citizens to remain within the bounds of legal and acceptable activities. Informal political activities do not demand or require an explicit political stance. Participants may view their activities as social, economic, political, or equally all three. The popularity and strength of informal political participation lies in the fact that it is woven into the daily social and economic lives of their participants and therefore is part of the daily fabric of society.

How Can Social Gatherings Be Considered Political?

“Qat chews” are an example of a common and important type of informal political participation in Yemen. Qat chews are informal gatherings in which people come together to engage in the traditional practice of chewing leaves of the qat plant, a stimulant that produces effects similar to caffeine.⁴³ Qat is chewed primarily in the home but also in public or semipublic places such as the office of a CSO. People meet to discuss social problems, political issues, or literary matters. They often entail a formal presentation about some issue of interest. Others begin with the reading aloud of a newspaper article. Still others are less formal with a general discussion of a variety of issues.⁴⁴

As Lisa Wedeen explains, social gatherings such as qat chews are political in at least three senses.⁴⁵ First of all, people share information about political events and discuss their significance publically at qat chews. Qat chews thus create citizen awareness. They promote political engagement and critical debate. These are not only political acts but ones that are inherently democratic. Second, qat chews are forums during which power relationships between elites and constituencies are negotiated. Representatives of the village, electoral district, or local group are held responsible for their actions at qat chews and must respond to the needs of participants by guaranteeing goods and services or advocating on their behalf. Third, during some qat chews actual policy decisions are made. Political parties and parliamentary committees, for example, may hold their meetings, discuss events, and make policy decisions during qat chews. Similarly, political activists organize political rallies at some qat chews.

Even if informal gatherings such as qat chews do not directly or immediately lead to free and fair contested elections or to regime change, they are sites of political debate where issues of accountability, citizenship, and contemporary affairs are discussed and negotiated.⁴⁶ These are important political acts particularly in authoritarian regimes where political debate and criticism are at best ineffective or at worst illegal and dangerous.

Diwaniyyas in the Gulf states, such as Kuwait, similarly are important “mini-parliaments” where the informal/formal and private/public meet and are intertwined.⁴⁷ Much like qat chews, *diwaniyyas* are sites of traditional culture, daily social life, and of political activity. The term *diwaniyya* refers both to the place where social gatherings occur inside the house and to the activity of gathering together. In Arabic, the word *majlis* means the place of sitting, and in Kuwait, as in many of the other Gulf states, the place of sitting—the room used for (men’s) social gatherings—is called the *diwan*. Today, there are male, female, and mixed *diwaniyyas*. In many cases, a separate structure is now built outside the house for the specific purposes of *diwaniyyas*. While many *diwaniyyas* are for family and friends to socialize and talk business and politics, others can be quite specialized in terms of who attends them and the subjects discussed.

Diwaniyyas are the seeds of many of Kuwait’s CSOs today. Prominent intellectuals and activists hold *diwaniyyas* after major political decisions and events, to many of which

members of parliament are commonly invited. The political influence of a *diwaniyya* depends on current events, the activism of those attending the *diwaniyya*, and the political orientation of the owner of the *diwaniyya*.⁴⁸ At election times, candidates may set up tents for *diwaniyyas*, or they may attend other *diwaniyyas* in order to meet voters. Candidates have little chance of being elected without going to *diwaniyyas*.

The important interface between formal and informal political participation in Kuwait is perhaps best seen in the role the *diwaniyya* played in reinstating Kuwait's parliament in 1990. When the amir banned political parties and dissolved parliament in 1985, members of parliament and intellectuals began holding what soon was called the Monday *Diwaniyya* (as it was held each Monday) in order to express their outrage and, most importantly, to demand the reinstatement of parliament. The Monday *Diwaniyya* became so large that loudspeakers had to be used for all those in attendance to hear. Despite police efforts to stop the Monday *Diwaniyya*, it continued to take place and to draw crowds. Eventually, the Monday *Diwaniyya* led to a dialogue and the reestablishment of the parliament.⁴⁹

An important element of *diwaniyyas* and other forms of informal political participation that revolve around the home and family lies in the fact that they are "protected spaces." Mary Ann Tetreault points out, as *diwaniyyas* are in the home and in that strict sense in the private sphere, they can be held without the government permits that other meetings ("public" meetings) require.⁵⁰ Along with the mosque, *diwaniyyas* provide a space that largely is protected from authoritarian state intrusion.⁵¹ Although *diwaniyyas* are generally not banned, largely because it is very difficult for the government to do so, the Kuwaiti government has arrested the leaders of particularly influential oppositional *diwaniyyas* and has tried to restrict their influence.

As protected spaces, *diwaniyyas* are highly popular as forms of political participation in Saudi Arabia. In Saudi Arabia, we also see citizens increasingly engaging in discussion forums. In contrast to *diwaniyyas*, discussion forums, called *muntada*, are not social gatherings in the home. Rather, they are large scheduled lectures on specific topics. One of the first discussion groups in Saudi Arabia was the Tuesday Forum, established by a former leader of the main Shi'i opposition movement in 2000. The lectures and discussions are posted online following the forum, reaching a much-wider audience than those in attendance.

Discussion forums are helping to create a culture of dialogue and debate in Saudi Arabia even if their audiences are limited to intellectuals and the educated. Yet their potential for social and political change is not lost on authorities who commonly ban discussion forums for periods of time.

Even in countries with comparatively greater freedom of the press, regimes consider informal gatherings as politically threatening. In Jordan, the king has spoken out harshly against political salons. (*Political salons* is the term given to the after-dinner gatherings that take place in private homes throughout Jordan and particularly in the capital, Amman.) In some cases, political salons are more organized, outside the home, and more akin to discussion forums. On more than one occasion, when the "chattering

class” has become too critical of the king’s policies, particularly the reversal of many of the political liberties and democratic rights that had been gained during the 1990s, the king has criticized the political salons of “some areas of the capital.” He once called them “mafias” that must be stopped.⁵²

The majority of qat chews, *diwaniyyas*, and political salons are not intended to be oppositional. As Wedeen states, the ideas for and organization of oppositional political activity may arise out of qat chews or *diwaniyyas*; however, qat chews and other types of informal political participations cannot a priori be designated as subversive.⁵³ Qat chews, *diwaniyyas*, and political salons may just as equally be hosted by those supportive of the regimes in power.

How Are Networks Political?

It is not only through discussion and debate that Arab citizens engage in informal political participation. Singerman's groundbreaking work on Cairo's urban poor under Mubarak shows how the urban poor participate in politics through the creation and mobilization of informal networks. These networks begin with the family unit and intersect with formal institutions and representatives of the state. Through their networks, the urban poor are political actors that compete with other actors for power, legitimacy, and resources.

In their efforts to ensure the maintenance and reproduction of the family, the urban poor, particularly the female heads of families, create vast networks of connections and exchanges that weave in and out of the extended family and neighborhood, informal savings associations, day care and literacy centers, health clinics, food cooperatives, local businesses, mosques, markets and schools, marriage brokers, private charitable and voluntary associations, workplaces, the army, ministries, and the offices of members of parliament. These networks are created to secure basic needs such as food, employment, and education and to gain credit, access services, choose a spouse, arbitrate conflict, and encourage the political, social, and cultural norms of the community.⁵⁴ In other words, they are created and mobilized to fulfil material, social, and political aims.

The networks of the urban poor not only have consequences for the informal economic sector, but they have political dimensions to them as well. Some of the connections within the network are created with patrons and can be considered patron–client ties; others are not. Members of parliament may be involved in local associations. Day care centers, health clinics, food cooperatives, and schools provide useful information about the community for politicians as much as they provide access to public goods and services for the urban poor.⁵⁵ Much like the *diwaniyyas* in Kuwait, members of parliament have a much better chance of receiving votes when they participate in the networks of the urban poor.

Asef Bayat similarly argues that people across the MENA engage in political acts, particularly acts resisting the state, through their actions in everyday life.⁵⁶ The Tunisian street vendor Muhammad Bouazizi, whose altercation with a policewoman and consequent self-immolation triggered the Tunisian revolution, is an example of the millions of people in the MENA who make up the “urban subaltern.” These are the men and women on the margins of society—the unemployed, the working poor, the disenfranchised—who are forced to work illegally as street vendors, beggars, or prostitutes in the public spaces of cities. These people, the urban subaltern, live in constant insecurity and tension with the authorities of the state. This tension may result in fines, bribes, assault, or jail. As Bayat points out, the urban subaltern also develop solidarity through their lived experiences and daily confrontations with the state.

Bayat calls such groups of people “social nonmovements,” to emphasize their lack of organized structure. Social nonmovements include nonmovements of the poor to claim

rights to use public spaces. Nonmovements do not put organized direct pressure on the government as social movements do. They do not push for political reform. Their actions are done by individuals to ensure their daily activities and are often not regarded as political acts by the state. But by doing so, they slowly change the status quo.⁵⁷ The encroachment on the status quo “begins with little political meaning attached to it,” but it can turn into “a collective/political struggle” if people’s “gains are threatened.”⁵⁸ During the Arab uprisings, Bayat argues that the nonmovements of the youth and the poor became more coordinated and took part in the uprisings.⁵⁹

Networks may also strengthen social bonds and create a sense of community bound by a worldview in a manner somewhat similar to qat chews discussed earlier. In her research on Islamic charities in Egypt, Yemen, and Jordan, Clark finds that networks of shared meaning are created through the provision of charity—raising donations, contacting funders, distributing aid, or providing medical care. The act of participating in charity activities brings different networks together. Communities of participants internalize and promote a particular set of values in these networks.⁶⁰

Clark finds that what makes Islamic charities “Islamic” and what makes working with the charity political is the feeling of solidarity, of a mission, of teamwork among those who work in the charity and its associated networks. What differentiates Islamic charities from their secular counterparts is the belief of those working in the charities and their networks that they are promoting Islam through their work.

Insiders to these networks may attribute any degree of political meaning to their actions. Some may perceive their charity activities simply as those of a good Muslim. Others may regard their charity work as an act that demonstrates the failure of the state to provide these services adequately. This ambiguity contributes to the ability of the networks to expand and to their strength.

Clark’s research on women’s Qur’anic study groups in Yemen similarly demonstrates how social networks have important political dimensions.⁶¹ While many Yemeni women attend qat chews, others participate in Qur’anic study groups. At a Qur’anic study group or *nadwa*, women gather in a home to read passages from the Qur’an and discuss themes important to the practice of Islam. These are social gatherings that bring friends and women from different social networks together on a weekly basis. By participating in *nadwas* and the networks in which they are embedded, women gradually may develop new worldviews that are more in line with the Islamist movement, become active in an Islamist-sponsored charity, or may join the Islamist political party.

Nadwas form part of a woman’s larger informal social networks. They bring Islamist women who are active members of an Islamist political party together with women who volunteer in a religious charity or those who are clients of the charity with those who are friends and neighbors of the hostess. A teacher at an Islamic school or university may ask one of her students to lead a *nadwa*. A friend who hosts one *nadwa* may be asked to attend another.⁶²

Women often do not participate in *nadwas* for political purposes, but the networks in which they engage can have important political significance. The networks gradually may play an important role in social and potentially political change as participants adopt a more Islamist world view, support the activities of the Islamist movement, or vote for an Islamist party.

How Does Informal Political Participation Translate into Formal Political Participation?

Gwenn Okruhlik's research on the Islamist movement in Saudi Arabia provides an excellent example of how informal political participation in the home and mosque becomes formal political participation.⁶³ Okruhlik's research questions how a powerful Islamist movement arose to challenge the regime under conditions of authoritarianism and in a society where concern to protect the family reputation is paramount. The Islamist movement first emerged during the first Gulf War (1990–1991) when US troops were stationed on Saudi soil. In the 1980s, Saudi Arabia experienced an Islamic resurgence. Several nonpolitical informal Islamist groups established during this time and advocated a spiritual awakening. They were not involved in oppositional politics against the regime. The Gulf War transformed these loose underground nonpolitical groups into an organized and explicitly political movement that called for the overthrow of the ruling family.

The war brought to the surface issues that had long been discussed within the home—the deviation of the regime from the straight path of Islam and the corruption of the royal family. Both the mosque and the home served as protected spaces in which people voiced their discontent with the Saudi regime and constructed oppositional alternatives to history, the status quo dogma, and the prevailing ideology. Sermons and discussions in the mosque and home created alternative historical narratives that resonated with people and empowered them to confront the authoritarian state.⁶⁴ Family networks were vital to disseminate information and to mobilize support underground.⁶⁵

Box 5.1 Human Rights and Sexual Minorities: From Informal to Formal Activism

One of the newest types of CSOs to emerge following Tunisia's revolution are human rights organizations that defend the rights of minorities, including sexual minorities—the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT+) populations. In Tunisia, it is illegal to engage in same-sex conduct, and LGBT+ persons are often prosecuted under Penal Code Article 230, according to which an offender may receive up to three years in jail for sodomy. LGBT+ populations also suffer from discrimination, harassment, and violence. Many of the minority-rights CSO founders worked in HIV/AIDS organizations during the Ben Ali era. The seeds of many of the CSOs were planted well before the revolution when activists created informal networks in order to find victims of violence safe spaces to stay, for example. After 2011, activists turned to human rights and created formal, legal associations. LGBT+ activism is risky; however, activists have lobbied political parties and created allies in the Individual Freedoms and Equality Committee, a presidential committee comprising legislators, professors, and human rights advocates. The hard work may be paying off. In June 2018, the Committee released its report, recommending that the government repeal Article 230.

Following the war, the opposition clergy made their dissent public and presented several petitions to the king demanding political reform. In 1992, under pressure from the Islamist movement, the king created a Consultative Council comprising Saudi citizens to advise him and other political reforms. While the Islamists did not succeed in regime change and the majority of Saudis do not support Islamist terrorism, through

protected spaces and networks, Islamists helped formalize an important debate among Saudis concerning what it means to be Saudi, the meaning of citizenship, and the relationship religion and state.

What Role Did Informal Political Participation Play in the Arab Spring?

Informal networks of participation are well established in the MENA, and they play an important role in collective action. The Arab uprisings can only be truly understood by going beyond the formal institutions of civil society and political parties or even broadly based social movements. Research has demonstrated the important role that the support infrastructure that informal networks had created before the uprisings played during the uprisings as people mobilized as a group. As Laila Alhamad argues, “Islam-based networks played an integral part in the everyday lives of people, holding urban society together by providing spiritual guidance, accepted norms of behavior, and ways of conducting private and commercial transactions.”⁶⁶ The informal networks of mosques served as a key source of mobilization during the uprisings, not just for Islamists, who had used the mosques as mobilization sources before the uprisings, but also for non-Islamists, as mosques facilitated the gathering of people in large numbers in public spaces, serving as the nuclei and starting points of public demonstrations.

Tribes played a similar role to mosques as support networks. In Libya and Yemen, tribes play an important role not only in terms of ethnic ties but also political ties—in those places, many people’s primary affiliation is to the tribe, rather than the regime. Under the Muammar al-Qadhafi and Ali Abdallah Salih regimes, the tribes had existed as providers of “support networks for religious, professional, and other needs”⁶⁷ for their members—and in doing so, as protectors from the state. When the uprisings began in those countries in 2011, the tribes played a key role in mobilizing people against the al-Qadhafi and Salih regimes when the tribal leaders decided to side against those rulers.

Youth groups also form informal networks all over the MENA. In Morocco in 2010, youth formed an online Facebook group to discuss political reform, calling itself “al-Facebookiyoun.” Encouraged by the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, more young people formed informal, temporary networks in a number of cities in Morocco to organize public protests calling for reform. The networks called themselves the February 20 movement, but they did not follow a hierarchical structure and were not organized groups. Membership was transient—what brought the youth together were ideas and issues revolving around reform, and the meetings the youth held to discuss their ideas and demands were characterized by being leaderless.⁶⁸ Similar leaderless, informal youth networks exist across the MENA.

So, too, artists, writers, and intellectuals are active all over the MENA, producing works that contest the ruling regimes. In Syria, the cartoonist Ali Ferzat published cartoons that subverted the national narrative constructed by the Assad regime. In Iran, conceptual artists and filmmakers are prolific in creating products that critique the political status quo of the Islamic Republic. In Egypt, Yemen, Lebanon, and several other countries, political humor is a popular avenue for expressing dissent and contestation. Collective action is typically thought of as an action undertaken by a group of people—the goal of which can only be achieved if everyone participates in the action. However, Stephen Wright says that collective action can be performed by one individual

when that person's act is done in the name of the group and for the sake of the collective good, as opposed to personal gain.⁶⁹ In Wright's sense of the term, the MENA can be regarded as rich in collective action, which became a pronounced group struggle during the Arab Spring.

Photo 5.1 Arab Spring political humor.



BULENT KILIC/AFP/Getty Images

What emerges from this discussion is the importance of culture and ideas in processes of political participation in the MENA, as well as the merger of the political and the cultural spheres. The Arab uprisings of 2011 took this merger to a higher level, as processes of cultural production themselves became processes of political participation in a direct way. Tahrir Square in Cairo during the January 25 revolution became the hub of cultural-political activities that used poetry, songs, drawing, and theater as means of political expression. As people gathered in the square demanding the fall of the Mubarak regime, they often carried placards displaying humorous slogans. One placard, for example, had the word *Leave* written in hieroglyphics, below which an Arabic explanation directed at Mubarak said, "It's written in hieroglyphics so that maybe you'd understand it, you pharaoh." This is an example of how everyday "quiet encroachment"—here in the form of political humor—was transformed into a tool of group political participation.

The Arab uprisings brought together formal networks like civil society groups, social movements (like the April 6 movement in Egypt), and informal networks (like the February 20 movement). They also involved ordinary people whose political participation prior to the uprisings had taken place outside of the realm of networks altogether.

Political Engagement through Violence

Sadly, other forms of informal political engagement in the MENA, as elsewhere, include violence against the state. Other than the fact that what are labeled as *terrorist groups* all engage in violence, the diversity of terrorist groups makes it difficult to put them under one label. Terrorist groups differ in terms of the following:

- Their goals—nationalistic and seeking a homeland, ideological, or a hybrid of both
- Their targets—the state or symbols of Western imperialism, for example
- Whether or not they accept the state system established by the former colonial powers in the MENA (e.g., the Islamic State [IS] rejects current boundaries)
- Whether or not they are state sponsored (e.g., Hizballah receives funding from Iran)

As is discussed in the chapter on religion, society, and politics and in the individual country chapters in this book, these are just a few of the marked differences between groups that choose to operate outside of formal political avenues and legal informal political avenues.

Yet if we look at the violent groups such as the IS and other salafi-jihadi groups that have grabbed international headlines since 2011, we can see a common relationship between violent expression of political engagement and formal political participation. The seeming success of ISIS and other groups in gaining recruits is at least partially related to the limited and/or ineffective political opportunities for expression in their respective states and, oftentimes, also to the lack of or ineffectiveness of moderate Islamist political parties within their state's political systems.

In this regard, we can see the impact of Egypt's 2013 coup, which removed President Mohamed Morsi, the Muslim Brotherhood's Party's candidate, from power and resulted in the government declaring the Brotherhood's political wing (the Freedom and Justice Party) a terrorist group and arresting hundreds of Muslim Brothers or sending them into hiding. With the banning of the Freedom and Justice Party, the regime in Egypt eliminated what was once the most important moderate Islamist political option for thousands of Egyptians. The Freedom and Justice Party won more seats than any other party in Egypt's 2011 parliamentary elections, and in the 2012 presidential elections, Morsi won over 50 percent of the votes. In the context of the then-ongoing Syrian civil war—where IS was experiencing stunning, if not shocking, military and political successes—IS was able to, in the words of Egyptian scholar Khalil al-Anani, “seiz[e] the . . . moment to present itself as a role model for young Islamists around the globe, pushing them to adopt its ideology and emulate its tactics and strategy.”⁷⁰ To angry, mobilized Islamist youths throughout the region, Islamist political parties now seemed ineffective, co-opted, or archaic at best—if an Islamist political party was even allowed to run in their respective country.⁷¹ The strategy of nonviolence was perceived as a failure and the model of violence as superior.

New Channels of Political Participation

The Arab uprisings also demonstrated the increasing importance of new channels of participation. This included satellite television and online media, as well as Internet, text messaging, and other technologies. First, these new technologies provided new sources of information, often beyond the regime's control. Second, they created new venues for participation, often engaging individuals who were previously not politically active.

The Role of the Media: Satellite Television and the Online Media

The “Facebook revolution” was one of the nicknames given to the Egyptian revolution that took place on January 25, 2011. This characterization of the revolution is inaccurate since the revolution was not simply the product of online activism. However, the nickname does point out the important role that the media, mainly satellite television and the Internet, have been playing in political participation in the MENA since the late 1990s.

Significant change in media dates back to at least 1996 with the birth of al-Jazeera, the MENA’s first twenty-four-hour satellite news channel. The channel’s broadcasts were in sharp contrast to what the MENA television landscape had been accustomed to since the introduction of television to the region in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Al-Jazeera represented an opportunity for MENA journalists to participate in the creation and global dissemination of their own stories, away from the traditional reliance on foreign news agencies and television channels. It also supported the broadcasting of political views that often criticized the behaviors of several MENA governments. In that, al-Jazeera broke an important taboo in MENA television; in the past, most television channels—especially state-owned ones—had either acted as regime mouthpieces or simply refrained from political critique.⁷² This led many scholars to characterize MENA satellite television as supporting the move toward democratization in the MENA.⁷³

Al-Jazeera was also a pioneer in the MENA with its live coverage of conflict and its airing of news scoops. While its coverage of the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States, particularly video messages by al-Qa’ida leader Osama bin Laden, shed a negative light on its activities, the channel maintained a degree of credibility. This credibility was bolstered with its coverage of key events in the region such as the Iraq war of 2003; the Israeli attacks on Lebanon in 2006 and Gaza in 2009; and the uprisings in Egypt, Yemen, and Syria in 2011.

In those instances, al-Jazeera distinguished itself through disseminating the citizens’ points of view. This took place not only through live coverage by al-Jazeera reporters but also through the channel’s reliance on user-generated videos sent by “citizen journalists” for broadcast. As such, al-Jazeera allowed Arab citizens to participate more directly in the making of news, and hence, to be more active participants in local and regional politics.⁷⁴

Although MENA governments sometimes interfered with al-Jazeera’s reporting, the channel—as well as the several other television stations that have proliferated in the region over the past decade—made a positive contribution to political participation in the region. Oppositional movements in particular found a new platform through which they could air their views.

The Role of Technology in Political Engagement and Participation

The rise of satellite television coincided with the rise of Internet use in the MENA. Like satellite television, the Internet challenges the monopoly on state information through increased information sharing and the broadcasting of individual opinion. Some scholars have argued that use of the Internet and other modern technologies (examples of “horizontal communications”) would, as Augustus Richard Norton claimed, eventually produce the “slow retreat of authoritarianism in the Muslim world.”⁷⁵

Before discussing the role of the Internet in political participation, one must remember that the Internet is still relatively limited in its use in the MENA and that those who do have access do not necessarily have unlimited and unconditional access. Due to political, economic, and educational reasons, many MENA citizens do not use the Internet. Today, 42 percent continue to report not using the Internet at all. Interestingly, the percentage of Internet users in Egypt and Tunisia, the countries that witnessed the first Arab Spring revolutions, are the two lowest in the MENA. Sixty-eight percent of Egyptians and 56 percent of Tunisians currently do not use the Internet. These percentages were even higher at the time of the revolutions.

Ever since the Internet was introduced in these countries, ruling elites have attempted to find ways to control what people could and could not view on it. The fears were twofold: First, there was fear of “political subversion,” and second, the religious and conservative segments of the population feared that Internet access would “undermine ‘traditional’ values.” To limit Internet access, individual states took different approaches; in Saudi Arabia, for example, the regime “opted for a high-cost, high-tech solution, while Iraq under Saddam Hussein surrounded Internet use with barely-penetrable bureaucracy.”⁷⁶

Regimes’ responses to dissidents expressing unfavorable opinions about the state on the web demonstrate the seriousness with which the state takes the Internet as a medium of disseminating public opinion. The Egyptian state under Mubarak, for example, arrested bloggers who expressed negative opinions of the regime. Moreover, the freedom of expression that is often found in other countries via the Internet is not always present in MENA states; in countries where people are aware that the state controls much of the content on the Internet and monitors Internet activity, people often self-censor. Numerous states—including Oman, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the UAE, Yemen, Bahrain, Jordan, Libya, and Morocco—have been found engaging in Internet censorship. When the Egyptian January 25 revolution started, the Mubarak regime went as far as shutting down the Internet and mobile phone networks altogether to prevent their use for street mobilization.

The Mubarak regime’s extreme measure against modern communication technologies acknowledged the potential for them to be used as tools of political mobilization. As Deborah Wheeler argues, “Individual citizens manage to work around the state, constructing a wide range of interests, meanings, and practices, which often challenge

norms.” This engagement links “communities of people who are increasingly voicing opinions, making demands.”⁷⁷

New forms of technology have been important ways to network individuals and provide information. The Internet and even text messaging have been decisive in affecting protest behavior, collective mobilization, and new forms of formal and informal e-networks important for political and social ties. In the mid-2000s, blogging arose as a key platform for the airing of dissident views, political demands, and holding the state accountable. In Iran and Egypt in particular, blogs were used to expose human rights abuses, criticize state hegemony, and connect young people who aspired to change their societies and political systems from within. Mobile phones acted as supplementary tools in this process. For example, in Egypt the Misr Digital blog set up by Wael Abbas became the main site for the dissemination of videos of police torture of detainees in Egyptian jails, which were downloaded by users onto their mobile phones and disseminated via Bluetooth. This informal networking raised awareness about torture as well as public action by people, who demonstrated in the streets of Cairo against this infraction on human rights by the state.

By the late 2000s, the rise of social media further enhanced the potential of new technologies to act as political participation tools. Social media sites like Twitter and Facebook allowed citizens to document events and actions by the state, from police beatings to election fraud, and disseminate news about those actions. Visual evidence in the form of photographs and videos was sent not just to their immediate networks but also globally, supporting citizen journalism. Facebook use in 2012 reached over fifty million users. Three million individuals use Twitter, and YouTube gets 170 million daily views in the region. Social media helped youth across borders gather for a common cause. As such, even in countries characterized by high levels of censorship, like Tunisia under Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, the Internet facilitated political participation through supporting the creation of transnational networks of activism and civil society.⁷⁸

Citizen journalism, in-country networks, and transnational networks themselves later became ways through which the Internet and mobile phones could be used to coordinate public action on the street. The April 6 movement in Egypt is an example of this, using Facebook and YouTube to rally people to participate in strikes and demonstrations between 2008 and 2011. The 2011 uprisings were also examples of how new technologies could be used hand in hand with public action as tools of political participation. In Egypt, a Facebook page originally created in 2010 by youth to protest the unlawful killing of a young man, Khaled Said, at the hands of the police, evolved into a platform calling for government accountability. This quickly grew to gather Egyptians in the country and abroad to discuss Egypt’s political future as the country prepared for new parliamentary and presidential elections in 2010 and 2011. The page *We Are All Khaled Said* became a space to mobilize for antiregime demonstrations, the biggest of which sparked the revolution of January 25. In Syria, YouTube became a key medium for people to document the assaults by the regime on Syrian people and towns at the beginning of its civil unrest. As such, the social media are a tool for informal opposition movements and networks to engage in public action.⁷⁹

Yet authoritarian governments also have learned the power of social media. In an effort to weaken and depoliticize civil society activism, Lebanon's cybersecurity apparatus called in activists for questioning over their social media posts. Furthermore, as Marc Lynch points out, social media has proven to be just as capable of transmitting negative and divisive ideas and images as they had been at spreading revolutionary ones.⁸⁰ In postrevolutionary Egypt, for example, Twitter and Facebook contributed to the growing hostility between Islamists and liberals.

Conclusion

That the MENA remains largely authoritarian does not signify a lack of involvement among the region's populations. The 2011 uprisings were testimony to the political awareness and engagement of the population. Citizens employ a variety of modes to better represent themselves and their societies. From the urban poor to the elite, from those who are illiterate to those who carry degrees of higher education, men and women, young and old, those loyal to tribes and those embedded in tight families, those who frequent the mosque and those who embrace secularism, and those who support their states to those in the opposition—political participation for each of these segments takes on an intimate and meaningful form of activity. MENA citizens have been able to adapt to their current political environments, use existing pathways, and create or resurrect modalities of participation that allow them in some consequential way to represent their interests and the interests of their communities and help them chart a better future for themselves and their children.

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6 Social Change in the Middle East

Valentine M. Moghadam

Sociologists have long studied social change, or societal transformation, in terms of changes to a society's production system and its social order. Depending on the historical period, this entails examination of structures and relations at micro (household, kinship, family), meso (organizations, formal institutions, and networks), and macro (system and relations of production and distribution) levels of analysis. More specifically, and certainly for the modern period, sociologists examine state formation, industrialization, urbanization, demography, social stratification and inequalities, education-employment links, state-society relations, cultural values and attitudes, migration, and global ties. These are, in fact, interrelated phenomena that influence each other and may be grouped under the umbrella term *modernization*. Although there has been an implicit understanding in the modernization literature that such changes occur under conditions of capitalism, in fact significant social changes have taken place under socialist conditions (consider the former Soviet Union as well as communist-era China, Cuba, and Vietnam).¹

Social change may come about rapidly and dramatically, as in the wake of a social revolution or a purposive state-led development strategy, or more gradually, as in longer-term processes of industrialization, urbanization, educational attainment, and normative shifts. In recent decades, aspects of globalization such as the introduction and widespread adoption of new forms of social media have enabled rapid-fire communication and information exchange, facilitating the organization and mobilization of dissent—as occurred during the Green Protests in Iran in summer 2009, the Arab Spring protests of early 2011, and Turkey's Gezi Park protests of 2013. Indeed, the effective and widespread use of social media by protesters in Iran, Tunisia, and Egypt revealed a level of

technological know-how and social awareness that doubtlessly surprised many outside observers. Social media also have been used for artistic or political self-expression, which in turn reflects wider changes in cultural attitudes, values, and norms.

Social change may come about in the aftermath of war or armed conflict. For example, in addition to changing the world's political map, World War I and World War II enabled women's suffrage in Europe and the United States and generated claims-making by women's organizations that culminated in the global feminist wave of the 1970s. Postconflict democratic transitions in certain parts of the Global South helped launch the "quota revolution" that has increased women's political representation across the world.² In the wake of the Arab Spring protests, Algeria and Tunisia became part of the group of countries with a 30 percent or higher proportion of women in parliament. Wars, however, also have had destructive effects, often undoing years or even decades of modernization and positive social change and creating new problems. World War I destroyed the Ottoman Empire (as it did the Austro-Hungarian Empire), changing borders and creating new states but also entrenching the European colonial presence. World War II enabled the spread of nationalist movements in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), some of which came into conflict with each other, in part as a reflection of Cold War dynamics. The 2003 US/UK invasion of Iraq not only destabilized Iraq and resulted in years of occupation, terrorism, and political dysfunction, but it also presaged further instability and insecurity in the MENA region, including the destabilization of Libya (2011) and Syria (since 2011), the growth of the terrorist group ISIS, and the Saudi assault on Yemen (since 2015). In the context of the region's contemporary conflicts, which includes the overlong Israeli-Palestinian contention, it is difficult to envision positive social change, whether for a country's female population, its institutions, or its economic capacity.

Over the past two centuries, the MENA region has experienced considerable social change. The early twentieth century saw constitutionalism, nation-building, and colonialism. The 1950s

through the 1970s represented a period of postcolonial state-building and state-led socioeconomic development. The 1980s were characterized by “structural adjustment” policies as well as the expansion of Islamist movements. The 1990s until 2011 had features of limited political liberalization, competing social movements of Islamists and women’s rights advocates, neoliberalism, and subregional conflicts (the first Gulf war, the invasion and occupation of Iraq, the Israeli assault on Lebanon, and the persistent Israeli-Palestinian conflict).

The Arab Spring and political change in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen initially launched those countries on a path of democratic transition, while Morocco, which had started a slower, more gradual transition in 1998, approved constitutional changes in the referendum of July 2011, which limited some of the vast powers of the king. By 2013, however, Libya had descended into a failed state while Egypt had reverted to military-led authoritarianism. The destabilization of Libya and the internationalized conflict in Syria generated a massive wave of migrants and refugees to neighboring countries and to Europe. At this writing (2018), the Saudi-UAE bombing campaign and blockade of Yemen that began in 2015 has created what the UN and an array of international organizations call a humanitarian catastrophe. The one positive outcome of the Arab Spring protests, Tunisia, has been building democratic institutions but also has suffered from deteriorating economic conditions. The social changes wrought by the Arab Spring have been a source of scholarly debate, with some underscoring its “modest harvest,” others pointing to authoritarian resilience, others emphasizing the absence of revolutionaries as the reason for defeat, and yet others noting cultural changes and positive shifts in value orientations.³ Throughout, the global context has been important to the regional and country-specific changes that have occurred in MENA.

This chapter traces some of the key elements of societal transformation that have accompanied modernization in MENA, although references to the likely effects of the region’s conflicts also will be made. It begins by providing an overview of social structural

changes over time, including class and labor force formation. This is followed by an examination of the role of population growth, urbanization, and education. It continues with a look at changes in family structure and the role of women's organizations in debates on, and reforms to, family law. Related to these changes have been shifts in cultural attitudes and values, as reflected in various surveys. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the dynamic processes through which both the social conditions and the arena for future contests over change take place, with a focus on gender relations and women's mobilizations. Framing the chapter conceptually are world polity theory, which helps explain the spread and consequences of "modern" institutions, norms, and networks in the region, and world-system theory, which posits a hierarchical global system of markets and states led by a hegemon within which MENA's oil plays an important role in global capital accumulation and states face geopolitical challenges.⁴ A feminist lens rounds out the analysis by highlighting the gendered nature of states, institutions, movements, and social relations.

Social Change and Social Structure

As various chapters in this volume show in more detail, MENA countries differ in their historical evolution, social composition, economic structures, and state forms. All were once under some form of colonial rule except for Iran (which nonetheless experienced Russian and especially British intervention in the nineteenth century), Turkey (which was itself a colonial power until the end of World War I), Israel (a settler-colonial state), and Saudi Arabia. All the countries are predominantly Arab except Iran, Israel, and Turkey, and all have majority Muslim populations except for Israel. Most Muslim countries are largely Sunni except Iran, which is Shi'a; Bahrain, which has a Shi'i majority; and Iraq and Lebanon, where Sunni and Shi'i populations are roughly equal. Some of the countries have sizable Christian (Lebanon, Egypt, Syria) or small Jewish (Iran, Morocco, Tunisia) minority populations; others (Iran, Iraq, Morocco) are ethnically and linguistically diverse. Some have had strong working-class movements and trade unions (Iran, Egypt, Tunisia, Turkey) or large communist organizations (Iran, Egypt, southern Yemen, the Palestinians). In all the countries, the middle classes have received Western-style education.

Other than Israel, MENA countries are considered “developing countries,” but there are marked differences among them. Their locations in the economic zones of the contemporary capitalist world-system—whether the periphery (Yemen, Oman, the West Bank and Gaza, Morocco) or semiperiphery (Israel, Iran, Turkey), along with the vast differences in their resource endowments (the oil-rich and labor-importing United Arab Emirates [UAE] and Qatar compared with low-income and labor-exporting Syria and Morocco)—have had implications for economic and social development as well as for state capacity. At the same time, MENA countries are linked to world society through involvement in multilateral agencies and international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs), treaty obligations, and access to new computer technologies and social media. Such

involvement and access have enabled norm diffusion—for human rights, women’s rights, and democracy—and demands for sociopolitical change.

Some countries have more-developed class structures than others; the size and significance of the industrial working class and its capacity for mobilization, for example, have varied across the region, as has the strength of the modern middle class. The development of skills (human capital formation), the depth and scope of industrialization, integration into the global economy, standards of living and welfare, and women’s participation and rights are varied. Although the countries of the Middle East are not among the poorest or most unequal in the world, they exhibit forms of social stratification that are both familiar and distinctive. Privilege or disadvantage is determined by class, gender, ethnicity, and national origin, while religious affiliation is another significant social marker.

Politically, the regime types range from theocratic monarchies (Saudi Arabia) to secular republics (Turkey and Tunisia). Until 1992, the kingdom of Saudi Arabia had no formal constitution apart from the Qur’an and the shari’a, the Islamic legal code. Many of the states in the Middle East experienced legitimacy problems, which became acute in the 1980s when Islamist movements spread across the region. The 1990s saw the beginnings of political liberalization, but for the most part, the process stalled, and many MENA states remained authoritarian, with limited citizen participation.⁵

Much has been written about the authoritarian, patrimonial, or rentier nature of the MENA state (see also [Chapter 5](#)). The term *neopatriarchal state*, adopted from Hisham Sharabi, is a useful umbrella term for the various state types in MENA, especially in connection with how gender and family are structured in the region.⁶ In the neopatriarchal state, unlike liberal or social democratic societies, the family, rather than the individual, constitutes the universal building block of the community, and religion is bound to power and state authority. The neopatriarchal state and the patriarchal family reflect and reinforce each other, although both

have been subject to challenges from women's educational attainment and labor force participation, as well as by civil society organizations and new social movements. The neopatriarchal state retains control over the population through authoritarian means but crucially through the codification of women's second-class citizenship in the region's conservative family laws.

Postcolonial state-building and economic development in the MENA region did, however, change social structures and social relations, creating new occupations and professions for the growing modern middle class and working class as well as transnational migrant communities. As new jobs were created in the service and industrial sectors, niches were found for female employment. Through policies that some scholars have termed *state feminism*, Tunisian women saw legal reforms and opportunities for higher-education attainment and jobs in the growing public sector.⁷ Educated women secured jobs in teaching, health, and welfare provision, while in Turkey and Egypt women's participation increased in commercial and industrial enterprises and in public administration. During the period of rapid growth, governments instituted social security programs; protective legislation for working mothers, such as paid maternity leave and workplace nurseries, was in place in all MENA countries. Egypt had a policy of guaranteeing public sector jobs to graduates of secondary schools and universities; Morocco's scheme provided "temporary employment" to graduates. Through these policies, the public sectors in countries such as Egypt, Jordan, and Algeria absorbed about 50 percent of the formal labor force, and public sector workers enjoyed social insurance programs that were adopted from international models.

Such social policies, along with advances for women, are said to form part of the general trend toward modernization.⁸ Nonetheless, most citizens remained engaged in agrarian production or traditional commercial activities. As a result, the family remained the key institution of the MENA social welfare regime and neopatriarchal state during the oil boom era. As long as the oil revenues remained buoyant and the economy kept up its growth, informal family

transfers and worker remittances played an important role in maintaining economic security for parts of the population that were excluded from the formal social welfare system.⁹ Whether in the informal or formal sector, the breadwinners were predominantly men.

This leads to the question of why MENA women remained a small proportion of the nonagricultural labor force until well into the new century, and even today compared with other world regions. A significant reason lies in the region's political economy: the centrality of the oil sector and the relatively high wages enjoyed by male workers during the state-building and oil boon era. Oil-based growth and capital-intensive production limited female labor supply and demand.¹⁰ Higher wages earned by men served to limit the supply of job-seeking women during the oil boom years; indeed, one analysis of manufacturing-wage trends showed that workers' wages were higher in most MENA countries than they were in Asian countries such as Indonesia, Korea, and Malaysia.¹¹ Another analysis has focused on women's historic separation from the means of production, specifically their exclusion from land ownership.¹² Women's exclusion from gainful employment reinforced "the patriarchal gender contract"—the implicit and often explicit agreement that men are the breadwinners and are responsible for financially maintaining wives, children, and elderly parents, and women are wives, mothers, homemakers, and caregivers. In turn, the patriarchal gender contract was inscribed in the region's family laws, which render women minors and under the supervision of male kin. In these ways, both political economy and formal institutions served to reproduce conservative social norms and the traditional sexual division of labor.

The oil boom era came to an end in the mid-1980s, in the midst of the Iran-Iraq war (1980–1988). In the late 1970s and into the early part of the next decade, many developing countries experienced indebtedness, in part because of the sudden increase in interest rates, and were compelled to accept austerity measures and "structural adjustment" policies as a condition for new loans from the IMF and World Bank. The regional oil economy protected many

MENA countries, but by the 1990s, a combination of declining oil prices, mismanagement of economic resources, expensive and destructive conflicts, and the return or expulsion of labor migrants led to economic stagnation, indebtedness, and high unemployment in many countries. Attempts to preserve employment during a long period of retrenchment that began in the mid-1980s led to substantial wage erosion in all the countries in the region.¹³ Structural adjustment policy prescriptions to reduce the government's wage bill meant that public sectors no longer hired as expansively as they had before, and a strategy to avoid outright layoffs was wage deterioration or encouragement of early retirement.

One of the casualties of the end of the oil boom, as well as intraregional political disputes, was the intraregional labor flow, affecting expatriate Arabs working in the Gulf states. The return of expatriate workers was a mixed socioeconomic experience. In some cases, returnees contributed to a boom in the construction industry and in small businesses (especially in Jordan), but in other cases, they faced unemployment, slow absorption into the local labor market, or poverty. The latter was especially acute for Yemenis, who were largely unskilled workers unable to find employment at home. In the Gulf states, Arab workers were replaced by South and Southeast Asian migrants.

The result of these developments—the end of the oil boom, the introduction of structural adjustment, and the return of labor migration—was a considerable decline in household incomes and a substantial increase in unemployment. Parallel to the new discourse and policy of privatization, “flexible” labor markets, and entrepreneurship, unemployment rose. Although adult men were also affected, women and youth have faced the greatest difficulty finding jobs. Women's unemployment rates soared in the 1990s, indicative of the growth of the population of job-seeking women in a context of real economic need as well as women's rising educational attainment and changing aspirations. In most countries, unemployment benefits and social insurance—if they were in place at all—were not available to new entrants to the labor market, who

were the majority of the registered unemployed in most countries. Economic restructuring and demographic pressures created new inequalities and groups of “new poor.”¹⁴

Another development worth mentioning is the expansion of Islamic fundamentalist movements as well as movements for political Islam (see also [Chapter 4](#)). The conservative turn in MENA has been extensively analyzed, with the identification of such factors as the demonstration effect of Iran’s Islamic revolution; US support for the tribal-Islamist uprising in Afghanistan in the 1980s; popular anger over the nonresolution of the Israeli-Palestinian problem; frustration over unemployment and rising living costs following the adoption of privatization and liberalization policies; Saudi Arabia’s export of the Wahhabi ideology through its worldwide construction of mosques and madrasses; Arab migrant workers’ adoption of that ideology during their employment stay in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf sheikhdoms; reunification of Yemen in 1990 and the end of the socialist experiment in the south. In turn, Islamist movements took advantage of these and similar opportunities to mobilize financial, human, and organizational resources to grow their social base and challenge regimes. In some cases, regimes fought or repressed the Islamist movements, especially when acts of terrorism were carried out in the 1980s and 1990s, as occurred in Egypt, Algeria, Jordan, and Tunisia. But regimes also accommodated Islamist movements by introducing or strengthening Muslim family law (as in Egypt in 1985) and allowing the construction of numerous unsupervised mosques. Conservatism, Salafism, and attachment to the Islamist agenda thus spread across many populations. In Egypt, veiling became increasingly widespread within the female population, and in Jordan, the Muslim Brotherhood Islamist party consistently won seats in parliamentary elections, blocking liberal reforms.¹⁵

As the forces of globalization expanded in the 1990s, the MENA countries were further transformed.¹⁶ New socioeconomic relations began to be forged as states followed international trends in privatization and liberalization, but neither a coherent vision nor a comprehensive strategy of development succeeded the old models

of economic and social development.¹⁷ The size of the middle class expanded; foreign direct investment flowed to Morocco, Tunisia, and the Gulf states; and the globalizing business classes of countries such as Turkey, Egypt, Lebanon, and the Gulf states became part of what sociologists Leslie Sklair and William Robinson have termed the *transnational capitalist class*, with a stake in global flows of financial and industrial capital.¹⁸ While some aspects of the globalizing processes, such as links to world society through the Internet and transnational advocacy networks, were dynamic and liberating, other aspects contributed to the growing inequalities and wage gaps in the region. Conflicts in Palestine and Iraq, moreover, created or exacerbated poverty.

Conflicts in the region have led to another significant change in the MENA region. Demographer Philippe Fargues has referred to “demographic Islamization,” by which he means the declining numbers of non-Muslims—including those populations of Christians and Jews that predated the Muslim conquest—in countries including Iran, Iraq, Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria.¹⁹ What he calls “the golden age for Christian demography” was found during the era of the Ottoman Empire, when several MENA countries were a vibrant mix of religious, ethnic, and linguistic communities. Turkey itself had a Christian population of nearly 20 percent in 1914. This dwindled to 2.5 percent in 1927, the result of the massacre of Armenians, the removal of Greeks, and the departure of other Christians. By 1991, the population of Christians in Turkey was just 0.2 percent.²⁰

The formation of the state of Israel led to the displacement of Jews from Iraq, where they had been a large and prominent presence since biblical times; in the 1950s and 1960s, North Africa lost much of its Jewish population to emigration to Israel or France. Egypt’s surge of nationalism in the early 1950s, following the 1952 “Free Officers’ Revolution” that ended the monarchy, may have set the country on a path of social development, but it also marked the beginning of the end of what had been known as “cosmopolitan Alexandria.” Members of Alexandria’s foreign community and Egyptian Jews left the country after the enactment of regulations that

paved the way for the arrests of citizens without charge, seizure of their businesses, and nationalization of their assets. In Iran, the Islamic Revolution changed the country's demographic makeup. Although Iran still has the largest Jewish population in MENA outside of Israel, many Iranian Jews—along with Christians, Baha'is, Zoroastrians, and secular Muslims—left Iran during the revolution or in the years afterward.

Fargues provides data to show that Lebanon's Christian population declined from about 55 percent in 1956 to 43 percent in 1998, due mainly to the Lebanese civil war and outmigration. The significant decline of the population of Christian Palestinians is attributed to a combination of the pressures of living in Israel, fears of Islamization, and the lack of employment opportunities. One of the many tragic outcomes of the 2003 US invasion and occupation of Iraq was the displacement of the country's minorities, especially its once large Christian population. The enforcement of veiling and the banning of alcohol by vigilante Islamists forced the departure of numerous Christian Iraqis, primarily to safe areas in Jordan and Syria.²¹ Later, many Iraqi Christians as well as Palestinians who had sought refuge in Syria faced another crisis. One aspect of the internationalized civil conflict in Syria has been sectarian violence, in which antiregime Sunni Muslims, aided by foreign fighters, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE, have targeted Christians. This included the armed takeover of the ancient Syrian Christian town of Maaloula by the violent transnational Islamist group calling itself the Islamic State.

Other factors for the declining numbers of religious minorities are intermarriage and international migration. For the region as a whole, challenges to non-Muslim communities that have led to emigration (forced or free) include xenophobic nationalisms, political Islam, conflicts and wars leading to sectarian violence, and the absence of jobs. For all these reasons, the proportion of Christians in the Middle East's population has declined from 13.6 percent in 1910 to 4.2 percent in 2010 and is expected to fall to just 3.6 percent by 2025.²² An irony of history and of demography is that as Europe and North America have become more multicultural, with Muslim residents and

citizens demanding more rights, the MENA region has become less multicultural, with Christians on the defensive or departing altogether.

This overview of regional transformations over the past century sets the stage for a more detailed look at key social change processes. We begin with sociodemographic processes and their connection to urbanization, and we end with social reforms and women's rights movements.

Population Growth and Urbanization

Urbanization is a central aspect of social change and of economic development, with cities playing a key role in globalization. Rural-to-urban migration and the growth of cities are usually fueled by “push” and “pull” factors: the push of population pressure on natural resources and the lack of economic opportunity in the rural areas, and the pull of perceived economic opportunity and a better lifestyle in the big cities.²³ MENA has experienced rapid rates of urbanization and population growth, and although countries are at different levels of urbanization, the majority of the region’s inhabitants now reside in urban areas. By 2018, the Arab region alone was 61 percent urbanized, more so than the world average of 54 percent. After Latin America, which is 80 percent urbanized, the MENA region has the highest level of urbanization in the developing world.²⁴

Urbanization has implications—both positive and negative—for social structure and class relations, gender relations, and normative change. Public space, once the exclusive domain of men, is now also occupied by women, though not necessarily without risk. Still, gender mixing on the streets, in schools, and at workplaces can help change attitudes, values, and behaviors. Public and private services are more extensive in cities than in rural areas, although population growth puts pressure on quality and cost. Work is typically less arduous in cities than in rural agrarian areas, but urban labor markets cannot absorb all workers, leading to informality, unemployment, or underemployment. City-based collective action, advocacy, and activism expand, but so do state surveillance and repressive methods.

The most rapid growth in urbanization occurred in the oil-exporting countries, albeit in different ways. The population doubled between 1960 and 1980 in Saudi Arabia, Oman, Libya, and the UAE, and it doubled in Iran and Iraq between 1950 and 1985.²⁵ Among countries not already highly urbanized, the slowest rate of urbanization was in

Egypt; its urban share increased from 32 percent in 1950 to 43 percent in 2015. Yemen is the least urbanized country in the region, whereas Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain are essentially city-states. International migration also has played a part in urbanization. In the case of Israel, immigration by Jews from other countries has contributed to the growth of Tel Aviv and West Jerusalem. In the small, oil-rich Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, importation of foreign labor has contributed to urban growth through the construction boom.

The city of Dubai experienced spectacular urban growth in the 1990s and 2000s, which other Gulf states have sought to replicate. In the 1950s, the once-thriving trade and pearling center had a faltering economy. From the late 1960s through the 1970s, Dubai's leaders invested revenue from the emirate's newly discovered modest oil reserves in seaport and airport infrastructure to further develop the emirate as a trade hub. Migrants from nearby South Asia, other MENA states, and beyond settled in the city, and by 1980, its population was 276,000, up from about 60,000 when the first census was conducted in 1968. In the 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century, further growth and diversification were pursued through development of free zones, tourism, and the emirate's famed real estate and construction boom. In 2010, approximately 1.5 million people lived in Dubai, the vast majority of whom were not citizens and more than 70 percent were men.²⁶ Dubai's population continued to grow rapidly and is estimated to be 2.68 million in 2018. The largest percentage of Dubai's residents is from the Indian subcontinent, but there are significant numbers of expatriates from other MENA states and smaller populations of expatriates from around the world. Gulf cities have become increasingly cosmopolitan multicultural hubs, sparking concerns and debates among some citizens about the erosion of local culture and identity, as well as mimicry and monumentalism.²⁷ The Gulf example also raises questions about social relations and rights in such cities, where most inhabitants are noncitizens, often living in a state of what Syed Ali has termed "permanent impermanence," and where social and cultural life transcend the boundaries of the national state.

A very different example of urbanization and its social consequences comes from Alexandria, the ancient Egyptian city and the country's largest after teeming Cairo. Alexandria boasts Greco-Roman monuments and colonial-era buildings. The notable Alexandria Library was built in 2002 on what is believed to be the site of its ancient predecessor, the Royal Library of Alexandria, and there are plans to build an underwater museum that would showcase the submerged remnants of Cleopatra's palace.

As one report explains, until the mid-1990s Alexandria was a popular summer destination for well-to-do Egyptian vacationers, but decades of state neglect, population growth, beach erosion, and heavy pollution left their mark on the city. As Alexandria grew more dilapidated and congested, the country's elites moved west, spending their summers at the pristine beach resorts farther along the coast. Alexandria's public beaches became the preserve of the less privileged, though these are not well-kept and still charge an entrance fee. The Alexandria Chamber of Travel Agencies recently signed agreements with Greece, Cyprus, and Italy to promote the city as a tourist destination in the hope of increasing the inflow of tourists from the three Mediterranean states. Direct flights to Alexandria's Borg El Arab Airport will be established under the plan, which also seeks to increase the airport's annual passenger handling capacity to four million passengers by 2022—more than three times the current capacity of 1.2 million. In parallel, the number of hotel rooms will increase to cater to the projected growth in tourism, while the private beaches will ostensibly protect female tourists from sexual harassment.²⁸

There are, of course, environmental costs to urban overdevelopment, as well as to urban neglect. Tehran's urban development, including new highways and housing complexes, not only has expanded the city limits but also has exacerbated pollution and traffic jams. In May 2013, mass protests erupted in Istanbul over plans to bulldoze a central park—one of the very few left in Istanbul—to make way for new building construction. The Gezi Park protesters were met with tear gas by police and eventually

dispersed; construction went ahead. In Cairo and other cities in Egypt, the cutting down of trees to make way for new urban projects has angered the public and led members of parliament to call for new measures to protect Egypt's dwindling urban green spaces.²⁹

Governments also have engaged in urban prestige projects that seem to compete in size, scale, and cost. Dubai produced the world's tallest building, the Burj Khalifa. Algeria is constructing what will be the world's third largest mosque. Turkey's megaprojects include the longest suspension bridge in the world: the Çanakkale 1915 Bridge, a planned suspension bridge to be located at the western end of Marmara Sea; a new international airport in Istanbul, under construction in Arnavutköy district on the European side of Istanbul, which will be the world's largest; the Gebze-Izmir Motorway, Turkey's largest ever infrastructure project, which will feature the 3.3km Izmit Bay suspension bridge; and the Istanbul Tunnel Project, a connector between Asia and Europe 110 metres below sea level with three different levels, intended for both cars and metro to reduce Istanbul's notorious traffic jams. Several of the Turkish megaprojects are public-private partnerships, sometimes criticized for cronyism.³⁰

As seen in [Table 6.1](#), MENA's population and urbanization growth has been steady and, in some cases, dramatic. As mortality rates dropped and fertility rates remained high between 1950 and 2010, countries such as Egypt, Iran, Morocco, and Turkey saw high rates of population growth; indeed, until relatively recently, high population growth rates in MENA were second only to those in sub-Saharan Africa. MENA's annual population growth reached a peak of 3 percent around 1980, while the growth rate for the world reached its peak of 2 percent annually more than a decade earlier.³¹

Concomitantly, push-pull factors saw migration from rural to urban areas, leading to urban expansion. The region's high fertility rates resulted in the "youth bulge" that was in evidence during the mass social protests in Iran in 2009 and in the Arab countries in 2011.³²

In 1990, MENA had only about twenty cities with populations of more than one million; nearly thirty years later, there are more than forty

such cities. The 1980s saw the population growth of already large cities such as Cairo, Istanbul, and Tehran, as did a second tier of cities. Cities with between two and three million inhabitants include Algiers, Dubai City, Kuwait City, Morocco’s Casablanca and Rabat, and Iran’s cities of Isfahan, Mashad, and Shiraz. Those with between four and five million include Jeddah, Tel Aviv, Alexandria, and Ankara. Baghdad and Riyadh have about seven million inhabitants while Tehran has eight million.³³ Istanbul’s population of 12.5 million in 2014 has doubtlessly increased with the inflow of Syrian migrants. The same can be said of Amman and Beirut, whose populations in 2014 were 1.3 million and 2.2 million, respectively. Conversely, Syria’s cities—Aleppo, Homs, and Hama in particular—have seen depopulation due to the conflict and refugee outflow.³⁴

Table 6.1 Population and Urbanization in the Middle East and North Africa

Table 6.1 Population and Urbanization in the Middle East and North Africa

Country	Total population (millions)			Percentage urban			
	1950	2010	2015	1950	1980	2010	2015
Algeria	8.75	35.5	37.9	22.2	43.5	72	70.7
Bahrain	0.116	1.26	0.4	64.4	86.1	88.6	88.8
Egypt	21.5	81.1	91.5	31.9	43.9	43.4	43.1
Iran	17.414	74	79.1	27.5	49.7	68.9	73
Iraq	5.72	31.7	36.4	35.1	65.5	66.5	70.2
Israel	1.26	7.42	8.4	71	88.6	91.8	92

Country	Total population (millions)			Percentage urban			
	1950	2010	2015	1950	1980	2010	2015
Jordan	0.449	6.19	7.6	37	59.9	82.5	84.8
Kuwait	0.152	2.74	3.9	61.5	94.8	98.2	98.4
Lebanon	1.44	4.23	5.9	32	73.7	87.1	88.4
Libya	1.03	6.36	6.3	19.5	70.1	77.6	79.6
Morocco	8.95	32	34.4	26.2	41.2	56.7	60.2
Oman	0.456	2.8	4.5	8.6	47.6	73.2	77.6
Qatar	0.025	1.76	2.2	79.2	89.4	98.7	99.2
Saudi Arabia	3.12	27.5	31.5	21	65.9	82.1	83.1
Syria	3.54	20.4	18.5	30.6	46.7	55.7	57.7
Tunisia	3.53	10.5	11.3	32.3	50.6	66.1	66.8
Turkey	21.5	72.8	78.7	24.8	43.8	70.5	73
United Arab Emirates	.07	7.51	9.2	54.5	80.7	84	85.5
West Bank and Gaza	.932	4.04	4.4	37.3	62.4	74.1	73.3
Yemen	4.32	24	26.8	5.8	16.5	31.7	34.6

Source: UN Dept. of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Urbanization Prospects*, “2011 Revision” and “2014 Revision”; 2015 figures from World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2017*, 11–14.

Some of the megacities, and especially Cairo (population 9.68 million in 2018), have extremely high population densities, severe shortages of housing and services, and lack of regulation of construction and urban development. Indeed, the economies of the cities cannot absorb their large urban populations, and this reality leads to unemployment, underemployment, and poverty among urban populations. Other problems include a shortage of clean drinking water, the growth of slums or shantytowns, polluted air, water shortage, inadequate waste disposal systems, power shortages, and noise pollution.

Population growth and urbanization in MENA, as in other world regions, was propelled by the demographic transition, which entails changes in health and mortality. The infant mortality rate is a key indicator. The region’s average infant mortality rate, which was as high as 200 per 1,000 live births in 1955, began to decline in 1960; by 1990, it had reached about 70 per 1,000 live births. Eight years later it was down to 45—still higher than Latin America, the Caribbean, eastern Asia, Europe, and Central Asia, but lower than southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. For individual countries, the changes in infant, child, and maternal mortality occurred rapidly and dramatically. For example, in 1960 Tunisia had an infant mortality rate of 159, and its under-age-five child mortality rate was 255. In the 1980s, these declined to 58 and 83, respectively. By 2000, the rate of infant mortality had dropped to just 30, and in 2012, it was 14.³⁵ Iran similarly saw impressive achievements in the health of children as well as of mothers during the 1990s. Indeed, maternal mortality rates have dropped throughout the region. According to the 2016 *Human Development Report*, they remain highest in Morocco and Yemen, with rates of 121 and 385 per 100,000 live births, respectively. Life expectancy varies; the regional average for Arab states (this does not include Israel, Iran, or Turkey) rose from fifty-two years in the early 1970s to nearly seventy-one in the new century. As of 2016, most MENA countries had life expectancy rates

of between seventy-two and seventy-five years (Israel's was eighty-two years); lower rates were found in Syria (seventy), Iraq (sixty-nine), and Yemen (sixty-four).³⁶

In the late twentieth century, fertility began falling, especially among young, educated women in urban areas. For the region as a whole, the total fertility rate (expected number of births per woman) dropped from 7 children per woman in the 1950s to 4.8 in 1990 and declined further to about 3.6 in 2001; in 2010, it was down to 2.8 children. Iran and Turkey are two examples of volatility in population growth and demographic transitions. Turkey began its transition earlier, in the 1950s, only to experience a kind of baby boom in the early 1970s. Iran's total fertility rate declined during the 1970s but increased during the 1980s following the Iranian revolution. The dramatic population growth rate of the 1980s is attributed to the pronatalist policies of the new Islamic regime, which banned contraceptives and encouraged marriage and family formation, but it may also be a result of rural fertility behavior, which was slow to decline during the 1970s. As late as 1988, the Islamic Republic of Iran reported 5.6 births per woman. With the reversal of the pronatalist policy following the results of the 1986 census and the introduction of an aggressive family planning campaign after 1988, fertility declined again.³⁷ In the new century, the fertility rate hovered at replacement level—between a reported 2.1 and 1.8 children per woman.

Jordan's demographic transition has followed a different pattern. Fertility rates declined through the 1990s but then stalled at around 3.7 births per woman—much higher than the replacement rate—for about a decade in the 2000s. In other words, for “women born between 1975 and 1995, the trends in age at first marriage and first birth were essentially flat.” Since 2010, there has been a resumed decline, with 3.3 births per Jordanian woman. The median age at marriage has risen very slowly from 22 to 23 and median age at first birth from 24 to 25.³⁸

Table 6.2 Fertility Rates and Ages at Marriage in the Middle East and North Africa

Table 6.2 Fertility Rates and Ages at Marriage in the Middle East and North Africa

Country	Total fertility rate			Mean age at marriage (2001–2011)	
	1970–1975	1990–1995	2010–2015	Male	Female
Algeria	7.4 ^a	4.1	2.8	33	30
Bahrain	6.7	3.4	2.1	30	26
Egypt	5.4	3.9	2.8	—	23
Iran	6.4	4	1.9	27	24
Iraq	7.1	5.8	4.1	28 ^b	23
Israel	3.9	2.9	2.9	29	26
Jordan	7.6	5.1	3.3	29	25
Kuwait	6.7	3.2	2.6	29	28
Lebanon	4.6	3	1.5	32	28
Libya	6.8	4.1	2.4	34	31
Morocco	5.9 ^a	3.7	2.8	31	26
Oman	9.3 ^c	6.3	2.9	28	25

Country	Total fertility rate			Mean age at marriage (2001–2011)	
	1970–1975	1990–1995	2010–2015	Male	Female
Qatar	4.5 ^d	4.1	2.1	27	25
Saudi Arabia	6.5 ^d	5.4	2.7	27	25
Syria	7.7	4.9	3.0	29	25
Tunisia	6.1	3.1	2	33	29
Turkey	5.7	2.9	2.1	—	24
United Arab Emirates	8.2 ^c	3.9	1.8	27	25
West Bank and Gaza	7.5	6.5	4.1	28	24
Yemen	8.5 ^a	7.7	4.2	25	22

Sources: Fertility rates: 1970–1975: “World Fertility Patterns 2007,” UN Population Division, March 2008; 1990–1995, 2005–2014: *Human Development Report*, United Nations, various years, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/data/>. Mean age at marriage: “Statistical Indicators on Men and Women,” United Nations, <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/indwm/tab2b.htm>.

[a.](#) 1977 data.

[b.](#) 1997 data.

[c.](#) 1983 data.

[d.](#) 1985 data.

Like the World Fertility Surveys of the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) of the 1990s confirmed the link between mothers' education and total fertility rate: The higher the educational attainment, the fewer the number of children. Government policy—such as family planning education in Iran and the distribution of contraceptives—has doubtlessly played as major a role as women's educational attainment and fertility decision-making. And yet in both Iran and Turkey, fertility decline has alarmed the authorities. In Turkey, President Erdoğan has called on married women to have at least three children, while in Iran, the authorities have terminated the family planning program.³⁹ (See [Table 6.2](#) on fertility rates and marriage age.)

Decades of high birthrates, nonetheless, have helped to keep the population of Middle Eastern countries young. According to the 2009 *Arab Human Development Report* (AHDR), some 35 percent of the region's population was younger than fifteen years of age, whereas only 4 percent was older than sixty-five.⁴⁰ Some 60 percent of the population of Arab states is below age twenty-five.⁴¹ Similarly, in Iran in 2009 some 70 percent of the population was below age thirty-five. The existence of a large population of young people has economic and political implications. Young people tend to suffer from high rates of unemployment and may engage in social protest either for jobs, housing, and income or for cultural change and freedoms; young men also may constitute a recruiting base for Islamist movements or radical campaigns. Iraq, the West Bank and Gaza, and Yemen retain high fertility, which correlates with poverty, poor schooling, conflicts, and patriarchal values; it is reported that Syrian refugee populations exhibit similarly high fertility, in large measure due to unavailability of contraceptives. The MENA population is expected to swell to 576 million by 2025—more than double the current size. Given the aridity of much of the region, the growing numbers will place increasing demands on water and agricultural land; urban services, currently strained, will need to be vastly expanded and improved. Other

challenges will be job creation and mechanisms for political inclusion.⁴²

Such challenges are exacerbated by the Saudi assault on Yemen, prolongation of the civil conflict in Syria, the tensions in Iraq, and the brutal period of ISIS control. These developments have led to a humanitarian catastrophe in Yemen and a massive outflow of citizens, primarily from Syria but also from Iraq, seeking safety elsewhere. Summer 2015 saw a dramatic outflow of refugees by sea and land, seeking safety and security in Europe; Philippe Fargues has estimated their numbers to be close to 358,000 persons, and has noted, too, that some 2 percent of those coming across the perilous waters of the Mediterranean have lost their lives.⁴³ The refugee camps of Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey are home to some four million Syrians. According to 2018 figures, over six million Syrian suffer internal displacement (down from eight million in 2014), while just over six million Syrians are refugees.⁴⁴ Apart from the multifaceted humanitarian crisis of the internationalized civil conflict, internal displacement, and refugee outflow is the question of how depopulation has affected urban centers and city life in Syria and Iraq.

Labor Force Growth, Employment Challenges, and Income Inequalities

Rapid urbanization and population growth have transformed the size and structure of the labor force, with populations shifting from rural and agrarian production to various types of urban industrial and service-oriented economic activities. Urban labor markets have been unable to absorb the growing labor force, resulting in the expansion of the urban informal sector, income inequalities, and high rates of unemployment. The shift in the 1990s to the neoliberal model of privatization, liberalization, and labor market flexibilization only exacerbated the problem, especially for women and young graduates.⁴⁵

Labor force statistics in the region are not always reliable, and women's economic activity outside the formal and modern sector has tended to be underestimated. National and international data sets often present inconsistent figures for female labor force participation (FLFP). Data from both the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Bank, which are the most reliable, show that for MENA, average FLFP is about 25 percent, compared to a world average of nearly 50 percent. The female share of the total nonagricultural salaried workforce is very small, at around 23 percent.⁴⁶ The higher rates of FLFP found in the GCC countries include the migrant female labor force. Even so, in the GCC as in other MENA countries, analysts have documented many legal barriers to women's employment.⁴⁷

In most MENA countries, the measured female workforce is concentrated in the service sector, even though in some of the larger countries a considerable proportion of the female economically active population remains rooted in agriculture. Among the GCC countries, there is greater involvement in agriculture in Oman and Saudi Arabia, but more on the part of men than of women; and other

than Oman, the vast majority of the GCC female workforce (nationals) is found in public sector employment. Asian women workers perform service work considered culturally inappropriate for native women. Only in Morocco and Tunisia are large percentages of the female workforce involved in the industrial (manufacturing) sector, particularly in the garment industry.

Throughout the region, however, university-educated women have higher FLFP than do less-educated women, married women have weak labor force attachment, and female unemployment rates are very high. There are various reasons for this state of affairs: the contraction of public sector jobs, the absence of women-friendly work environments in the private sector, the fear of sexual harassment, employer responsibility for paid maternity leave, and the dearth of child care centers and preschool facilities.⁴⁸ Institutional reforms are needed, therefore, to ensure women's economic participation and empowerment: family law reform, enforcement of antidiscrimination and antiviolenace laws, decent jobs, statutory paid maternity leave, and a nationwide network of preschool facilities to generate jobs for some women and enable maternal employment.

In all countries, the male workforce is more evenly distributed across the sectors and more likely to be found in modern occupations. While official statistics show that salaried work remains a predominantly male domain in the region, women have been moving into new occupations and professions that are in line with economic globalization trends: call centers (especially in Morocco); global banking and financial services; insurance agencies; consulting firms catering to foreign businesses; offices of international organizations, banks, and foundations; and high-end tourist shops.⁴⁹

Despite these changes, however, unemployment in the region is high, as can be seen in [Table 6.3](#), hovering around an average of 10 percent. Contributing factors include the decline in intraregional labor migration, continued rural-to-urban migration, contraction of public sector jobs, and lack of formal-sector job growth in the private sector. In some cases, layoffs occurred following enterprise restructuring or

denationalization and privatization (for example, in Tunisia, Morocco, and Turkey), and usually, the unemployed population consists of first-time job seekers, including a high percentage of college graduates as well as secondary school graduates, male and female alike, who are seeking jobs out of economic need. Urban unemployment rates began increasing in the 1980s and reached highs of 10 percent to 18 percent in Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Iran, Turkey, and Yemen.⁵⁰ In the 1990s, female unemployment rates soared to highs of 25 percent, indicating a growing supply of job-seeking women, in contrast with an earlier pattern of “housewife-ization.”

[Table 6.3](#) shows that in almost all countries female unemployment rates remain considerably higher than male rates despite women’s lower labor force participation rates. Iranian women’s very high rate of unemployment in 1991 was almost halved by 1996, probably because more women began establishing their own businesses and NGOs or enrolling in university. In 2015, women’s unemployment rate was 19.3 percent, more than twice the male rate (9.3 percent). The figures reveal that what Moghadam termed in 1995 the “feminization of unemployment” has been a defining feature of the urban labor markets of the MENA region.⁵¹ Indeed, the low FLFP rates in MENA (along with the low average rate of female parliamentary representation) are largely what bring down the MENA region in global rankings of gender equality/inequality. A recent study of “gender regime clusters” in the Global South, for example, showed that the MENA region ranked within the highest clusters because of good indicators on women’s educational attainment and health, but also in the lowest clusters because of poor indicators on women’s employment and on parliamentary representation.⁵²

Table 6.3 Labor Force Data from Selected Countries in the Middle East and North Africa
Table 6.3 Labor Force Data from Selected Countries in the Middle East and North Africa

Country	Labor force participation rate, ages 15 and older, 2015 (percentage)			Unemployment rate, 2015 (percentage)		
	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male
Algeria	41	15	67	11.2	16.7	10.0
Bahrain	72	44	87	1.2	3.8	0.5
Egypt	48	22	74	13	26.1	9.1
Iran	43	15	70	11	19.3	9.3
Iraq	47	18	75	7.7	13.2	6.4
Israel	64	59	70	5.3	5.4	5.1
Jordan	39	14	64	13.1	22.7	11.0
Kuwait	70	49	86	2.2	3.1	1.8
Lebanon	47	23	71	6.1	7.4	5.8
Libya	52	26	79	18.4	26.9	15.6
Morocco	49	25	74	9.7	10.4	9.4
Oman	70	30	87	15.8	32	13.3
Qatar	88	59	95	0.2	0.8	0.1
Saudi Arabia	56	22	79	5.6	21.7	2.4

Country	Labor force participation rate, ages 15 and older, 2015 (percentage)			Unemployment rate, 2015 (percentage)		
	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male
Syria	42	12	71	14.6	39.3	10.4
Tunisia	47	25	71	15.2	21.5	13.0
Turkey	51	31	72	10.2	12.5	9.2
United Arab Emirates	81	42	93	2.1	5.5	1.6
West Bank and Gaza	45	19	71	25.9	39.0	22.5
Yemen	38	6	69	13.1	25.6	12.0

Source: World Development Indicators, World Bank.

How do the unemployed—those who expect jobs in the formal sector but do not find them—fare in countries where unemployment insurance is not in place or is not available to new entrants? Some of the job seekers, and especially the men, appear to have gravitated to the urban informal sector, which by all accounts has grown tremendously in the region. Informal-sector workers may include taxi drivers, construction workers, domestic workers, people who work in souks and bazaars (the traditional markets in MENA), hairdressers, barbers, seamstresses, tailors, workers in or owners of small industrial or artisan workshops, hawkers of sundry goods, repairmen, and so on. They also include home-based pieceworkers, such as

women in Turkey, Syria, and Jordan who are engaged in sewing and embroidery for a contractor or subcontractor. But the informal sector also involves high-end economic activities, such as beauty services, jewelry making, catering, tutoring, and desktop publishing. The nature and function of the informal sector have been much debated in the development literature and in policy circles. There is consensus that although the informal sector serves to absorb the labor force and provide goods and services at relatively low cost, it is also unregulated and untaxed, leading to poor labor standards and relatively high incomes (such as the wealth of many merchants) that are not redistributed. The informal sector both reflects and contributes to social inequalities in the society. Meanwhile, poverty persists.

Poverty and Inequality

There has been considerable improvement over time in standards of living in the MENA region—as measured by life expectancy, infant mortality, maternal mortality, age at first marriage, fertility rates, literacy, and school enrollments, along with access to safe water, adequate sanitation facilities, and social protection. The UNDP’s *Human Development Report 2016* shows the region progressing over time from the lower to the upper end of “medium human development,” though below East Asia and the Pacific and especially Latin America and the Caribbean. Most of the countries, however, are classified as “high human development” in the statistical tables. Conflict, however, has adversely affected ranking. As noted at the outset of this chapter, conflicts in Iraq, Libya, Palestine, Syria, and Yemen have been destructive of physical infrastructure, labor markets, public services, and human capital. The sanctions regime imposed on Iran and enforced by the United States has distorted prices and labor markets, exacerbating unemployment, inflation, and poverty. Syria and Libya dropped from *medium* human development in 2014 to *low* in the 2018 ranking, now joining Yemen, according to the 2018 edition on indices and indicators.⁵³ It will take those countries decades to move up the human development ladder, and this regression in human development ranking vividly confirms that conflict and war can undo years and decades of modernization. Conflict and war also create *new poor* categories or exacerbate existing poverty. At the same time, the presence of poverty in even an ostensibly *very high* human development country such as Saudi Arabia may be regarded as a puzzle to be explored. But as the *Human Development Report 2016* notes and numerous social-science studies have demonstrated, poverty is also a developed-country problem, typically associated with ineffective or corrupt governance.

According to the World Bank and United Nations Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA), the number of poor people in MENA increased from an estimated sixty million in 1985 to

seventy-three million in 1990, or from 30.6 percent to 33.1 percent of the total population.⁵⁴ Poverty assessments prepared by the World Bank, which were derived from surveys of living standards undertaken within various countries, revealed growing poverty in Egypt and Jordan and the emergence of an urban “working poor” in Tunisia and Morocco. According to official statistics, 23 percent of the population in Egypt in 1991 and 18 percent of the population in Jordan in 1993 was considered to be living below the poverty line, although most analysts believed that the poverty incidence could be as high as 30 percent in both countries. Poverty was largely rural in both countries. The rural poor were small landholders and tenants, landless agricultural workers, and pastoralists, but the urban poor in Egypt included the unemployed and female-headed households. In Lebanon, the main factors behind the increase in the incidence of poverty and rising inequalities was the civil war of the 1980s and the misguided economic policies of the 1990s, including tax write-offs for large firms engaged in the country’s reconstruction and the absence of any property taxes. An ESCWA report singled out the absence of government social spending and “unjust wealth distribution” as the factors behind the rise in nutritional deficiencies, lack of sanitation in poor areas, and lowering of teaching and health standards.

Circa 2012, some 30 percent of Syrians, 27 percent of Tunisians, and 25 percent of Egyptians were living below the nationally determined poverty line, and 14 percent of Moroccans and 13 percent of Tunisians lived on less than two US dollars per day (see [Table 6.4](#)). A 2018 study of four countries, including Egypt, Jordan, and Tunisia, found “significant wealth gaps, especially across urban-rural and educated-uneducated divides, and between demographic groups,” as well as “increasing polarisation of wealth ownership in Egypt, with the poorest 5 percent of households experiencing declining wealth.”⁵⁵ The authors note that studies of the distribution of income and consumption expenditures that find modest degrees of inequality in the MENA region overlook households’ “stock of productive and non-productive assets,” which increase living standards and economic inequality across households and are related to their present and future earnings.⁵⁶

Government responses vary, but in Iran, poverty reduction steps include an unconditional and universal cash transfer, introduced in December 2010 when Iran ended its energy and bread subsidies. Each month, each citizen receives the equivalent of \$40, and some 95 percent of households are covered. As a result, the proportion of individuals living in poverty declined from 22.5 percent to 10.6 percent, although inflation has been lowering the real value of the transfer.⁵⁷ In all countries—because of gender differences in employment and income, and for older women, literacy and educational attainment—women are especially vulnerable to poverty during periods of economic difficulty or in the event of divorce, abandonment, or widowhood.⁵⁸ Conflicts in the region have exacerbated women’s vulnerability. Indeed, a joint ESCWA-UN Habitat report found the following:

Although most Arab countries reduced extreme poverty during the timeframe of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), conflict and wide-scale displacement to urban areas have contributed to increased relative poverty or absolute poverty since 2010 [T]he average poverty incidence in the Arab region, based on national poverty lines, rose from 22.7 percent in 1990 to 23.4 percent in 2012.⁵⁹

Table 6.4 Poverty and Inequality in the Middle East and North Africa

Table 6.4 Poverty and Inequality in the Middle East and North Africa

Country	Population living below the national poverty line, 2006–2017 (percentage)	Population (in percent) living on less than US\$2 per day (PPP)	Quintile ratio (ratio of average income of richest 20% of population to poorest 20%)	Gini coefficient, 2010–2017
Algeria	5.5	0.5	4.0	27.6
Egypt	27.8	1.3	4.6	31.8
Iraq	18.9	2.5	8.8	29.5 (2012)
Iran	—	0.2	7.2	38.8
Israel	—	0.7	9.8	41.4
Jordan	14.4	0.1	5.2	33.7
Lebanon	—	—	5.5	31.8
Morocco	8.9	3.1	7.4	40.7
Palestine	25.8	0.2	5.5	34.4
Syria	35.2 (2009)*	—	—	—
Tunisia	15.5	2.0	6.4	35.8
Turkey	1.6	0.2	8.5	41.9

Yemen	48.6	18.8	6.1	36.7
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Source: *Human Development Indices and Indicators, 2018 Statistical Update*, Tables 3 and 6.

Note: — signifies data not available. No data are available for the GCC countries and Libya.

* *Human Development Report 2016, United Nations Development Report*, Table 6 (for Syria only).

In the case of Iraq, war and economic sanctions worsened the situation of the poor and created new poverty-stricken groups. The destruction of Iraq's infrastructure by US-led bombings in January 1991 and again in March and April 2003, the shortage of medical supplies and foodstuffs caused by the long sanctions against the regime, and the collapse of public services following the 2003 invasion served to transform a country that was once urbanized, mechanized, and prosperous. By 2012, Iraq's poverty headcount (the percentage of the population living under the national poverty line) was 20 percent to 23 percent. Yemen had the largest number of poor as a proportion of its overall population: In 2005, 35 percent lived below the poverty line, and nearly half lived on less than two US dollars per day. The situation has deteriorated even further since the 2015 Saudi assault, which all but destroyed the country's infrastructure and generated widespread cholera.

Economic theory holds that income inequality widens at early stages of economic development and levels off at later stages, when poverty also falls.⁶⁰ Neoliberal capitalist globalization, however, has generated rising income inequality in once relatively egalitarian Western societies. In MENA, some studies have found moderate and even declining levels of income inequality along with widespread societal perceptions of rising inequality; such studies distinguish between income inequality, wealth inequality, inequality of opportunity, and so on. Some experts dispute this and provide evidence to show that income and wealth inequality are much wider in MENA than is assumed in much of the literature (though not by citizens, who report perceptions of much greater income and wealth

inequality).⁶¹ Wealth inequality across households and “new poor” populations are associated with development failures including structural adjustment policies and government mismanagement, privatization, and cronyism, as well as conflicts and sanctions.

High military expenditures have impeded progress in human development or set it back in some MENA states. US allies invest in defense at levels that are very high by global standards. In 2005 through 2006, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iraq, Jordan, Oman, and Yemen topped a global ranking of countries by percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) allocated to military expenditures.⁶² World Bank figures for 2015 show that at 7.7 percent of GDP, the MENA region had the highest military expenditures of all world regions; the figures ranged from a low of 2.3 percent of GDP in Iran to a whopping 13 percent to 14 percent of GDP in Oman and Saudi Arabia.⁶³ The relationship between military expenditure and development is contested, but high military expenditure does tend to be associated with war-making. Negative effects of high military spending are evident in countries with weak economies and involvement in conflicts; Yemen’s high military spending throughout the period of 2000 to 2010 is a vivid example of misallocated resources when one considers its poor indicators on poverty, maternal mortality, and adolescent fertility. As Paul Collier has shown, war prevents or sets back development; as Gregory Hooks argues, wars impede the formation of developmental states (defined in Amartya Sen’s terms as welfarist states pursuing human capabilities). Others have shown a positive relationship between income inequality and share of military expenditures in the central government budget.⁶⁴

In the large and diversified economies—especially Turkey and Iran, but also including Morocco and Tunisia—income inequalities allow those from the upper-middle classes to enjoy very comfortable lives while the lower-income groups struggle. Urbanization has brought about access to health, safe water, and sanitation for residents in most of the countries, but some countries face difficulties in the provision of such services. In other countries, there are distinct rural-

urban disparities. In terms of access to services, urban living is generally superior to rural living, but population growth and reductions in government social spending are straining the quality and quantity of urban services. These pressures are not conveyed by the statistics but are best discerned by visits to and stays in the nonelite sections of some of the large cities in MENA, where overcrowding, rundown and inadequate public transportation, streets in disrepair, polluted air, high noise levels, and lack of building codes are only some of the many problems that low-income urban dwellers have to endure. One solution is for governments to adopt more effective taxation, including “a progressive inheritance tax regime.”⁶⁵ Among other positive outcomes, more effective taxation could help MENA countries meet the Sustainable Development Goals.

Education and Human Development

Social change is associated with the rise of mass education, which in turn generates decreasing fertility rates, higher age at marriage, shifts in family structure and dynamics, and changing attitudes, aspirations, and behaviors. In standardized measures such as literacy, enrollment ratios, and mean years of schooling, educational levels have risen significantly during the past six decades. In particular, women's higher education attainment has been impressive, and this correlates with higher rates of female labor force participation. Nonetheless, the region has experienced declining educational quality, increasingly stretched resources, and concerns about the relevance of available education for national growth, development, and international competitiveness.

Education has served a central role in the development of modern states globally, and world society theorists have highlighted the role of education in both reinforcing and contributing to world culture.⁶⁶ Education is now widely considered a basic right, the provision of which has become essential for both state legitimacy and economic growth. It also plays a key role in nation-building efforts, providing a vehicle for cohering shared collective memory and identity. In the Levant and North Africa, the expansion of education was a cornerstone of state-building efforts during the postindependence period; in the Gulf monarchies, education developed alongside rising oil wealth.⁶⁷ In Iran, investments in universities and public schools as well as the growth of an array of private and international schools constituted an essential feature of the state's modernization drive from the 1960s to the 1970s.

In the mid-twentieth century, literacy rates ranged from 30 percent to 62 percent, and women's literacy rates were at roughly half those of men. According to data from UNESCO's Institute for Statistics and the World Bank's *World Development Indicators*, by 2009 overall literacy rates had almost doubled, reaching between 56 percent and

95 percent. Literacy tends to spread more rapidly in urban areas; with their significant rural populations, Morocco, Yemen, and Egypt had the lowest adult literacy rates in MENA, at 56 percent, 62 percent, and 66 percent, respectively.⁶⁸ Adult women's literacy levels still lag behind those of men in nearly all MENA states.

In 1960, the average number of years of schooling among individuals over age fifteen in MENA ranged from 0.61 in Tunisia to a high of 2.9 in Kuwait. By 2000, the average had risen to a regional mean of 5.4 years. Yemen had the lowest reported years of schooling at 2.9, whereas Kuwait and Jordan had the highest at 7.1 and 6.9, respectively.⁶⁹ In 1970, primary school enrollments were very low in Oman, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia; there and elsewhere, the gender gaps were very wide. Today, primary school education is nearly universal across the region, with a reported 94 percent completion rate in 2015, according to the UNESCO database.

Secondary school enrollment ratios across the region average nearly 80 percent. For girls, the ratios jumped exponentially between 1970 and 2010—for example, in Algeria from just 6 percent to 97 percent, and in Turkey from 15 percent to 81 percent. According to UNESCO figures, 2015 secondary school enrollments of over 90 percent were found in Bahrain, Israel, Oman, and Tunisia; in Iran, the rate was 89 percent. The lowest enrollment rates were in Morocco, Syria, and Yemen. (Data were not available for Algeria, Iraq, and Libya, although Algeria's "school life expectancy" was over 14 years.) The widest gender gaps in secondary schooling that favor men were found in Morocco and especially Yemen, but almost everywhere else, women's net secondary school enrollments are higher than men's.⁷⁰ The same pattern is found in tertiary, or higher education, enrollments. One key difference, however, is that the labor force participation rates of women with university education are much higher than those of women with secondary schooling or less, despite the latter's much larger population size.⁷¹

In 1970, tertiary enrollment was below 10 percent in most of the region and at its highest at 21 percent in Lebanon, but it has

expanded since then. Between 2005 and 2010, Israel had the highest tertiary enrollment rate of any MENA state at 58 percent, followed by Libya and Turkey with enrollment rates of 56 percent. The lowest percentages were found in Qatar and Yemen at 10 and 11 percent, respectively. But in Qatar, women enroll in university at a far higher rate than do men, reaching a gross enrollment ratio of 47 percent in 2016, compared to just 6 percent for men. Tunisia has had female tertiary enrollments of over 40 percent since 2008, considerably higher than men's, although the gender gap is not as extreme as that of Qatar. In Iran, women's tertiary enrollments began to exceed those of men in 2001 and rose to 67 percent in 2015, but by then, men's enrollment rates also had increased considerably.⁷² Women's tertiary enrollments exceed those of men in all but a few of the MENA countries. Egypt, Morocco, and especially Yemen, however, perform poorly on tertiary enrollments.

Education systems, along with the knowledge and methods of learning that they impart, are shaped by particular sociopolitical and cultural contexts and may be sites of contestation over ideological and political interests, national identity, religiosity, and political authority. As Monica Ringer notes, education's presumed neutrality hides a "competition for hegemony amongst political, social, historical, cultural, and religious actors." School curricula can be used to shape collective memory, assert a hegemonic interpretation of historical events, or obscure the contributions and experiences of some actors. Educational institutions also may reinforce inequalities such as those based on gender and socioeconomic class. In a study of Jordan's educational system, Betty Anderson examines the content of textbooks over time, tracing the development of national identity. This national identity, she argues, was supported through particular interpretations of regional history and politics. Bradley Cook argues that Egyptian educational institutions are dominated by an elite minority who enforce their preference for secular education, whereas a majority of Egyptians express a preference for a greater role for Islam in public education.⁷³ In Saudi Arabia, where sex segregation in education remains the norm, girls' education until 2002 was overseen by religious authorities rather than the Ministry of

Education.⁷⁴ These examples highlight the ways in which education is molded by particular interests and the ways that diverse agendas have shaped educational institutions, pedagogy, and curriculum across countries.

Improvements in regional education levels have not been reflected in economic indicators such as improvements in macrolevel productivity or GDP per capita or employability of graduates.⁷⁵ MENA states as a whole lag behind East Asia and Latin America in metrics such as average years of schooling and test scores. The fifteen participating MENA states fared below international averages on the international standardized *Trends in International Mathematics and Sciences Study* in 2007.⁷⁶ A recent study found that whereas GCC countries do well on health indicators and outcomes, this is not the case for education. Using a “political economy of education” approach, Lueders and Lust find that education outcomes in the GCC rentier states fall below those of other states at similar levels of development because of guaranteed jobs in the public sector, a major employer of nationals.⁷⁷ At the same time, Middle Eastern women’s enrollments in the sciences—for example in Morocco, Oman, and Tunisia—are much higher than those for women in Latin America, Europe, and the United States.⁷⁸ Tunisian women graduate students, for example, have high rates of enrollments and exceed men’s in such fields as math and statistics, health, life sciences, physics, and environmental protection.⁷⁹ And yet their unemployment rates are very high.

During the era of state-building and modernization, the university system was a key institution to produce public sector employees, including the country’s needed teachers, university professors, health workers, and public administrators. Unemployment was almost unheard of for university graduates. With policies of privatization and liberalization, public sector employment experienced contraction, and the quality of schooling declined, contributing to the so-called education-employment mismatch. Analysts argued that rote learning and the absence of independent studies, development of critical thinking, internships and cooperative

education programs, or collaborations with universities around the world left students poorly prepared for either the “knowledge economy” or market needs. In addition, resources allotted to education have been frequently mismanaged and increasingly stretched.

Educational provision remains organized primarily through the state, but private universities are present in Iran, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Morocco, and Turkey. The quality varies considerably, as does the relative autonomy of private institutions from state interference. The significant expansion of private tertiary education in the Gulf states has been offset by government control over who is permitted such licenses. André Mazawi notes that the expansion of Gulf universities has been accompanied by the increasing adoption of US models.⁸⁰ This shift is explained in terms of globalization and internationalization trends in higher education as well as a function of Gulf states’ military and economic alliances with the United States. (Still, Lueders and Lust find that citizen students in those Gulf universities perform less well in math and sciences than do the foreign students enrolled there.⁸¹) In Iran, the most highly regarded and competitive university remains the state-funded University of Tehran. The expansion of private education thus should not necessarily be viewed as expansion of opportunities for quality education. Indeed, Egyptian sociologist Ghada Barsoum shows that the proliferation of private learning institutions in Egypt is regarded by many young people as an “easy route” that presumably leads to a government job. The objective, she argues, is credential-seeking for status and jobs in a neoliberal era, and she concludes that “easy education in private universities is a waste of the precious resources of lower-achieving students and their families.”⁸² Writing about Tunisia, Mongi Boughzala and colleagues similarly note that the emergence of private higher-education institutions has not improved the quality of educational outcomes in Tunisia.⁸³

Mismatch notwithstanding, the high rates of unemployment among college-educated youth, and especially educated young women, suggest that there is a demand-side problem of labor absorption. A

study for the World Bank showed that “overeducation” is common in diverse low- and middle-income country contexts, both those where tertiary graduates are relatively plentiful and those with much lower rates of educational attainment. The study also finds evidence that overeducated tertiary workers do not use all of their skills, potentially wasting valuable human capital and educational resources.⁸⁴ MENA countries were not part of that study’s cross-national comparisons, but the overall findings may be applicable. University-educated young people who are unemployed, underemployed, or moving from one temporary gig to another represent a waste of human capital. For women in particular, the private sector’s instability, long hours, and lack of support structures for working mothers constitute a disincentive to employment.

One positive development related to the expansion of education as well as to globalization is increasing access to and use of the Internet. In the 1990s, the use of mobile phones and satellite TV spread throughout the region, while the new century saw the expansion first of Internet cafés and then new social networking sites such as MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Young people in particular began making extensive use of the new computer and information technologies (ICTs), for purposes of personal self-expression (e.g., blogs), connections with friends and family, and knowledge of events elsewhere in the region and around the world. Eventually, ICTs facilitated engagement with the public sphere, “virtual activism,” and—especially in connection with the Iranian Green Protests and then the Arab Spring—political mobilization, recruitment, and coordination of protest activity. On the eve of the Arab Spring outbreak, use of social media was most common among young men in the region. In the case of Facebook, for example, users outnumbered female users by a margin of 2:1 and greater in most countries of the region.⁸⁵ But that has changed, with widespread use of Facebook by women not only for connections with family and friends but also for discussion of social and political issues, as has become common in Tunisia. Mobile phone usage is especially widespread; in 2015, subscriptions per 100 people exceeded 100 everywhere but Yemen, the West Bank and Gaza,

Syria, Lebanon, Iran, and Iraq. In Jordan, it was as high as 179 subscriptions per 100 people, and in Kuwait, 232.⁸⁶ The MENA region's high Internet usage increased dramatically between 2010 and 2015, as seen in [Table 6.5](#).

As noted, women's gross tertiary level enrollment ratios now exceed those of men in most MENA countries, mirroring a global trend.⁸⁷ Sociological analysis of the male gender gap in US higher education may be relevant for understanding this phenomenon in the MENA region. At the individual level, differences in the perceived returns to higher education among women and men have been identified as a key factor in explaining women's higher-educational attainment. Thomas DiPrete and Claudia Buchmann find that standard-of-living and insurance-against-poverty returns have risen faster for women, and they also point to sociocultural changes in gender roles and expectations, along with changes in the labor market and within institutions of higher education.⁸⁸ In the UAE, the perception of lower returns to education for men coupled with male advantages in the large public sector where salaries are attractive and competition for jobs is relatively low help to explain women's higher enrollments.⁸⁹ Elsewhere, too, women may be overtaking men in higher education because men are gravitating to lucrative jobs in the growing private sector.

The personal and social returns of education to women cannot be overemphasized, even when accounting for the unemployment rates. Iranian sociologist Golnar Mehran points out that following the Iranian revolution, sex segregation became compulsory, textbooks were revised to reflect traditional ideas about gender, and female students were increasingly directed into specializations deemed gender appropriate. Schools were intended as vehicles for the creation of the "New Muslim Woman" and women's enrollment and completion rates grew. But education provided a platform for women's increased political awareness, civic activism, and changing aspirations.⁹⁰ Women's equal or even greater educational attainment across the region does not indicate the achievement of gender equality, but it does signal a growing pool of educated women who

are likely to challenge their second-class citizenship in the family and in the society at large.

Table 6.5 Internet and Mobile Phone Usage

Table 6.5 Internet and Mobile Phone Usage

Country	Internet users (per 100 people) 2010–2015		Mobile cellular subscriptions (per 100 people)
Algeria	13	38	106
Bahrain	55	93	185
Egypt	27	38	111
Iran	13	45	93
Iraq	2.5	17	94
Israel	65	77	133
Jordan	39	53	179
Kuwait	38	82	232
Lebanon	31	74	92
Libya	14	19	157
Morocco	49	57	127
Oman	62	74	160
Qatar	82	93	159

Country	Internet users (per 100 people) 2010–2015		Mobile cellular subscriptions (per 100 people)
Saudi Arabia	41	70	177
Syria	21	30	64
Tunisia	37	49	130
Turkey	40	54	96
United Arab Emirates	78	91	187
West Bank and Gaza	36	57	78
Yemen	12	25	67

Sources: World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2011, 2017*.

The Family, Family Law, and Sexuality

Modernization and its entailments—urbanization, schooling, the opening up of public spaces to women, links with world society—have affected the traditional family and prescribed gender roles, replacing the patrilocally extended family with the nuclear family, creating many more opportunities for women, and affecting attitudes toward sexuality. Whereas family structure in the MENA region once was described as extended, patrilineal, patrilocal, patriarchal, endogamous, and occasionally polygynous, there have been dramatic changes in the structure of the family and the role of women within it. In urbanized countries of the region, and apart from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf monarchies, polygyny has become a statistically insignificant family form. Only Turkey and Tunisia have banned polygyny outright, but monogamy is the norm in the region, and the 2004 reform of family law in Morocco made it very difficult for a man to obtain a second wife.

Early marriage is becoming rare as educational attainment rates increase and young women and men interact with each other in universities, workplaces, and other public spaces. Before 1970, women in the region commonly married in their teens and early twenties. Today, the average age at marriage for women in the region has shifted to the mid-twenties, and the average age for men is three to five years higher. As marriage patterns are influenced by urbanization, urban youth marry later in all countries. There are, however, exceptions to the general pattern of rising age at first marriage and lowered fertility. Teenage marriage continues in the poorest countries, the rural areas, and among the most conservative households. More than 15 percent of women marry before age twenty in Yemen, Oman, parts of Egypt, and Gaza.⁹¹ Early marriages have been reported among the Syrian refugee populations in Jordan and Lebanon. According to a recent study, whereas just under one in ten Jordanian girls married before age 18, the rate for Syrian refugee girls was about two in ten.⁹² In 2015, the

adolescent fertility rate (births per 1,000 women aged 15–19) was just 7 percent in Tunisia and 10 percent in Algeria but as high as 51 percent in Egypt, 58 percent in the West Bank and Gaza, 61 percent in Yemen, and an astonishing 85 percent in Iraq.⁹³

While later age at marriage is associated with positive outcomes such as higher educational attainment and decreasing birthrates, it may also signal the impact of economic constraints on desired family formation. Weak regional labor markets are forcing increasing numbers of women and men in the region to delay marriage or remain unmarried.⁹⁴ In some cases, young men postpone marriage because they face job insecurity or lack a diploma to guarantee access to desired jobs. Women, faced with the pragmatic necessity to count on themselves instead of relying on a rich husband, further their formal education.

In Iran, the legal age of marriage for girls was lowered to puberty after the revolution; at the turn of the twenty-first century, after many parliamentary debates, it was finally increased to thirteen.⁹⁵ But the real mean age at first marriage for women is now twenty-five, and in 2015, the adolescent fertility rate of 26 percent was far lower than the regional average of 38 percent and the global average of 44 percent.⁹⁶ The surge in unmarried young people and the fear of illicit sex led some clerical and lay authorities to encourage “temporary marriage” (*muta’a* in Arabic, *sigheh* in Persian), which is a contractual arrangement for licit sexual relations under Shi’i interpretation of shari’a law. Temporary marriage is, however, highly unpopular in middle-class society, which associates it with legalized prostitution. Instead, as Iranian American anthropologist Pardis Mahdavi has explained, young people rebel through unorthodox modes of dress and hairstyles and by holding parties, dancing, drinking alcohol, and “kissing our boyfriends in the park.” As such, young people are “comporting their resistance” and using their bodies in deliberate ways that suggest a kind of sexual or generational revolution.⁹⁷ In Tunisia, likewise, in the 1990s only 3 percent of young women ages fifteen to nineteen had ever been married; subsequently, the average age at first marriage rose

dramatically, reaching twenty-nine years for women in 2004. According to one feminist organization, the Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates, the current social realities required that the issue of “sexual rights” be addressed.⁹⁸ Indeed, a conference on the subject of sexual and reproductive rights, organized by the Femmes Démocrates and the Turkey-based feminist group Women for Women’s Human Rights–New Ways, took place in Tunis in November 2006, providing early evidence, among other things, of the growing assertiveness of the women’s rights movement.

The late Moroccan sociologist Fatima Mernissi famously argued that the idea of a young, unmarried woman was completely novel in the Muslim world, for the concept of patriarchal honor is built around the idea of virginity, which reduces a woman’s role to its sexual dimension: reproduction within an early marriage.⁹⁹ The concept of a menstruating and unmarried woman is so alien to the Muslim family system, Mernissi added, that it is either unimaginable or necessarily linked with *fitna*, or moral and social disorder. The unimaginable is now a reality.

Such social changes are significant, but they are not embraced by all segments of a society. Conservative forces in the state apparatus and in civil society contest changes to traditional norms, institutions, and relationships. Thus, the family remains a potent cultural trope, with conservative discourses frequently tying women’s family roles to cultural, religious, and societal cohesion. Although changes in sexual behavior have been observed among the young in Tehran, Istanbul, and Tunis—in part because of the rising age of marriage and rising university enrollments—virginity remains an important cultural asset. In small towns and rural settings, family honor depends in great measure on the virginity and good conduct of the women in the family. The control of the sexual behavior of women and girls remains a preoccupation and a patriarchal legacy.

For married women and certain young women, however, there is some flexibility. Although Tunisia remains the only MENA country where medical abortion is legal and has been performed in hospitals

since 1973, Muslim religious leaders in a number of MENA countries have issued *fatwa*, declaring that abortion is permitted under certain circumstances, such as fetal anomaly, rape, and if the pregnancy poses a threat to the mother's life and health.¹⁰⁰

Sylvia Walby distinguishes between the “private patriarchy” of the premodern family and social order and the “public patriarchy” of the state and the labor market in industrial societies. In his work on South Korea, John Lie has identified “agrarian patriarchy” and “patriarchal capitalism.” Others have used the term *patriarchy* more strictly so that patriarchal society is cast as a precapitalist social formation that historically has existed in varying forms in Europe and Asia, with a particular kinship structure that favors endogamy.¹⁰¹ In the patrilocally extended household—which is typical of the peasantry in agrarian societies—property, residence, and descent proceed through the male line (patrilineality), and endogamy is the preferred reproductive strategy, maintained typically through cousin marriage, along with polygyny. The senior man has authority over everyone else in the family, including younger men, and women are subject to control and subordination. Childbearing is the central female labor activity.

“Classic patriarchy” or “private patriarchy” has been dissolving under the weight of modernization and development, but we continue to see the patriarchal legacy in both the private sphere of the family and the public sphere of states, markets, and organizations. The patriarchal legacy is seen in practices such as adolescent marriage of girls, son preference, compulsory veiling, cousin marriage, sexual control of females, and “honor killings.” It is also inscribed in family laws that increasingly are regarded as anachronistic by much of the female population and activist generation.

Many feminist critiques of Muslim family law have focused on the civil and political aspects of women's forgone human rights and second-class citizenship.¹⁰² The Iranian winner of the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize, Shirin Ebadi—who is a veteran lawyer and served as a judge prior to the Islamic revolution—has pointed out the injustice

and absurdity of a legal system whereby her testimony in court would count only if supplemented by that of one other woman, whereas the testimony of a man, even if illiterate, would stand alone. But family law also has implications for women's socioeconomic participation and rights and may have been a contributing factor to the low female economic activity found across the region.¹⁰³ Muslim family law is predicated on the principle of patrilineality, which confers privileges and authority to male kin. Brothers inherit more than sisters do, and a deceased man's brothers or uncles have a greater claim on his property than does his widow. The groom offers a *mahr* (dower) to the prospective bride and must provide for her; in turn, he expects obedience. Provisions regarding obedience, maintenance, and inheritance presume that wives are economic dependents, thus perpetuating the patriarchal gender contract. In many MENA countries, the concept of *wilaya*, or male guardianship, means that women are required to obtain the permission of father, husband, or other male guardian to undertake travel, including business travel.¹⁰⁴ In Iran and Jordan, a husband has the legal right to forbid his wife (or unmarried daughter) to seek employment or continue in a job. Although wives—at least those who are educated and politically aware—may stipulate in their marriage contracts the condition that they be allowed to work, many wives make no such stipulations, and courts have been known to side with the husband when the issue is contested.¹⁰⁵ In some countries, certain occupations and professions, notably that of judge, are off-limits to women.

Muslim family law is at odds with long-standing discourses about the need to integrate women in development. It also contravenes the equality provisions of constitutions and those articles in the labor laws that describe an array of rights and benefits to women workers. For example, while social security policies make the widow the beneficiary of a deceased employee, in Muslim family law the paternal line has the main claim to a deceased male's wealth. Egypt's policymakers defer to shari'a law; thus, inherited pensions are divided according to Islamic law, with a widow receiving no more than one-quarter or one-eighth of the pension if there are children.

Muslim family law may be seen not only as a premodern or prefeminist code for the regulation of family relations but also as a way of retaining family support systems in the place of a fully functioning welfare state predicated on concepts of citizen contributions and entitlements. The welfare of wives and children remains the responsibility of the father or the husband. When a woman seeks a divorce or is divorced, her maintenance comes not in the form of any transfers from the state and even less in the form of employment-generating policies or affirmative action for women; it comes instead in the form of the *mahr* that is owed to her by her husband.

Social changes have rendered Muslim family law an outdated institution and social policy. The growth of a population of educated and employed women with aspirations to full social participation and equal rights of citizenship has led to dynamic women's movements and campaigns for repeal of discriminatory laws—specifically, for reform of family laws. One of these campaigns was spearheaded by the Collectif 95 Maghreb-Egalité. In a 2003 book that was subsequently translated into English, the authors point out that among the many reasons why Muslim family law is in need of reform is its divergence from the social realities and actual family dynamics of many countries, where women must seek work to augment the family budget and where women are increasingly looking after their elderly parents.¹⁰⁶ In other words, where Muslim family law does not directly stand in the way of women's economic participation and rights, it is an anachronism in light of contemporary family needs and women's aspirations.

Small wonder, then, that throughout the region, women's groups have made reform of Muslim family law a priority. In Morocco, a decade-long campaign by women's rights activists and a political opening in 1998 led to the reform of the highly patriarchal Mudawana in 2004.¹⁰⁷ In Iran, the One Million Signatures Campaign was launched in 2007, though almost immediately it faced serious state repression. A meeting in Kuala Lumpur in February 2009 brought together "Islamic feminists" to form a transnational network called

Musawah and craft a set of arguments that would bolster their case for reform.

In the wake of the Arab Spring, there were fears that newly empowered Islamists would seek to undo the gains made by women's rights advocates and their allies, including repeal of family law reforms. Egypt's salafists, for example, called for the repeal of women's rights to divorce, lowering the age of marriage from eighteen to fourteen, decriminalizing female circumcision, and calling for the enforcement of shari'a law. In Libya, among the first statements issued by the head of the National Transitional Council was that polygamy would be restored. In Tunisia, Islamist women began appearing openly in *niqab*, but feminists mobilized to thwart any attempted changes to their legal status. "*Ne touche pas à mes acquis*" was a prominent slogan chanted and inscribed on placards held by Tunisian women of diverse generations during the postrevolutionary transitional period.

Dynamics of Social Change: Focus on Women's Rights

Changes to women's legal status and social positions depend in part on the dynamics of local and global civil society and social movements, as well as on broader regional and international processes.¹⁰⁸ Citizens come together in voluntary associations, professional organizations, and all manner of NGOs, social movements, and INGOs—some of which may be at philosophical and political odds with each other—to struggle with each other and the state over the distribution of power and resources (see also [Chapter 5](#)). How these competing interests and conflicts are resolved depends on the nature of the state, the balance of social power, the strength of democratic institutions, and the types of links to world society; the resolutions, in turn, reshape the political and social actors and institutions. As a closer examination of the women's movement shows, the result is a dynamic process, altering both social conditions and the broader institutional arenas within which new struggles take place.

Both global and local forces have significantly influenced the status of women in the MENA region. The global women's rights agenda and the UN conferences of the 1990s—especially the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, which took place in Cairo, and the 1995 Beijing Conference on Women—prompted the proliferation of women's organizations and women-led NGOs in the Middle East. Whereas the 1950s through the 1970s saw women involved almost exclusively in either official women's organizations or charitable associations, the 1990s saw the expansion of many types of women's organizations. At the same time, increasing state conservatism in some countries forced women's organizations and feminist leaders to assume a more independent stance than they had before. Rising educational attainment and smaller family size have freed up women's time for

civic and political engagement, allowing them to staff or establish NGOs, advocate for women's equality and rights, and participate in an array of campaigns. Even ultraconservative societies such as in Bahrain, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia have felt pressure, as activists demand that women receive their rights as full citizens.

Women's education correlates with both employment and involvement in professional and civic associations, and it is also a powerful predictor of activism for women's rights. There may be a connection between the fact that liberal arts colleges for women have mushroomed in the Gulf countries and that women's claims-making associations have also emerged in those same countries. Research on Kuwait has shown that women's networking and involvement in professional associations—highly correlated with women's educational attainment—is a strong predictor of engagement with the political process.¹⁰⁹ Civil society thus becomes an arena more amenable to women's activism and, at least in principle, a venue through which they can more easily access decision-making positions. Women are involved in an array of associations, from professional associations to human rights groups, though they tend to be underrepresented in all but women's rights organizations.

In the 2019 global ranking of parliaments by percentage of female members, Arab states ranked second-lowest as a region, with an average of 18.6 percent female representation compared with a global average of 24 percent. This is a notable improvement since the 2010 rankings, when the region's average was only 9.6 percent. Half of MENA states ranked in the bottom third globally, anchored by Yemen and Oman. Tunisia topped the MENA list, followed by Israel, Algeria, and Iraq. Algeria, Tunisia, and Iraq have parliamentary gender quotas, as does Morocco, and Israeli political parties have adopted voluntary quotas (see [Table 6.6](#)). Female representation in those states compares favorably with other parts of the world. Research by Egyptian-American political scientist Marwa Shalaby shows that women parliamentarians take an active part in parliamentary debates and discussions; they also are members of

various legislative committees though not necessarily the “power committees.”¹¹⁰

For the most part, political power is firmly ensconced in male hands, notably in Iran, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, and Kuwait. Yemen’s Tawakul Karman may have won the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize (sharing it with Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, president of Liberia, and her countrywoman Leymah Gbowee), but as the 2005 *AHDR* noted, despite the presence of eighty-seven women’s associations in Yemen, the proportion of women in decision-making positions did not exceed 6 percent, while their share of parliamentary seats was less than 0.5 percent.¹¹¹ The *AHDR* called the establishment of the Arab Women’s Organization (AWO), which was launched in 2002, a form of tokenism, given that it was not provided the resources or the authority to influence broader decision-making, much less take part in decisions pertaining to economic development or peace and security. Elsewhere, women are found in an array of civil society organizations, such as human rights and environmental protection organizations and professional associations of lawyers, medical doctors, scientists, and so on. In Tunisia, several “feminist syndicalists” are members of both women’s rights organizations and the country’s large trade union, the UGTT. In both Tunisia and Morocco, women head the main employers’ associations.

The main form of women’s civil society participation is found in women’s own organizations such as Morocco’s Association Démocratique des Femmes Marocaines, Algeria’s SOS Femmes en Détresse, Iran’s Cultural Center for Women and the Change for Equality Campaign, Tunisia’s Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates, and Turkey’s Women for Women’s Human Rights–New Ways. In the wake of the 2011 Egyptian uprising and revelations of extensive sexual harassment and abuse by police, military, and marauding males, feminists established the online and offline campaign HarassMap. All these movements, organizations, and campaigns have been spearheaded by educated women—most of them also professionals in an array of fields. It is in their own organizations that critically minded, educated women can establish

their authority, take part in decision-making, engage with various publics, and exercise their political and social rights. In so doing, they are also expanding the terrain of democratic civil society and helping to enact legal and policy reforms. Among the recent accomplishments have been the 2014 law against sexual harassment in Egypt; the strengthening of anti-domestic violence laws in Algeria and Tunisia; the lifting by governments in Morocco and Tunisia of reservations to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); the adoption of equal nationality rights for women by the Arab League in October 2017, following reforms in Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia; and the repeal in 2017–2018 of marry-your-rapist laws in Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia. In Iran in 2018, women’s rights advocates awaited parliamentary adoption of a landmark “Provision of Security for Women Bill,” which expands the legal definition of violence against women but which faced criticism from conservatives. In Saudi Arabia the main reform has been to allow women to drive, in 2018.

Table 6.6 Women in National Parliaments in the Middle East and North Africa, 2019

Table 6.6 Women in National Parliaments in the Middle East and North Africa, 2019

Country	Women in lower or single house (percentage)	Rank (among 193 countries)	Gender quota?
Tunisia	35.9	30	Legislated candidate quotas
Israel	29	54	Voluntary quotas adopted by political parties

Country	Women in lower or single house (percentage)	Rank (among 193 countries)	Gender quota?
Algeria	25.8	65	Reserved seats
Iraq	25.2	67	Reserved seats
United Arab Emirates	22.5 (appointed)	84	No
Morocco	20.5	97	Reserved seats in the lower house; voluntary quotas adopted by political parties
Saudi Arabia	20 (appointed)	105	Reserved seats
Turkey	17.4	119	Voluntary quotas adopted by political parties
Libya	16	128	Legislated candidate quotas
Jordan	15.4	131	Reserved seats in the lower house
Bahrain	15	132	No
Egypt	14.9	135	No

Country	Women in lower or single house (percentage)	Rank (among 193 countries)	Gender quota?
Syria	13.2	144	No
Qatar	9.8 (appointed)	166	No
Iran	6	179	No
Lebanon	4.7	183	No
Kuwait	4.6	185	No
Oman	1	188	No
Yemen	1	189	No

Source: Percentage of Women in Lower House and Rank from “Women in National Parliaments, World Classification,” *International Parliamentary Union* (2019), <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>. Data on gender quotas is from Quota Project, <http://www.quotaproject.org>.

Note on Yemen: The data are from 2003.

Another form of MENA women’s participation in civil society is through cinema and literary efforts, including the publication of books, journals, and films. Morocco’s Edition le Fennec has produced numerous books on women’s rights issues as well as many literary works by women. Throughout the 1990s, the very lively women’s press in Iran acted as a stand-in for an organized women’s movement, until the movement burst onto the national scene in 2005. Shahla Lahiji’s Roshangaran Press has published important feminist works as well as historical studies, while the Cultural Center of Women, organized by Noushin Ahmadi-Khorassani and others, has produced feminist analyses, calendars, compendiums, and

journals. Filmmaker Rakhshan Bani-Etemad continues to focus on women's lives. Feminist newspapers are produced in Turkey, and the Women's Library in Istanbul contains research and documentation on women and gender issues. *Al-Raida*, a quarterly feminist journal of the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, of the Lebanese American University, has published issues since 1976 on topics such as women in Arab cinema, women and the war in Lebanon, women and work, violence against women, sexuality, and criminality. Tunisia, which is arguably the most progressive MENA country, has seen the burgeoning of women's cultural production in art, literature, blogs, and cinema, especially in the wake of the Arab Spring and the lifting of political restrictions. The hard-hitting film *Beauty* by Tunisian filmmaker Kaouther Ben Hania boldly takes on the sexual abuse of women and re-enacts the real-life rape of "Meriam" by a group of policemen. The combination of women's cultural production, advocacy efforts, mobilizing structures, access to various media, and engagement with various publics has been referred to by Moghadam and Sadiqi as a gradual feminization of the public sphere in the Middle East.¹¹²

Like other progressive civil society actors, Middle Eastern feminists are often caught between repressive or unresponsive states and fundamentalist or radical Islamists. As nonviolent groups with limited leverage, they can only watch in despair as extremists wreak havoc in the region. Cognizant, however, that the state is an unavoidable institutional actor, they make claims on the state for the improvement of their legal status and social positions, or they insist that the state live up to commitments and implement the conventions that it has signed—notably CEDAW. Where domestic coalition-building to advance their goals is difficult, women's rights activists appeal to transnational advocacy groups, transnational feminist networks, and the UN's global women's rights agenda, with its panoply of international conventions, declarations, and norms. The relationship among women's education, employment, and civic engagement is clear. While some have suggested that the "NGO-ization" of the women's movement in Arab countries represents co-optation by the state,¹¹³ a more plausible hypothesis is that participation in NGOs

and especially in women's rights organizations has contributed to civil society and the development of civic skills necessary for democracy-building—as was seen in Tunisia and to a lesser degree in Morocco following the Arab Spring.

After the Arab Spring: Changes in Attitudes and Value Orientations

Changes in values and attitudes, often discerned from surveys and opinion polls, may accompany broader social changes or be reflective of a society's cultural and normative shifts. Attitudes, values, and norms are variable across social groups and certainly across time, but survey research seeks to capture societal attitudes at a given moment while different rounds will enable comparisons over time. For MENA, the primary data are available from the World Value Survey, the Arab Barometer, the Arab Human Development Report, and national sources. As noted at the start of this chapter, scholars have approached the changes wrought by the 2011 Arab Spring in rather different ways, with some emphasizing authoritarian resilience, others analyzing the new conflicts that have arisen, and yet others examining changes in value orientation. Many scholars have long described the MENA region as beset by patriarchal, conservative, and religious values and practices, though as this chapter has shown and as survey research confirms, cultural changes have occurred. In particular, young people, employed women, men married to employed women, and the older generation raised during the postcolonial state-building and developmentalist era can be expected to hold more egalitarian or liberal values.¹¹⁴

An example of normative change, assisted by the power of social media, comes from Iran, described by Iranian journalist Saied Jafari. On June 13, 2018, just before Iran's national soccer team played in the World Cup, a huge poster was displayed in one of Tehran's main squares. It depicted a group of men, with each individual representing a different ethnicity in Iran, standing side by side and holding up a golden trophy. It did not feature a single woman. This sparked a social media backlash of such magnitude, Jafari writes, that two days later the poster was taken down and replaced with another that included women. What is more, a World Cup TV ad by the Iranian branch of Samsung showed members of a family watching soccer, with the men following the game and cheering

while the women looked after the children. “The ad was harshly criticized on social media and created a very negative atmosphere for Samsung,” writes Jafari. The company responded to critics by posting an explanation in Persian on its official Instagram page in an attempt to calm sentiments while deflecting accusations of being antiwoman.¹¹⁵

And yet attitudes can be affected by macroeconomic difficulties and macropolitical changes, as a recent study shows. Veronica Kostenko and Eduard Ponarin analyzed gender values and social change in the thirteen Arab societies surveyed in Wave 3 of the Arab Barometer Project.¹¹⁶ They constructed an index compiled from expressed attitudes to the following statements: A married woman can work outside of home; in general, men are better in political leadership; and university education is more important for boys. The region as a whole still has far less gender egalitarian value orientation than is the case in other world regions. Specifically, however, they find that support for gender egalitarianism generally grows among the youngest generations of the conservative states—that is, those countries with no experience of “secular” regimes, although the growth in support is from a very low level. On the other hand, the countries that have had experience of secular nationalist regimes—Egypt, Palestine, former South Yemen, and Tunisia—show a decline from a relatively high level of egalitarian attitudes among younger cohorts. Iraq, which had an “Arab socialist” form of secular nationalism, now ranks the lowest among all the countries surveyed. Kostenko and Ponarin attribute this to changes in political regimes and to the spread of conservative values by oil-rich Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia, although the disastrous effects of the US-led invasion surely has played a role in the hardening of identities and values in Iraq. For Tunisia, the decline may be attributed to both the influence of the Islamist party made possible by democratization and the difficult economic conditions that the country has faced in recent years.¹¹⁷

A recent survey of Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, and Palestine sponsored by Promundo and UN Women found that two-thirds to

more than three-quarters of men support the notion that a woman's most important role is to care for the household. The Promundo/UNWomen survey found that, in the four countries surveyed, 10 percent to 45 percent of men who had ever been married reported having used physical violence against a female partner at least once. The findings for Egypt are especially disturbing:

Support for female genital mutilation is high. Some 70 percent of men, and more than half of women, approve of the practice. More than two-thirds of men and women said the decision to circumcise their daughters is made jointly between husbands and wives. Men and women alike reported high rates of men's use of violence against women. Almost half of men reported having ever used physical violence against their wives. More than 70 percent of men and women said they believe that wives should tolerate violence to keep the family together. Street sexual harassment is commonly perpetrated by men and frequently experienced by urban women. More than 60 percent of men reported ever having sexually harassed a woman or girl, and a similar proportion of women reported such unwanted attentions. More women than men blame the victim for having been harassed.¹¹⁸

As noted in the previous section, legal advances have occurred, principally the result of years of feminist advocacy. And yet there is always a cultural lag that remains, or weak enforcement of the law. Men or families that feel entitled to discipline wives or female kin may also prevent them from working outside the home or from retaining their earned income. Morocco's much-lauded family law reform of 2004, along with the 2011 constitution, have vastly improved women's legal status, but Moroccan scholar Fatima Sadiqi reports that women's economic empowerment has not improved, especially for working-class, poor, and rural women, along with

female-headed households. Social norms, she notes, appear to “constitute the biggest hurdle in the implementation of the Moudawana” (Morocco’s family law). Although some changes were made to the inheritance law, rural women often give up their already unequal share to male relatives.¹¹⁹ In the countryside, she adds, women still face difficulty in securing loans because they often do not have bank accounts or assets in their names. On the positive side, Morocco very recently appointed women to the profession of *adoul*—marriage officers under Muslim law, authorized to write legal acts, such as for marriage or inheritance. Some eight hundred new *adouls* of both sexes were recruited in October 2018.

Writing about Algeria, Moha Ennaji finds both stable and changing attitudes:

An Arab Barometer poll carried out in 2011 revealed that the majority of respondents, 55.7 percent, said that they were against the election of a woman as head of state or prime minister, while 41.4 percent did not mind that a woman hold such high posts. In fact, Algerian women hold senior posts; over a third of judges in Algeria are women. Concerning women and work, 64.2 percent of respondents were in favor, while 31.2 percent stood opposed. Regarding polygamous marriage, 32 percent of Algerians were in favor if the first wife approves, while 8.6 percent were against, and 20.3 percent supported the enactment of a law prohibiting polygamy.

About 35 percent of respondents believe that women should enjoy the same right as men to opt for divorce, while 21.3 percent are against this proposal. Some 53 percent of women believe that they have the right to reject men chosen for them by their families. In brief, the Algerian populations’ responses regarding marriage reflect a certain modernity in their character, despite the weight of religion and customs rooted in their society. Some traditional

communities in the South still maintain “a conservative culture” regarding women.¹²⁰

Algeria’s first codified family law of 1984 became the subject of much feminist contestation, with family law reform remaining the focus of the women’s rights movement ever since. Ennaji explains that the state did not consult the women’s movement in part because the women’s organizations had been unwilling to compromise their strictly secular stance and accept family law as Islamic law. Morocco’s 2004 family law reform also affected the timing, method, and content of the Algerian reform, he explains. Algerian women’s organizations continue to protest Article 11, stipulating that the woman conclude her marriage contract in the presence of her *wali*, or guardian, as witness. The practice of guardianship continues to place Algerian women in a subordinate role in the family—despite the fact that fully one-third of judges and members of parliament are women. But only 19 percent of Algeria’s total labor force is female.¹²¹

In another study focused on attitudes toward secular politics in Egypt, Mansoor Moaddel finds most support among those with higher socioeconomic status, younger, urban, more tolerant of both gender equality and other religions, and less concerned with Western cultural invasion. Framed by his concept of historical change occurring through “cultural episodes” and examining survey data from 2011 to 2016, Moaddel’s findings lead him to be more optimistic about future cultural shifts in the wake of the Arab Spring, although he concedes that persistent conservative views on gender equality constitute a barrier to full democratization. Moaddel finds similar factors at play in Tunisia and Turkey. The 2015 Tunisian survey found that 68 percent of respondents agreed that religion and politics should be separate; in Turkey, the 2016 survey found 67 percent in favor, compared with 72 percent in Egypt. However, on the importance given to shari’a law, far more Egyptians agreed (44 percent) than did Tunisians (18 percent) or Turks (19 percent). Tunisians and Turks, therefore, tend to agree that shari’a should

have a limited place in government and law, particularly compared to Egyptians. Even so, Moaddel finds declining Egyptian support for shari'a governance between 2011 and 2016. Moaddel also finds rising support for religious tolerance, with the most tolerant of the three countries surveyed being the Tunisian public. Turkish respondents, however, are most tolerant of gender equality, with Egyptians being most conservative, although a slight positive shift did occur between 2011 and 2016.^{[122](#)}

Conclusion

This chapter has surveyed some of the main elements of social change in the MENA region: social structural dynamics; urbanization and rising educational attainment; the demographic transition, lower fertility, and changes to family structure; the emergence of social movements and civil society organizations calling for broader citizen participation and rights; and value orientations. As has been demonstrated, MENA societies are more varied and vibrant than is often recognized. At the same time, they face formidable problems: social inequalities, economic difficulties, physical insecurity, interstate hostilities, and the ever-present threat of external military intervention. In the postcolonial or republican era, “state feminism” in countries such as Egypt, Turkey, and especially Tunisia helped create two generations of women with aspirations for employment, empowerment, and activism. Nevertheless, patriarchal values emerge within new generations or remain resilient among certain older segments of the population—particularly in the context of the spread of Islamist ideology, the continued occupation in Palestine, the destabilization of states, and economic setbacks. If the year 2011 began with hopes for a better future, subsequent years have generated soberer sentiments. The Arab Spring did not achieve the goal of increased socioeconomic rights that citizens called for in Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, and elsewhere; it was decidedly not a thoroughgoing revolution.¹²³ But it did reflect cultural changes and doubtlessly generated new ones. And it did lead to at least one successful democracy—Tunisia. At the same time, the effects of feminist advocacy, along with increasing female educational attainment and women’s public roles, clearly manifest themselves in attitudinal changes among segments of current populations. Given women’s continued education attainment, employment, civil society activism, cultural production, and political representation, we can expect more changes in government policy, the law, and societal attitudes.

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7 The Political Economy of Development in the Middle East

Melani Cammett
Ishac Diwan

The Arab Spring has highlighted the profound economic grievances of citizens in Middle Eastern countries. In the uprisings, protestors condemned their leaders for the lack of jobs, unequal distribution of wealth, and crony capitalist networks across the region, among other things. To be sure, the Arab protests and revolutions—like all social movements—have resulted from more than economic injustices, whether real or perceived. Economic factors, however, constitute a necessary component of any explanation for the Arab Spring. At a minimum, an understanding of the political economies of Middle East and North African (MENA) countries suggests that it is difficult to separate the economic and political roots of the uprisings and in ongoing developments in the region.

Despite broad similarities in the economic challenges facing MENA countries, including high youth unemployment, limited opportunities for socioeconomic advancement, eroding systems of social protection, and underperforming economies,¹ the precise nature and causes of economic problems vary from country to country. Thus, it is vital to establish a clear picture of cross-national variation in the political economies of the MENA countries. The Middle East encompasses countries with widely divergent economic structures and development trajectories. It is home to some of the richest countries in the world, including Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and the other oil-rich monarchies of the Gulf, and some of the poorest, such as Yemen, where poverty is on par with some sub-Saharan African countries and a brutal war that began in 2014 has led to a full-blown humanitarian disaster. In the UAE, oil wealth helped to fuel a massive real estate boom, including the construction of an indoor ski slope and hotels built on man-made islands in the shape of a palm tree (see image on p. 565). Meanwhile, in nearby Yemen, over 62 percent of the population lived below the poverty line in 2016,² and 55 percent of women were illiterate as recently as 2015—and conditions have undoubtedly deteriorated markedly in the past few years since these data were collected.

This chapter introduces the distinct types of political economies found in the Middle East and traces the record of economic development in different clusters of Middle Eastern countries.³ Since World War II, when most Middle Eastern countries either gained independence from colonial rule or consolidated their status as independent states, countries in the region experienced divergent development trajectories as

governments faced distinct initial starting conditions and adopted different policies to promote growth and development.

The chapter opens by describing various indicators of economic development and applying these measures to the contemporary Middle East, differentiating between countries that have low, middle, and large levels of oil rents per capita. The chapter then traces the record of economic growth and development across these distinct political economies in different historical periods, including the World War II period, the golden age of economic prosperity during the 1960s and 1970s, and the period of economic crisis and increased integration in the global economy from the 1980s onward. After describing the array of economic challenges facing most Middle Eastern countries in the contemporary period, the chapter briefly reviews diverse explanations for relative underdevelopment in the region.

Measuring Development in the Middle East

Before delving into the different pathways of economic development found in the Middle East, it is necessary to define *development*. Traditional views of development focus on income and economic growth, which the World Bank defines as an expansion in a country's overall economy measured as the percentage increase in the gross domestic product (GDP) in a single year. Economic growth can occur in different ways, including the use of more physical, human, or natural resources or the application of the same resources in more efficient or productive ways. In turn, economic growth is presumed to lead to higher per capita income and improvement in average living standards in the population.

Standard economic classifications of countries focus on per capita income.⁴ [Table 7.1](#) provides a snapshot of the MENA economies at the dawn of the Arab uprisings in 2011 (although within the region, the relative endowments of income and resources have largely been stable for decades).

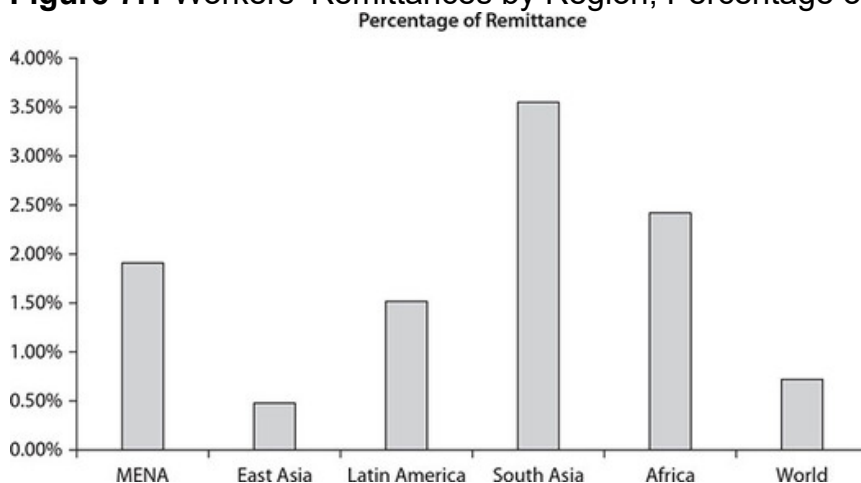
As the table shows, per capita income varies widely within the Middle East, ranging from the high-income states of the Gulf region to lower-middle-income Palestine to Yemen, which until 2007 was classified as a low-income economy.⁵ Oil wealth is a key point of differentiation. All high-income countries—Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE—have high levels of oil dependence.⁶ Population size is also an important factor in classifying income levels in the region. In our typology, then, the countries with high oil endowments and low indigenous or citizen populations are part of the high-oil country (HOC) group. Countries with high oil dependence and large populations, such as Algeria and Iran, fall in the lower-middle-income group, despite their valuable natural resource endowments, and are classified as the middle-oil country (MOC) group. It is worth noting that Libya defies easy classification. On the one hand, its per capita oil rents and income level place it in the HOC group. On the other hand, its per capita GDP is lower than all other HOC countries and its longtime ruler, Muammar al-Qadhafi, distributed oil rents far more unevenly among citizens than most other HOC countries (see [Chapter 17](#)). The remaining lower-middle-income countries—the low-oil country (LOC) group—export a relatively low volume of hydrocarbons, or none at all, and tend to have high indigenous populations.

Labor remittances are also an important source of income in the region, well above the global average and second only to South Asia and Africa (see [Figure 7.1](#)).

However, the importance of remittances in national economies varies across the distinct groups of MENA countries. Within the Middle East, the non-oil economies and high-population oil exporters are a much larger source of migrant labor than the oil economies, which host large “guest worker” populations that often exceed the total number of nationals. The largest labor exporters in the Middle East are LOC

economies. Some of the MOCs, such as Iran and Algeria, also send substantial numbers of emigrants abroad because they have insufficient domestic employment opportunities and resources to meet the demand for jobs of their high populations and have insufficient per capita resources to distribute substantial benefits to their citizens. MOCs such as Iraq and Syria face protracted instability and violence, providing additional motivations for citizens to seek opportunities elsewhere. A long history of migration (dating back to the nineteenth century), conflict, and political instability have contributed to the exceptionally high rate of labor migration in Lebanon, which depends heavily on remittances for the domestic economy to function.

Figure 7.1 Workers' Remittances by Region, Percentage of GDP, 2017



Source: *World Development Indicators* (2017), World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS?locations=1W>.

In general, patterns of economic growth also vary across resource rich and resource poor economies. Oil-rich economies experience spectacular increases in growth during boom years in world oil markets. Kuwait's experience is illustrative. In 2003, Kuwaiti per capita GDP grew by 14 percent and by 8 percent the next two years. Yet in the early 1980s, when oil markets were declining, Kuwait's per capita GDP contracted enormously, with a 25 percent decline in 1980.⁷ Although it's not a resource-rich economy, Jordan has experienced similarly volatile rates, given its dependence on external rents such as foreign aid and remittances. Jordan's economy was threatened by its decision not to join the US-led coalition in the first Gulf war against Iraq and the expulsion of Jordanians, largely of Palestinian origins, returning from the Gulf monarchies. The country's economic outlook improved after it reconciled with the West and signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1995; and it picked up significantly after its alliance with the United States in the "global war on terror" was cemented in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, or 9/11.

Economies that are not as dependent on oil revenues and remittances have also experienced variable growth rates, although the fluctuations have been less dramatic. For example, despite a recent drop in the value of the Turkish Lira and mounting questions about the sustainability of the country's economic model, Turkey is considered one of the better-performing economies in the region, thanks to its relative success in economic diversification and in promoting export-oriented manufacturing. From 2002 through 2006, Turkish per capita GDP grew at an average annual rate of approximately 6 percent. Yet in the prior three years (1999–2001), the Turkish economy contracted by nearly 3 percent. Similarly, in Tunisia GDP per capita grew at an average rate of 2.5 percent from 1990 to 1996, but in 1986, when the country experienced an economic crisis, per capita GDP shrank by 5 percent.

Another common indicator of development is a country's level of industrialization, or a change in the structure of production and employment so that the share of agriculture in the economy declines while the share of manufacturing increases and comes to play a leading role in the economy. As [Figure 7.2](#) shows, levels of industrialization, measured by the percentage of manufactured exports over total exports, vary widely within the Middle East.

As the figure shows, the HOC and MOC countries are far less developed than the LOC countries and Turkey when measured by levels of industrialization. This is largely because natural resource extraction has dominated their domestic economies,⁸ although some of the high-population oil exporters made a big push for industrialization in the initial decades after independence. For example, capitalizing on its oil revenues, Algeria developed a significant industrial base oriented toward the domestic market in the 1970s. Since 2005, however, Algeria's manufactured exports as a percentage of total merchandise exports have been on par with those of Yemen. Most local industries in the Gulf states are related to petroleum and natural-gas processing. On the other end of the spectrum, Turkey has a highly developed industrial sector and has become a major exporter of manufactures. Other countries in the region, such as Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia, which are all in the LOC group, also have significant manufacturing industries. As a comparison of [Table 7.1](#) and [Figure 7.2](#) suggests, oil dependence tends to be negatively correlated with the development of a strong industrial sector. In other words, countries with high oil reserves have generally neglected the development of manufacturing, although governments in these countries are increasingly cognizant of the need to diversify their economies. In short, the HOC countries, such as the Gulf monarchies, have minimal industrial sectors, and their oil-poor neighbors, who lack the windfall profits brought by oil earnings, were obliged to invest more heavily in domestic industry at an earlier time.

As measures of development, per capita gross domestic product and levels of industrialization capture some important aspects of development and are highly correlated with other measures of development. But indicators based on income and structural changes in the economy are not sufficient for several reasons. First,

growth can occur without development—that is, economies can grow on the aggregate, but the average person may be no better off. Second, an income-based approach neglects distributional issues, or how income is actually dispersed within a given society. Income-based measures of development implicitly assume that economic growth will trickle down to the masses in the form of jobs and other opportunities, but this may not necessarily occur if income distribution is highly skewed. As a result, such measures do not provide an accurate picture of well-being in the population. Finally, income measures do not include nonmarketed production, such as subsistence agriculture and domestic work, and, therefore, do not measure important components of a society’s economic activity.

Recognizing these deficiencies, understandings of development broadened beginning in the 1970s to include more attention to social dimensions. Increasingly, other factors were emphasized, such as poverty levels, inequality, and unemployment, within the context of a growing economy. Definitions of development also came to include social indicators, such as literacy, rates of schooling for boys and girls, the extent of educational services, health conditions, and access to housing. In 1990, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) started to publish its annual *UN Human Development Report*, which provides its own measure of development—the Human Development Index (HDI). Designed to capture social aspects of development, the HDI provides an aggregate measure of the living conditions of the population across different countries and includes measures of health and access to health care services, nutrition levels, life expectancy at birth, adult literacy and mean years of schooling, access to basic infrastructure such as water and sanitation, real per capita income adjusted for the differing purchasing power parity of each country’s currency, and the percentage of the population living below the poverty line.⁹

Table 7.1 Gross Domestic Product, Oil Rents, and Country Classifications in the MENA Region, 2010

Table 7.1 Gross Domestic Product, Oil Rents, and Country Classifications in the MENA Region, 2010

Country classification	GDP (billions)	Population (millions)	Oil rents (billions)	Oil rents per capita	Oil rents as a percentage of GDP	GDP per capita
High-oil countries (HOCs)	\$1,231.3	49.8	\$438.8	\$9,248.5	32.3	\$32,435.5
Bahrain	22.9	1.3	4.4	3,489.5	19.2	18,174.6

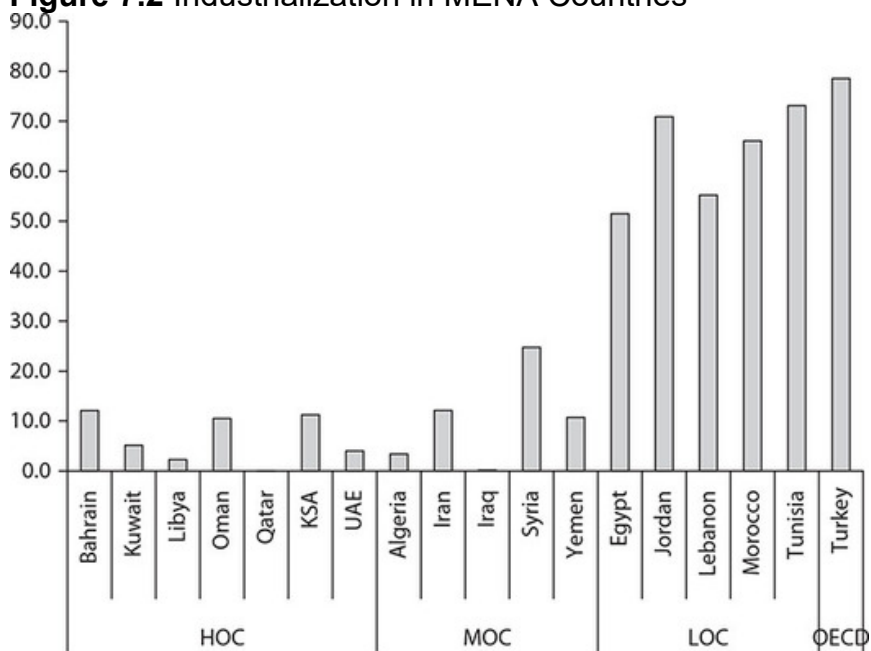
Country classification	GDP (billions)	Population (millions)	Oil rents (billions)	Oil rents per capita	Oil rents as a percentage of GDP	GDP per capita
Kuwait	124.0	2.7	59.9	21,858.4	48.3	45,255.5
Libya	74.8	6.4	31.6	4,974.9	42.3	11,761.0
Oman	57.8	2.8	20.9	7,505.7	36.1	20,791.4
Qatar	127.0	1.8	18.5	10,535.2	14.6	72,159.1
Saudi Arabia	526.8	27.4	248.6	9,074.8	47.2	19,226.3
United Arab Emirates	298.0	7.5	54.8	7,301.2	18.4	39,680.4
Medium-oil countries (MOCs)	882.3	235.3	259.1	1,015.1	28.1	3,250.9
Algeria	162.0	37.4	27.4	732.0	16.9	4,331.6
Iran	422.6	78.9	99.3	1,259.2	23.5	5,358.4
Iraq	142.8	33.7	105.1	3,118.7	73.6	4,237.4
Syria	59.1	22.5	9.6	427.6	16.3	2,623.2
Yemen	31.0	25.6	6.4	249.8	20.6	1,212.8
Low-oil countries (LOCs)	425.1	140.3	15.6	55.8	2.1	4,032.8
Egypt	219.0	82.3	13.8	167.7	6.3	2,661.6
Jordan	26.4	6.3	0.0	0.1	0.0	4,183.8
Lebanon	37.1	4.3		0.0	0.0	8,627.9

Country classification	GDP (billions)	Population (millions)	Oil rents (billions)	Oil rents per capita	Oil rents as a percentage of GDP	GDP per capita
Morocco	90.8	32.6	0.0	0.1	0.0	2,785.3
Palestine	7.4	4.1	0.0	0.0		1,827.2
Tunisia	44.4	10.8	1.8	166.9	4.1	4,111.1
OECD economies						
Israel	217.0	7.9	0.0	0.2	0.0	27,468.4
Turkey	731.0	74.0	1.2	15.6	0.2	9,878.4
Overall MENA	3,486.7	507.3	714.7	2,067.0	20.5	15,413.2

Sources: World Bank, World Bank Institute (WBI) data; International Monetary Fund (IMF), *World Economic Outlook (WEO)*.

Note: All figures in 2010 US dollars.

Figure 7.2 Industrialization in MENA Countries



Source: *World Development Indicators* (2014), World Bank.

Every year, the *Human Development Report* divides countries by HDI rankings into *very high*, *high*, *medium*, and *low* human development. In the 2014 report, which is based on data from 2013, most Arab countries fell into the *medium* or *high* category (see [Table 7.2](#)).

Policies implemented by postindependence governments, including high social expenditures and public sector employment, help to explain the relatively high rankings of the Middle East as a whole with respect to human development. Cross-regional comparisons illustrate the importance of government spending in MENA economies (see [Figure 7.3](#)).

As [Figure 7.3](#) shows, state spending as a percentage of GDP in the Middle East consistently outstripped that of other regions until the last decade. Across the region, new ruling elites emphasized economic and social development, in part in response to neglect by colonial authorities and a genuine commitment to raising living standards, and in part in the context of “authoritarian bargains” in which citizens traded political voice for improved well-being, as discussed in a later section (1950s–1970s: Protectionism, Indigenous Industrial Development, and the Transition to a New Development Model).

Table 7.2 Human Development Index Rankings: Middle East and North Africa, 2013

Table 7.2 Human Development Index Rankings: Middle East and North Africa, 2013

	Country	Score	Rank	Category
HOC	Bahrain	0.815	44	Very high
	Kuwait	0.814	46	Very high
	Libya	0.784	55	High
	Oman	0.783	56	High
	Qatar	0.851	31	Very high
	Saudi Arabia	0.836	34	Very high
	UAE	0.827	40	Very high

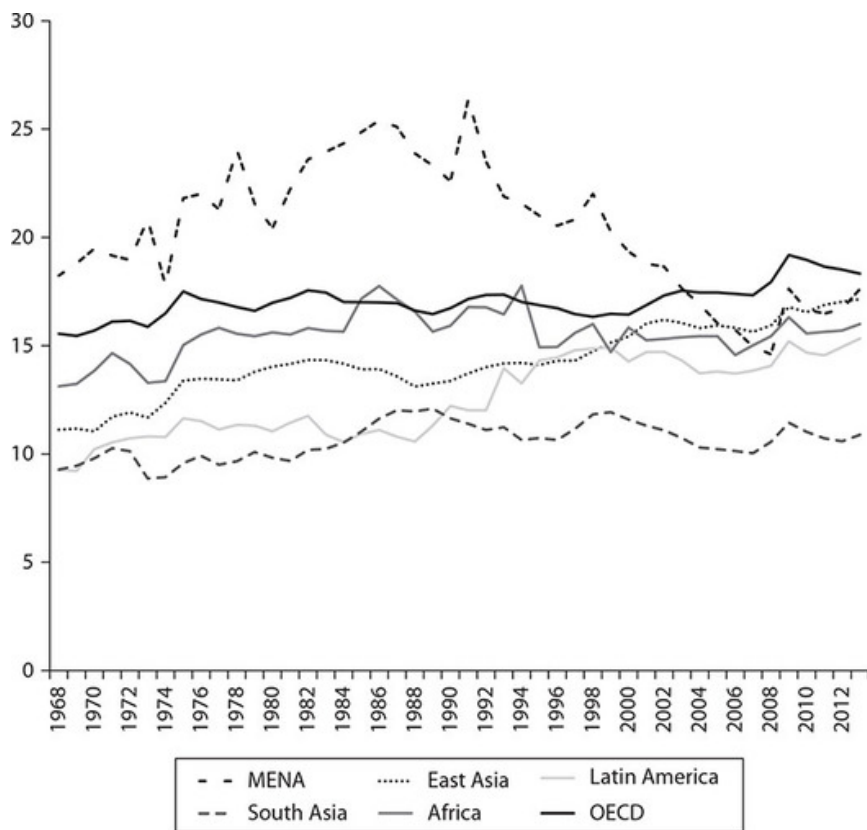
	Country	Score	Rank	Category
MOC	Algeria	0.717	93	High
	Iran	0.749	75	High
	Iraq	0.642	120	Medium
	Syria	0.658	118	Medium
	Yemen	0.5	154	Low
LOC	Egypt	0.682	110	Medium
	Jordan	0.745	77	High
	Lebanon	0.765	65	High
	Morocco	0.617	129	Medium
	Palestine	0.686	107	Medium
	Tunisia	0.721	90	High
OECD	Turkey	0.759	69	High

Source: United Nations Development Programme (2014).

A more disaggregated look at the region, however, shows significant variation in human development. As would be expected, the HOC countries of the Gulf and Libya have higher HDI rankings and are clustered in the *very high* and *high* human development categories. Conversely, the lower-income countries in the LOC and MOC categories, with larger populations and higher poverty levels, tend to have lower human development rankings, although there is substantial variation on HDI measures within these two groups of political economies.

Intraregional variation in literacy rates is also associated with per capita income. As [Figure 7.4](#) shows, the wealthy oil countries of the Gulf tend to have higher adult literacy rates, and lower-income countries, such as Egypt, Morocco, and Yemen, have lower rates.

Figure 7.3 Government Spending as Percentage of GDP by Global Region



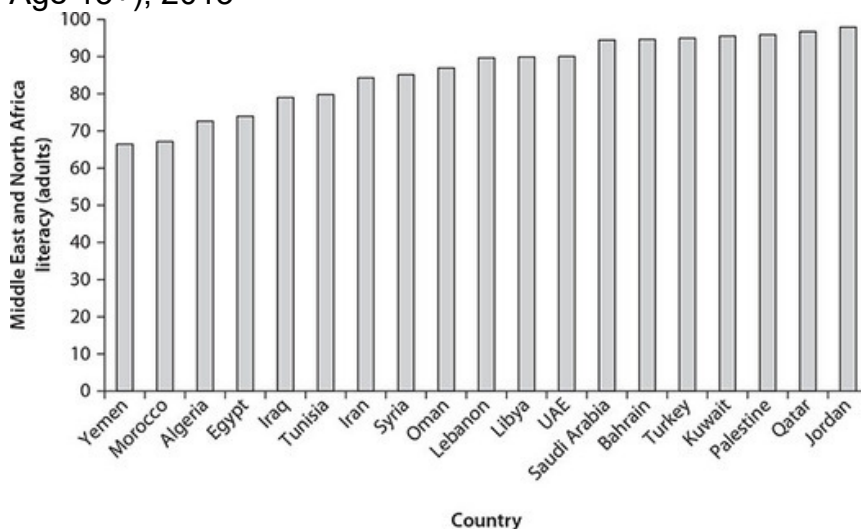
Source: World Development Indicators (various years), World Bank.

At the same time, as [Figure 7.4](#) shows, some exceptions to the correlation between income and literacy stand out. For example, the Palestinian territories have high literacy rates, despite poor economic conditions as a result of protracted conflict and the Israeli occupation discussed in the next section. This is largely due to the fact that Palestinians have valued education as the primary means of upward mobility in the face of few other opportunities and because protracted conflict and instability have made property rights more precarious. Conversely, in the 1970s and 1980s, Iraq boasted one of the most educated and skilled populations in the region, but war and international sanctions contributed to a marked decline in Iraqi literacy rates and other social conditions.¹⁰ Similarly, social indicators have declined precipitously in Syria with the outbreak of the civil war and the massive humanitarian crisis that has ensued.

A closer look at the HDI also underscores that high income does not automatically translate into high human development levels. This is particularly apparent when Middle Eastern countries are compared to countries in other regions. For example, Kuwait's per capita income (\$65,800) is over twice that of Portugal, yet it ranks significantly lower in its overall HDI score.¹¹ Much of this discrepancy arises from Portugal's higher rates of literacy and school enrollments, demonstrating how the

HDI provides a more comprehensive perspective on development than do income measures alone.

Figure 7.4 Adult Literacy Rates in the Middle East (Percentage of Population Age 15+), 2013



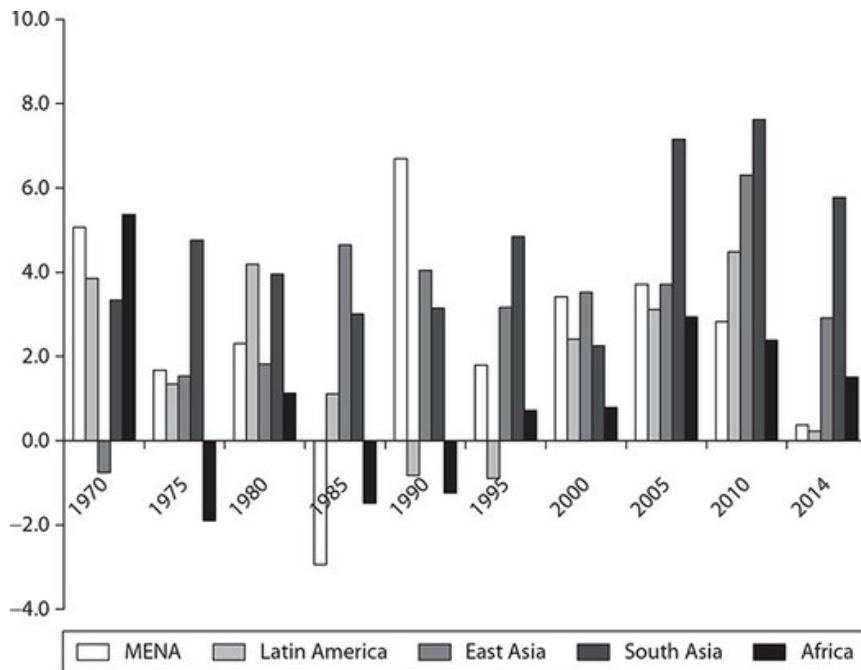
Source: World Development Indicators (2013 or most recent year), World Bank.

A cross-regional comparison of per capita GDP and literacy rates also indicates that income does not guarantee human development (see [Figures 7.5](#) and [7.6](#)).

As [Figure 7.5](#) shows, the Middle East generally has higher per capita GDP levels when compared with sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, especially prior to the last decade. Yet it has consistently lagged behind East Asia and, in most periods, South Asia. This is noteworthy, given the high income levels and resource endowments of many Middle Eastern countries and the fact that South Asian countries, such as India and Bangladesh, have some of the highest poverty rates in the world.

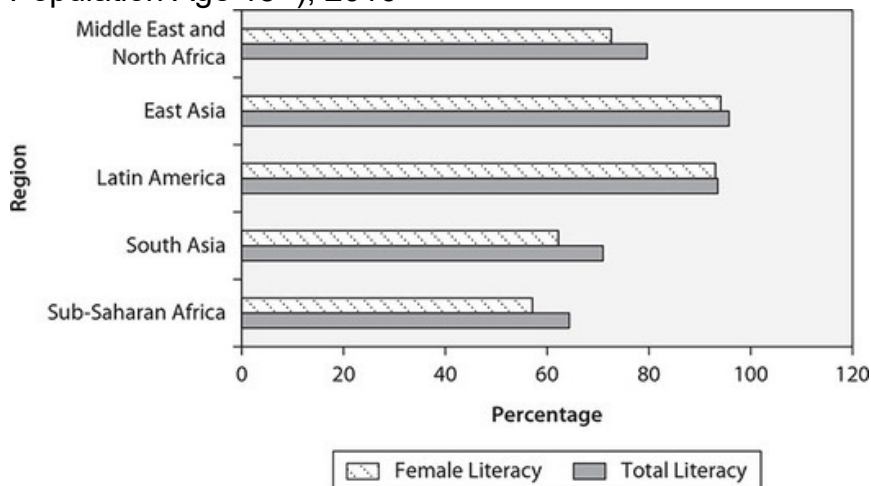
The Middle East also underperforms with respect to literacy levels. [Figure 7.6](#) shows that the Middle East lags behind East Asia and Latin America in literacy rates, and the gap between total literacy and female literacy is greater in the Middle East than in these two other regions. Indeed, among developing regions, the Middle East's literacy rates and gender gap in the literacy rate are only ahead of those in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, the two regions with the highest poverty rates and lowest income levels in the world. The gap between income and literacy, evident in [Figures 7.5](#) and [7.6](#), demonstrates in stark terms that wealth does not necessarily buy development.

Figure 7.5 Per Capita GDP Growth by Global Region



Source: World Development Indicators (various years), World Bank.

Figure 7.6 Overall and Female Literacy Rates by Global Region (Percentage of Population Age 15+), 2016



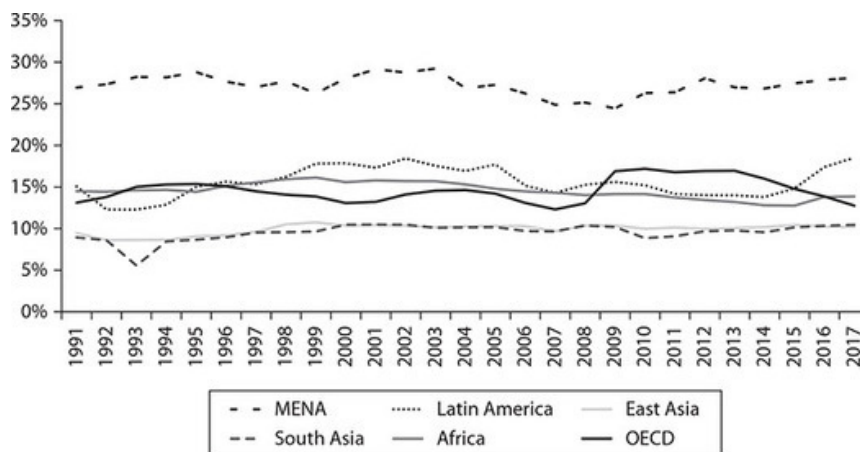
Source: World Development Indicators (2016), World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ADT.LITR.FE.ZS?locations=ZG>.

By the dawn of the new millennium, many countries in the Middle East faced persistent economic problems, many of which are cited as key underlying causes of the Arab Spring. Although not unique to the region, rising food prices spread mass

grievances among Middle Eastern populations, which are heavily dependent on food imports. A spike in food prices after 2008, which had immediate effects on household budgets and nutrition levels, as well as rising poverty and inequality, have led to discontent across the region.¹² These factors may also have helped to spur social mobilization on a large scale in the Arab uprisings.¹³ Official statistics indicate that the Middle East has consistently had lower inequality levels than other regions such as Latin America. These figures, however, may not capture the full reality of change over time in Middle Eastern countries and undoubtedly underestimate the true extent of wealth inequality, in part because the top 1 percent of the income scale tends to be underrepresented in household surveys and because measures of inequality generally focus on income rather than total assets. At a minimum, they do not reflect mass perceptions of growing inequality, as well-connected elites appeared to benefit disproportionately from new economic opportunities in domestic and global markets. Furthermore, the Arab uprisings exposed stark *subnational* inequalities cemented by decades of neglect of certain regions by central governments. For example, the self-immolation of Muhammad Bouazizi, the Tunisian fruit and vegetable peddler whose suicide on December 17, 2010, is widely credited with sparking the Arab Spring, took place in his hometown of Sidi Bouzid, a neglected town in central Tunisia. Since the Tunisian Revolution, data on inequalities within Tunisia have received growing amounts of policy attention.¹⁴ Lack of opportunities for social advancement, reflected in high youth unemployment, is also a crucial backdrop to dissatisfaction across the Middle East, although youth unemployment peaked well before the uprisings and only rose again after mass mobilization and protracted instability ensued.¹⁵ As [Figure 7.7](#) shows, high levels of youth unemployment have distinguished the region for more than a decade.

Finally, corruption and crony capitalism, a system in which business success depends on personal ties to government officials and privileged access to economic opportunities rather than on merit, are often invoked to explain popular dissatisfaction with governments in the Middle East. At its root, corruption is a political phenomenon, but some consider it to be a cause of economic underdevelopment in the region.

Figure 7.7 Youth Unemployment by Global Region, 1991–2017



Source: World Development Indicators (various years), World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS?locations=ZQ>.

Social mobilization is a complex phenomenon. Decades of research demonstrate that economic grievances alone cannot explain mass collective action.¹⁶ Socioeconomic factors are not sufficient explanations for the Arab Spring, but they are necessary components of any account. Indeed, as discussed in [Chapter 5](#), public opinion polls in Egypt and Tunisia indicate that economic grievances have been and remain foremost on the minds of citizens in these countries.¹⁷

Experts debate the nature and effects of economic trends in the Middle East. For some, economic liberalization has not gone far enough and failed efforts to implement market-friendly policies are at the root of economic stagnation in the region.¹⁸ Others contend that market-oriented economic reforms are at the root of declining living conditions for MENA populations, driving an absolute increase in poverty and rising inequality.¹⁹ Elements of both perspectives have merit: Concerns about political instability and the desire to stave off both elite and popular protests have prevented rulers from adopting many of the policies urged on them by international financial institutions. As a result, proponents of neoliberal economic reforms argue, the fruits of these policies could never be realized.²⁰ At the same time, outside of the wealthy oil economies, public social programs have declined and absolute poverty levels have increased across the region.²¹ Furthermore, market reforms do not occur in a political vacuum, as a sociopolitical perspective on market-building holds.²² Across the MENA region, well-connected elites monopolized economic opportunities as governments “liberalized” their economies.²³ Regardless of the true effects of economic reform of the past few decades, it seems plausible that citizens of MENA states expect a lot from their states, given previous decades of state interventions in the economy including guaranteed public employment schemes.²⁴ Arguably, the lack of social mobility since the 1980s transformed high expectations of the state into dashed hopes. Indeed, public opinion polls indicate

that citizens continue to expect extensive support from their states across the region in the wake of the Arab Spring.^{[25](#)}

The Economic Costs of War and Protracted Conflict

The Middle East has been at the epicenter of geopolitical struggles for decades and is the site of multiple protracted regional crises, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the US occupation of Iraq, the civil war and humanitarian crisis in Syria, state breakdown in Libya ([Chapter 17](#)) and Yemen ([Chapter 25](#)), full-scale war in Yemen since 2014, and ongoing struggles between various Middle Eastern governments and armed opposition or secessionist groups. In addition to physical and psychological destruction on the individual and societal levels, war and ongoing conflict have enormous economic costs. The experiences of the Palestinian territories and Iraq since the 1980s illustrate this point, as well as the more recent case of the war in Yemen.

War and civil conflict have also taken a serious toll on economic and social conditions in Iraq (see [Chapter 12](#)) and, more recently in Syria (see [Chapter 22](#)) and Yemen ([Chapter 25](#)). In the 1970s, Iraq was considered the most developed country in the Middle East and ranked as an upper-middle-income country in the World Bank's classification. The educational and health systems were among the best in the region, and Iraq scored high marks on almost all well-being indicators, such as infant mortality, school enrollment, nutrition, income, and employment. Political repression, war, international sanctions, and occupation have systematically undermined economic and social conditions, leading to immense suffering throughout Iraqi society. Iraq now ranks at the bottom on a range of well-being indicators, and some measures, such as secondary-school enrollment and immunization rates, are on par with the poorest countries in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia.²⁶ The civil war in Syria has had an even more devastating effect on that country in recent years.

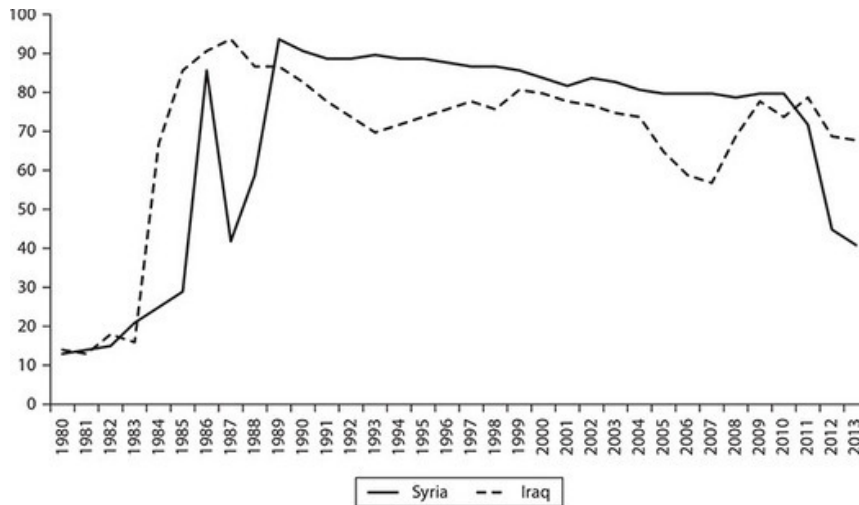
[Figures 7.8](#) and [7.9](#) depict immunization rates for children between the ages of twelve and twenty-three months and gross secondary-school enrollments, respectively, in Iraq and Syria.

For Iraq, the figures show a decline in public health and educational outcomes from the 1980s through the first half of the 2000s (data was only available for Iraq through 2007). This is particularly striking in light of an overall regional trend toward improvement in basic social indicators, even in the face of economic downturn. Conflict followed by sanctions imposed on Iraq after the first Gulf war helped to drive the marked decrease in the well-being of the population. Oil for Food, a UN program instituted from 1995 to 2003 that permitted Iraq to sell oil on world markets in exchange for food, medicine, and other humanitarian needs, brought some improvement in public health outcomes, although elites with close connections to the regime profited from international contracts facilitated by the program.²⁷

Civil war in the aftermath of the US invasion of Iraq and the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003 also took an enormous toll on the Iraqi population, with estimates of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi noncombatant deaths since 2003.²⁸ Since 2007, the situation has become more stable, although car bombings and other forms of violence remain a daily fact of life in many Iraqi cities. Many Iraqis have suffered economically because “ethnic cleansing” has forced them to leave their homes or primary breadwinners in many families have been killed or incapacitated. Civil conflict has also directly harmed the economy in other ways: Periodic attacks and sabotage have undercut oil drilling and shipping operations; prolonged uncertainty deters private capital holders from making longer-term investments; physical- and security-related restrictions hinder the free movement of people and goods; and many educated professionals have fled the violence in the country. At the same time, as in most war zones, black market operations have flourished, and a new group of Iraqis with connections to the government has profited from import supply chains.²⁹

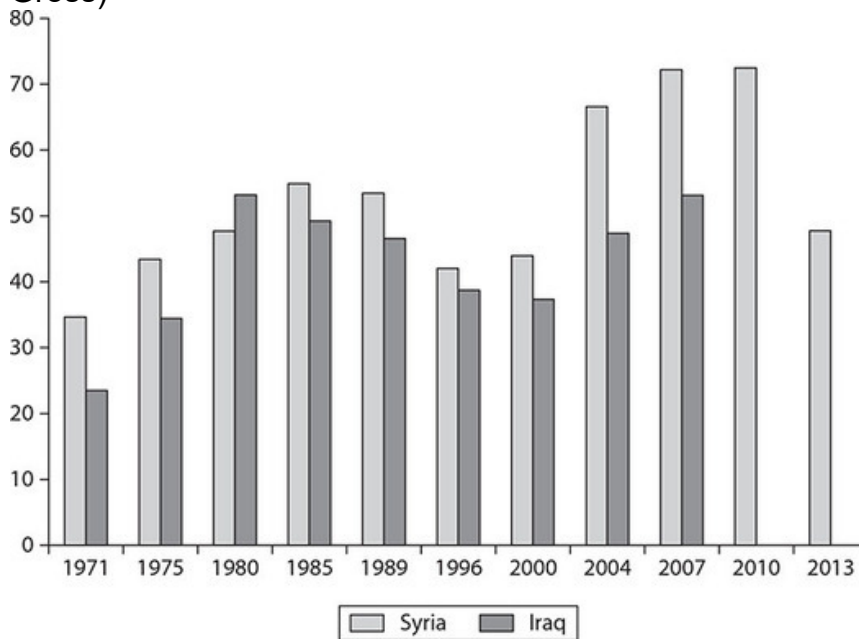
In Syria, the government’s harsh crackdown on peaceful protests soon escalated the conflict into a full-blown war with an enormous toll on human life and infrastructure. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, as of June 2015 more than 320,000 people have died in the Syrian civil war since March 2011, and more than 1.5 million people have been wounded.³⁰ The war has also resulted in the large-scale destruction of social service infrastructure and the breakdown of the economy. Access to medical care and schooling and, as a result, health and educational outcomes have deteriorated markedly in the country. The relatively strong health care infrastructure Syria built in the decades prior to the conflict is now devastated in significant portions of the country, and health outcomes are declining. On the eve of the conflict, life expectancy in Syria was high (75 in 2010) while the under-age-five mortality rate (15 per 1,000 live births in 2010) was low compared to many neighboring countries, but these achievements are rapidly being reversed. The enormous devastation of the Syrian health care system has resulted in a sharp decrease in immunization rates across the country, falling from 90 percent before 2011 to 52 percent in March 2014, according to the World Health Organization in 2014.³¹ Outbreaks of epidemics such as measles and polio, and the limited response by the health care system, are worsening the situation. In addition, the domestic economy has contracted significantly while the unemployment rate spiked, rising from 37 percent in 2012 to over 54 percent in 2013. The poverty rate showed a parallel rise, reaching 75.4 percent in 2013. Extreme poverty hit 54.3 percent.³² The conflict also led to massive displacement of the Syrian population with about 2.5 to 3 million Syrians seeking refuge in other countries, putting enormous stress on welfare regimes and infrastructure in neighboring countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey.

Figure 7.8 DPT and Measles Immunization in Iraq and Syria (Percentage of Children Ages 12–23 Months)



Source: World Development Indicators (various years), World Bank.

Figure 7.9 Secondary-School Enrollment in Iraq and Syria (Percentage of Gross)



Source: World Development Indicators (various years), World Bank.

As discussed in [Chapter 2](#), the Palestinian economy has undergone a progressive process of “de-development,” or decline in the capacity for production, structural change, and reform, obviating the possibility for economic advancement since the late 1980s.³³ From 1996 through 2005, per capita GNI fell from \$1,510 to \$1,290.

Growth rates in the West Bank have risen substantially since 2008, and standards of living have returned to the levels of the late 1990s, but this is largely a result of donor aid rather than domestic private-sector development. Poverty levels have steadily risen, despite the high educational attainment of the population, while official unemployment, which underestimates actual levels, spiked from 12 percent in 1999 to over 23 percent in 2011. The Palestinian economy's productive base has progressively "hollowed out," as evidenced by the shifting structure of GDP. In 1999, agriculture and industry amounted to about 25 percent of GDP but dropped to 17 percent in 2011. Conversely, education, health, and public administration expenditures rose from less than 20 percent of GDP in 1999 to about 25 percent in 2008. As a result, the Palestinian economy has become increasingly dependent on foreign aid.³⁴

Multiple factors have spurred Palestinian de-development and the decline of agricultural and industrial production, including high water salinity, high land prices, and the decreased supply of cultivated land.³⁵ The primary and most proximate cause, however, is the policy of Israeli closure of the territories. Although the Israeli restrictions on movement and access in and out of the Palestinian territories eased somewhat since 2010, regular closures and checkpoints continue to hinder trade and labor flows and periodic large-scale Israeli attacks on Gaza, most recently in July 2014, have introduced additional hardship, loss of life, further destruction of property and infrastructure, and restrictions on the movement of people and goods. While recognizing the stated security motivations for Israeli restrictions on movement within and outside of the West Bank and Gaza, the closures have an enormous economic impact on the Palestinian economy. These restrictions negatively affect Palestinian economic development by undercutting the development of economies of scale (which undercuts the ability of private firms to justify additional investment); access to natural resources such as land, water, and telecommunications infrastructure; and the formulation of a clear investment horizon on which private investors can calculate risk.³⁶ Private-sector development is critical for sustained growth in the Palestinian economy, but local entrepreneurs are entirely dependent on Israeli authorities to allow imports of inputs and final product exports through borders. Given the need for timely delivery of goods produced for world markets, the local economy is all the more vulnerable to Israeli border policies.

Closure not only limits or shuts down Palestinian trade channels but also severs the links between the Israeli and Palestinian economies, which have been tightly intertwined since at least 1967. Palestinian unskilled and semiskilled labor is highly dependent on employment opportunities in Israel. With Israeli incorporation of hundreds of thousands of foreign workers from eastern Europe and South Asia since the 1990s, Palestinian employment prospects have further declined.³⁷

Israeli closure policies have varied across the territories and at different times, depending on broader political conditions. Ironically, de-development accelerated after the 1993 signing of the Oslo accords, which were designed to establish a

framework for a comprehensive peace between Israel and the Palestinians. After its partial withdrawal from the territories, as stipulated in the agreement, Israel instituted the closure regime (see [Chapter 2](#)).³⁸ Prior to the accords, one-third of the total Palestinian labor force, including 70 percent of Gazan workers, were employed in Israel. Periodic total closures of the West Bank and Gaza led to spikes in the unemployment rate, which shot up to over 60 percent whenever access to Israeli jobs was cut.³⁹

The chapter thus far has provided a snapshot of Middle Eastern state-society relations and development indicators in the contemporary period. The next section traces the development trajectories of different types of political economies within the region from independence to the present. Focusing on industrialization strategies and social policy, this discussion provides a picture of the very different paths that postindependence governments of Middle Eastern countries adopted in the pursuit of economic development.

Development Paths in the Middle East

Most Middle Eastern countries did not become independent states until the mid-twentieth century, when the colonial powers withdrew. Among the first order of business for postindependence elites was economic development and the establishment or consolidation of national market institutions. In the decades since independence, the political economies of Middle Eastern countries developed in divergent ways. This section provides an overview of phases of development policy in distinct Middle Eastern political economy groups from about the 1950s to the present.

Background: The Construction of National Economies in the Interwar Period⁴⁰

With the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, European colonial powers took direct control of much of the region, dividing former Ottoman provinces among them. The Sykes-Picot Agreement, which the British and French negotiated secretly during World War I, created colonial protectorates, establishing British control over Iraq, Palestine, and Transjordan and French control over Syria and Lebanon. The territories of the Gulf were loosely ruled by prominent families and tribal leaders and, with the exception of Saudi Arabia, were largely under British control through a series of treaties signed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries between the British and various shaykhdoms. In North Africa, France had a longer record of colonial rule, with the occupation and subsequent incorporation of Algeria into France in 1830 and the establishment of protectorates in Morocco and Tunisia in 1913 and 1881, respectively.

As discussed in [Chapter 1](#), during the latter period of Ottoman rule, some regions and communities in the Ottoman Empire were increasingly integrated in the global economy in part through capitulations, or preferential relationships between minority communities and European governments. Colonial rule integrated these territories more directly in global markets controlled by European powers and laid the foundations for the creation of national economies with fixed borders, national systems of taxation, and tariffs and other trade barriers. These institutions brought about large-scale changes in the regional economy, which had virtually free exchange within the territories of the Ottoman Empire.

The colonial period left important legacies for subsequent development trajectories and, in some countries, laid the foundations for a nascent industrial sector. Colonialism in the Middle East, whether British or French, followed the same general principles. Colonial authorities tended to dominate local industry and invested little in local economies, expecting the colonized protostates to balance their own budgets and devoting few resources to welfare and public works. Local currencies were also closely tied to those of the colonial powers, facilitating trade while increasing the vulnerability of the colonized economies to global market fluctuations. Similar patterns in the administrative mechanisms of colonial rule also emerged: Throughout the region, colonial authorities relied heavily on alliances with tribal elites and large landowners to consolidate their control.

Despite these shared patterns, the precise nature of colonial involvement in the territories varied across the region. The French invested most heavily in North Africa, where they established significant settler communities. In these countries, colonial expatriate investors founded industrial firms and controlled the major farms and agricultural enterprises. French workers were even employed in some of the

urban industrial enterprises. The relative vibrancy of North African labor movements during the colonial period and in the first decades after independence was partly due to the exposure to unionization that indigenous workers gained through contact with their French counterparts. Although these patterns of French investment in the region ensured that the North African economies remained dependent on France and granted preferential treatment to French investors and workers, the colonial authorities also invested in infrastructure and public services.

In the East, the British and French colonial authorities also transformed local economies, but they did not own land; nor did they establish resident communities to the same degree as in North Africa. The British effectively took control of Egypt in 1881 and established a formal protectorate in 1914. By this time, European investors had established some factories that largely targeted the domestic market, but British economic interests centered largely on cotton exports. As was true throughout the region, colonial domination granted little or no indigenous control over economic policymaking, and therefore, few protective trade barriers designed to spur the rise of local industry were instituted under colonial rule. During the Great Depression, however, increased protectionism enabled more local investors to establish manufacturing enterprises.

In the British and French mandates in the East, including Palestine, Transjordan, Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria, colonial economic control operated in similar ways. Large-scale manufacturing was dominated by foreign investors, usually from the colonizing country, while the bulk of the local economy remained heavily agrarian and low income. In Jordan and Iraq, where much of the population was nomadic and rural, little industrial and agricultural development occurred during this period, particularly in Jordan. The discovery of oil in Iraq in the 1930s provided more resources but did little to stimulate industrialization. In Syria and Greater Lebanon, which encompassed many former Ottoman provinces, the French established close economic and cultural ties with certain Christian communities, particularly the Maronites, prior to the establishment of the mandate. As in the French protectorates of North Africa, however, most of the Syrian and Lebanese economies remained primarily agricultural; a significant manufacturing base did not develop, and French investment did not benefit most of the population.

In Palestine, the influx of Jewish settlers, some of whom came with advanced skills and education, provided an additional dimension to the economic impact of colonialism. Thanks to financial and infrastructural support from Britain and the community's own resources and skills, the Jews in Palestine constructed a relatively prosperous and industrially developed sub-economy within the British mandate. In Arab areas, however, infrastructure was generally less developed; agricultural techniques were not as productive, and industrial development lagged.

Until the discovery of oil in the 1930s, the Gulf economies were dominated by fishing, pearl diving, and in the case of Saudi Arabia, earnings from the pilgrimage to Mecca. The Gulf shaykhdoms had virtually no manufacturing base or agricultural

production, apart from date harvesting. Many contained significant Indian merchant communities, which received British legal protection. The discovery of oil brought an influx of foreign oil companies, which developed close relationships with ruling families, although significant royalties did not come in until the late 1930s and 1940s.

Unlike most Arab countries, non-Arab Turkey and Iran were never directly colonized by the European powers, although Iran was occupied by British, American, and Soviet forces during World War II. Nonetheless, capitulations and high foreign debt ensured Turkish and Iranian dependence on Europe. After the establishment of an independent state in 1923, Turkey began to promote the local industrial sector, channeling funds through state-owned banks to encourage business development. In the 1930s, Turkey adopted an etatist economic approach, or policies that entailed extensive government intervention in the economy and the promotion of domestic industry through subsidies and protective barriers. As a result, Turkey had a more substantial industrial base than other Middle Eastern countries on the eve of World War II. In adopting state-led development, Turkey was a pioneer in the region and served as a model for the Arab states in the post–World War II period. In Iran, Colonel Reza Khan, who became shah in 1925 and founded the Pahlavi “dynasty,” embarked on a nation-building initiative, which entailed the growth of the state bureaucracy and military. As in Turkey, the Great Depression compelled the shah’s government to adopt etatist policies and, at the same time, to establish public enterprises in diverse industries. The state also invested substantial sums in infrastructure and industry.⁴¹

The Great Depression and, later, World War II were extremely disruptive to the region but had the side effect of boosting domestic manufacturing. As most states in the Middle East protected themselves from the global downturn by instituting import barriers, local industry and even agriculture expanded. During World War II, with the disruption of trade routes, local manufacturing and processing factories emerged to compensate for the sharp reduction in consumer imports. At the same time, colonial authorities instituted some policies to promote local industry as a way to support the war effort, creating a legacy of state intervention in the economy that was greatly consolidated in the post–World War II period. Still, the countries of the region remained vulnerable to global market fluctuations and remained fundamentally low-income, agrarian economies.

1950s–1970s: Protectionism, Indigenous Industrial Development, and the Transition to a New Development Model

In the postwar period, countries in almost all developing regions, including the Middle East, adopted import-substitution industrialization (ISI) as a strategy for economic development. ISI involves a set of trade and economic policies aimed at reducing dependence on foreign imports and substituting foreign with domestically produced goods. To promote national industry and industrialization, ISI policy instruments include tariff barriers, quotas on imports, and, at times, the nationalization of industries. ISI also has ramifications for domestic social structure by fostering the rise of a domestic industrial bourgeoisie oriented toward the local market and the emergence of a local industrial working class, which benefits from relatively high wages in the formal sector and constitutes an important consumer base for domestic production. Populist policies, such as consumer price subsidies on staple goods, often accompany ISI development strategies, constituting an important de facto form of state welfare.

From the 1950s to the 1970s, a period of high growth throughout the region, countries throughout the Middle East adopted ISI policies. This was particularly true of the non-oil economies and the high-population oil exporters such as Algeria, Iraq, and Iran, all of which enjoyed an economic expansion during these decades that has been unmatched ever since. As a result, these countries experienced a marked shift in the sectoral structure of their economies, with fast growth in employment and production in manufacturing and the decline of raw material exports and agriculture. At the same time, the public sector grew dramatically with the establishment of state-owned enterprises in all Middle Eastern political economies and vast public investment.⁴² ISI ultimately faced serious challenges in the Middle East—and in most developing countries—because it failed to generate sufficient foreign exchange, a problem that especially plagued the non-oil economies that could not benefit from the sale of oil on world markets.

MOC and LOC Republics

Both the oil and non-oil, single-party republics went furthest in adopting ISI policies, constructing state-owned enterprises (SOEs), and marginalizing the private sector. Like most developing countries in the 1950s and 1960s, the single-party republics adopted protectionist trade policies to promote local manufacturing and limit foreign imports. The republics placed heavy emphasis on public enterprises, on average outstripping other developing countries with respect to the percentage of manufacturing value added produced by state-owned firms.⁴³ More than generating profits, state promotion of SOEs primarily aimed to support employment and supply the local market with inexpensive basic or strategic goods.

For varying durations, all of the single-party republics adopted versions of populist, quasi-socialist strategies of legitimation at independence, including Egypt (1957–1974), Algeria (1962–1989), Tunisia (1962–1969), Syria (1963–1990s), and Iraq (1963–1990s). When these policies were initiated, many republics were allied with the Soviet Union, which helped to inspire the adoption of planning and the expansion of the public sector. The new leaders of the republics also instituted land reform policies, transferring land held by colonial authorities, settlers, and local landed elites to less privileged strata and developing or expanding public health and education systems. The most extensive entitlements were reserved for formal sector workers, who constituted a relatively small portion of the total workforce. With the wave of postcolonial nationalizations and the establishment of state-owned enterprises, civil service and parastatal workers gained job security and a range of social protections, but they were expected to be politically docile.

The republics varied in the extent to which they made populism and “Arab socialism”⁴⁴ the centerpiece of their rhetoric and actually instituted populist policies. Egypt under President Gamal Abdel Nasser (1956–1970) exhibited a particularly strong commitment to populism, while Tunisia turned away from its quasi-socialist experiment earlier than the other republics. In the case of Algeria, oil wealth greatly aided populist policies, particularly during spikes in world oil prices, which helped to postpone the problems that tend to arise with ISI strategies.

As the prototypical example of Arab socialism, the case of Egypt is illustrative. When the Free Officers took over in a coup in 1952 (see [Chapter 10](#)), the state instituted a major shift in economic policy. Land reform was designed to undercut the power of large landholders and spur more investment in industry as the first step, although in practice little land was actually redistributed. State relations with the private sector were antagonistic, even if Nasser never intended to eliminate private business altogether. The nationalization of major banks, insurance companies, shipping companies, and other key industries exacerbated tensions between the state and business. The economic weight of SOEs was particularly important in Egypt and constituted a critical source of employment: While SOEs accounted for about 25 percent to 50 percent of manufacturing value-added in many developing countries, Egypt’s public enterprises accounted for about 60 percent of manufacturing added.⁴⁵

By the end of Nasser’s rule, economic stagnation was growing, contributing to mounting popular disaffection. ISI had not successfully bred a productive, revenue-generating manufacturing sector capable of propelling larger development. In this context, Nasser moved away from Arab socialism toward *infitah*, or economic opening, which involved a limited liberalization of foreign trade. In practice, the main result of *infitah* was the creation a new export-import class, but the policy had little effect on stimulating private industrial development.

Paradoxically, the republics with medium levels of oil per capita (i.e., Algeria, Iraq, Syria) exhibited the lowest economic performance, even though they were believed in the past to show the greatest promise, as they could combine oil wealth with a

large population to develop into industrial giants. That this simple economic intuition did not turn into reality is a testimony of the importance of politics in shaping development paths.

The republican middle-oil countries were borne out of particularly violent political processes that put at the helm groups that espoused radical departures from the past—embodied, for example, in Baath ideology in Iraq and Syria and socialism in Algeria. In these countries, oil supported a more benign form of autocratic rule in a first phase, within a modernist nationalistic phase of fast development and industrialization. The second more violent and repressive form emerged later, after the industrialization drives of the 1960s and 1970s ended in failure, which, coupled with the humiliating defeat of 1967 for the front-line states, put into question the core legitimacy of these regimes. Oil allowed these states to finance large armies and security forces and also to remain somewhat independent of foreign patrons.⁴⁶ These countries did not come to see the development of the private sector as an attractive alternative to state-led development, as it threatened regime durability at its core. In many of these countries, when the state retreated, it was replaced by a very narrow form of cronyism, closely associated with the regime, and with rising levels of repression.

In some cases, as notoriously illustrated by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, foreign adventurism was a means to attempt to replenish "strategic rents." In Algeria, the attempt to reform after the first oil shock contributed to the outbreak of the civil war, which still marks the sociopolitical scene today. Under the guise of increased repression and the fight against Islamists, army interests have come to dominate a stagnating private sector. In Syria, low oil prices (together with falling reserves) led to a rapid economic adjustment that reduced dramatically state involvement in peripheral regions from which the ongoing revolution emerged. The country's intervention in Lebanon was largely predicated on extracting rents.

In general across these countries, economic reforms led to the increased concentration of economic power among the elite, cousins of the president, and sons of generals. Iraq, coming out of the war with Iran with a huge foreign debt and decimated infrastructure, sought to invade Kuwait as a way to shore up its economy, with dramatic consequences for the Iraqi people. Iraq lost most of its oil revenues during its war with Iran and again when it was under sanctions, and in both cases, the country had to undergo wrenching and socially calamitous adjustment periods. In Yemen, the fight over newly discovered oil fueled a civil war and the subsequent forced unification of the country.

LOC Monarchies

From their establishment as independent states, Jordan and Morocco adopted liberal economic rhetoric, which privileged the private sector as the driver of development. Unlike the single-party republics, the non-oil monarchies did not

emphasize populist ideologies; nor did they experience a radical transformation in the distribution of resources, whether in rhetoric or in practice. Accordingly, social contracts established between rulers and ruled were similar in Jordan and Morocco. The two non-oil monarchies adopted far less expansive social programs than the Gulf monarchies and left greater room for families, private charities, religious organizations, and other private actors to tend to the social needs of the population than found in the single-party republics. Thus, the relatively minimal state redistributive role in Jordan and Morocco partly resulted from the adoption of liberal economic policies, which left greater scope for the local private sector, and the absence of oil wealth precluded the enactment of comprehensive social benefits.

Despite these ideological and policy differences, the public sector was equally important across the non-oil monarchies and single-party republics. As in Egypt and the other single-party republics, the state was the main source of investment and a major employer in the two non-oil monarchies. In Jordan, the state came to play a key role in the economy through the allocation of aid rents and ownership stakes in key industries. The domestic private sector, which is largely of Palestinian origin, was mainly involved in sectors with low barriers to entry, such as light manufacturing and exports of agricultural goods. In Morocco, SOEs, special investment agencies, and holding companies linked to the palace controlled large portions of the economy, while all major private interests enjoyed close ties with the monarchy.

The two non-oil monarchies diverge with respect to the adoption of ISI as a development strategy. Jordan's small size and limited resource base prevented the adoption of domestically oriented trade policies, and throughout its history, the country has relied heavily on external aid and other forms of assistance. The Israeli occupation of the West Bank in 1967 further limited the country's economic base. In Morocco, which has a larger population and agricultural base, ISI was adopted wholeheartedly beginning in the 1960s. During the early 1970s, a series of investment codes and economic policies, including the "Moroccanization" laws that transferred majority ownership of domestic firms to indigenous capital, further promoted local private industry.

HOC Monarchies

The oil monarchies of the Gulf pursued a different development trajectory than the non-oil monarchies and republics, largely due to structural differences in their economies. With oil dominating their economies and minimal or no manufacturing bases beyond joint ventures with foreign companies in petrochemicals, there was little need to adopt protectionist trade regimes aimed at promoting local industry. Furthermore, with the exception of Saudi Arabia, the indigenous population was too small to warrant an ISI approach, which requires a substantial domestic consumer base and labor force.

With respect to the role of the public sector in the economy, the oil monarchies surpassed the non-oil countries in the region. Thanks to windfall oil profits after the

oil price increases in the early 1970s, the share of the oil sector in the Gulf economies soared, and state coffers overflowed. This vast influx of wealth, which could not be fully absorbed by the local economies, enabled the Gulf states to launch ambitious infrastructure development programs and provide virtually guaranteed employment to nationals in the civil service. The oil monarchies also established numerous state-owned enterprises in all key sectors of their economies.⁴⁷

The quadrupling of world oil prices in 1973 also provided rulers with the resources to fund generous social programs, which granted citizens free or heavily subsidized health care, schooling, housing, and other benefits, as well as preferential access to secure government employment. These comprehensive welfare benefits had political implications: By catering to and even anticipating the needs of the population, social benefits undercut the potential impetus for citizens to oppose their rulers—at least until the recessions of the mid-1980s and subsequent economic downturns forced the Gulf oil monarchies to try to scale back citizen entitlements. Furthermore, limited industrial development and, hence, the marginal role of the indigenous working class undercut an important potential site of mobilization in opposition to the authoritarian Gulf oil monarchies.

Prior to the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran could be classified as an oil monarchy, albeit one with a far higher population than those of the Gulf oil monarchies. After 1941, when the Allied Powers helped install Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi on the Iranian throne, Iran's economic strategy gradually evolved to rely on oil exports and an ISI development strategy. In the 1960s and 1970s, the shah exercised increasingly tight authority over Iranian society. This control was reflected in patterns of state intervention in the economy and growing tensions between the monarchy and elements of the private sector. While the state maintained control over heavy industry, the private sector focused on lighter manufacturing and other specialized industries, at times in cooperation with foreign capital.⁴⁸

In the post–World War II period, Middle Eastern countries established distinct political economies, which varied according to the structural features of their economies and patterns of state-society relations institutionalized in different political regime types. In all countries, the state's role in the economy ballooned, as manifested in the creation of state-owned enterprises, public investment, and the growth of government bureaucracies. The non-oil monarchies and republics, which generally aimed to develop domestic industry to fuel growth, instituted ISI policies, including protectionist trade barriers and elaborate licensing and quota systems for production and trade. The Gulf oil monarchies, however, had less need for ISI policies, given the dominant role of oil in their economies and their minimal industrial bases.

With low oil prices forecast for the foreseeable future, however, the Gulf HOCs are acutely aware of the need to diversify their economies—a task that is easier to envision than to implement. In Saudi Arabia, the Crown Prince and Chairman of the

Council of Economic and Development Affairs, Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, launched Vision 2030. The plan aims to transform the Saudi economy through an ambitious diversification and privatization strategy. Some hail the plan as a forward-looking and necessary blueprint for reform. Others question its feasibility and express skepticism that the Crown Prince, who increasingly employs overt repression to govern the country and is accused of authorizing the murder of Saudi dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi in October 2018, is up to the task of transforming his country’s economy and polity while maintaining stability.

To some degree, these different political economies are associated with distinct types of social contracts between rulers and ruled. Oil and other economic endowments, which supply the resources needed for public social provision, and varied state economic ideologies shaped the nature of these arrangements. The LOC republics adopted populist rhetoric and quasi-socialist principles for organizing the economy, including tight regulation of the private sector. Accordingly, these states expressed a higher commitment to provide for citizens; much of the population was effectively excluded because most entitlements were linked to formal-sector employment. The LOC monarchies, however, were guided by a more liberal economic ideology in which private business was expected to play an important role in the economy, and private actors—such as families, religious groups, nongovernmental organizations, and the private sector—were expected to play a significant role in social provision.

Notwithstanding differences in their official economic ideologies and the composition of their ruling coalitions, most governments in the region invested significantly in social services after independence. When fiscal crises hit countries across the region in the 1980s and 1990s, however, not all countries were able to sustain these investments. [Table 7.3](#) depicts the share of government expenditures devoted to health and education for MENA countries in the three different political economy types at peak and bottom levels of government spending, which vary by country.

Table 7.3 Public Spending on Health and Education (as a Percentage of GDP) in MENA Countries at Their Peak and Bottom Levels, Various Years

Table 7.3 Public Spending on Health and Education (as a Percentage of GDP) in MENA Countries at Their Peak and Bottom Levels, Various Years

	Peak expenditure	Peak date	Bottom expenditure	Bottom date
HOC	9.5		6.5	
Bahrain	7.9	1986	5.4	2000

	Peak expenditure	Peak date	Bottom expenditure	Bottom date
Kuwait	11.2	1986	5.6	2007
Oman	8.6	1986	6.6	1997
Saudi Arabia	10.2	1987	8.5	1995
MOC	6.5		3.8	
Iran	9.9	1980	5.6	1991
Syria	3.0	1980	2.0	1990
LOC	6.9		5.7	
Egypt	6.5	1982	5.5	1998
Jordan	5.3	1980	6.2	1992
Lebanon	N/A	1994	2.7	2011
Morocco	7.8	1981	6.9	1996
Tunisia	7.9	1984	7.1	1998
Other	7.1		7.7	
Israel	9.6	1983	11.8	2011
Turkey	4.6	1997	3.7	1998

Source: Ishac Diwan and Tarik Akin. "Fifty Years of Fiscal Policy in the Arab Region." Economic Research Forum (ERF) Working Paper No. 914. Cairo, Egypt: Economic Research Forum, May 2015.

In general, as resources contracted, government spending on health and education has been less affected in the region as a whole than expenditures on other areas, falling from about 8 percent to 6 percent of GDP. In the MOC countries, however, it fell the most precipitously, from 6.5 percent to 3.8 percent, an extraordinarily low level. The freeze in budgets for health and education led to less progress in human development and a decline in the quality of services, especially those going to the

poor who cannot afford to purchase medical care and schooling in the burgeoning private sector. A recent UNDP study confirms this in dramatic ways. The study traces the evolution of the Human Development Index (HDI) and measures the performance of the health and education systems in all global regions during 1990 to 2010 and compares these measures to the period from 1970 to 2010. All countries experienced a slowdown, but it is particularly marked in the Arab region. After taking off in the 1970s, the rate of increase in the HDI in the Arab region slowed markedly. As elsewhere, initial improvements were easier to achieve coming from a low base and were boosted by the high expenditures on social sectors in the earlier postindependence period, which was characterized by the rise of the state and the first oil boom.

Cross-national variation in development patterns and spending levels are shaped by oil and population endowments but also reflect the historical specificities of distinct political economies, including the priorities of nationalist and postindependence leaders, as well as levels of conflict and thus military spending. While the data presented are illustrative of differences in government commitments to social spending, quantitative measurement of the distinct types of social contracts in the Middle Eastern political economies remains difficult. Data on expenditures do not yield a reliable picture of the welfare system,⁴⁹ in part because of notorious problems with statistical data collected in the Middle East and in many other countries. Furthermore, measures of government health spending do not indicate how social provision actually occurs. For example, the Lebanese government has high social expenditures, but the state has limited regulatory capacity, and therefore the health and education sectors are characterized by excessive waste and inefficiencies.⁵⁰

1980s–Present: Economic Liberalization and Increased Integration in the Global Economy in the LOCs

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, the golden age of growth had stalled in the Middle East. Most countries in the region began to feel the limits of ISI, which failed to generate sufficient foreign exchange and foster competitive industries. Many non-oil economies in the region found themselves in a balance-of-payments crisis, which compelled them to sign on to stabilization and structural adjustment programs (SAPs) with international financial institutions (IFIs), including the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (see [Box 7.1](#)).

Economic crisis does not fully explain the turn to IFI assistance.⁵¹ Some countries such as Tunisia initiated partial liberalizations of their economies well before experiencing a crisis. Furthermore, the region as a whole earned more revenues, thanks to oil and regional labor remittances, than other developing regions, such as Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa. These sources of wealth might have enabled many Middle Eastern countries to stave off painful economic reforms for a longer period. Furthermore, important domestic constituents, including factions of government officials and elements of the business community, were key proponents of structural adjustment, and both invoked and benefited from perceived IFI pressure to orchestrate shifts in the economic orientations of their countries. By the mid-1980s, however, adjustment became urgent as deficits were high while the failure of ISI and the drop in oil prices put pressure on many MENA economies, especially those with higher citizen populations.

Box 7.1 Economic Liberalization, Stabilization, and Structural Adjustment

In the 1980s and 1990s, the IFIs—and particularly the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and US Treasury Department—reached a consensus on the appropriate policy prescriptions for reforming and reviving economies throughout the developing world. These policies, often referred to as the “Washington Consensus,” were designed to decrease the state’s role in the economy, promote private sector-led development strategies, and reduce “distortions” in the economy created by government interventions in fiscal and monetary policy. Countries with large macroeconomic imbalances, in part resulting from their ISI experiences, were encouraged and even pressured to adopt stabilization followed by structural adjustment policies.

- Stabilization aims to restore macroeconomic balance by stemming inflation and reducing government deficits through higher taxes and reduced spending, in some cases involving cuts of consumer subsidies.
- Structural adjustment focuses on long-term, more microeconomic change in the economy. Structural adjustment programs (SAPs) intend to make as many goods and services available for sale through the market as possible, rather than through government allocation, subsidies, import licensing, output quotas, ration shops, government agencies, and public enterprises. Structural adjustment is sometimes referred to as “liberalization” or “deregulation.”

By the late 1990s, the results of stabilization and SAPs were disappointing at best and harmful at worst. Although countries that had undergone stabilization programs grew faster after the “lost decade” from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, growth was not inclusive, and the chasm between large, politically connected firms and the growing informal market expanded. Some countries experienced painful contractions in their economies with dire consequences for the population, particularly after the reduction or elimination of consumer subsidies and social programs. As a result, the IFIs incorporated greater emphasis on social safety nets and targeted antipoverty programs, although critics claimed that these revisions were little more than window dressing. The new thinking also singled out corruption, which was increasingly associated with economic decline and blamed for sluggish private investment.

Leaving aside the question of whether stabilization and SAPs actually work, the implementation of all elements of these programs is virtually impossible because political leaders would face overwhelming opposition from almost all societal groups, including elites who have long profited from cozy capitalist ties to the state and have served as the main social support for most Middle Eastern rulers.

International trade agreements also played a role in compelling Middle Eastern countries to open their economies. Beginning in the mid-1990s, the European Union (EU) initiated a series of bilateral free-trade agreements with countries throughout the region, committing the signatories to the phased elimination of trade barriers within a circumscribed period. For countries with extensive trade relations with EU countries, such as Morocco and Tunisia, this was tantamount to a radical opening of their economies to international competition.

In tracing the record of economic liberalization in the Middle East from the 1980s to the present, it is necessary to distinguish between the resource-rich and resource-poor economies of the region, which experienced the economic crises of the 1980s onward in varied ways. Although they had large public sectors, the oil economies had never instituted protectionist trade regimes to the same degree as the non-oil economies. Furthermore, although the oil price slumps of the mid-1980s compelled some HOC monarchies in the Gulf to institute austerity programs, these low-population oil exporters did not experience debt crises with the same severity as other Middle Eastern economies. Economic downturns compelled the Gulf countries to institute programs to diversify their economies and efforts to “indigenize” their workforces by replacing foreign labor with citizens, but renewed oil price hikes and financial reserves have slowed progress in these efforts.⁵² Given the substantial resources of the HOCs and even of the MOCs, economic liberalization programs were largely implemented by the resource-poor (LOC) economies in the Middle East, including single-party republics, non-oil monarchies, and democracies.

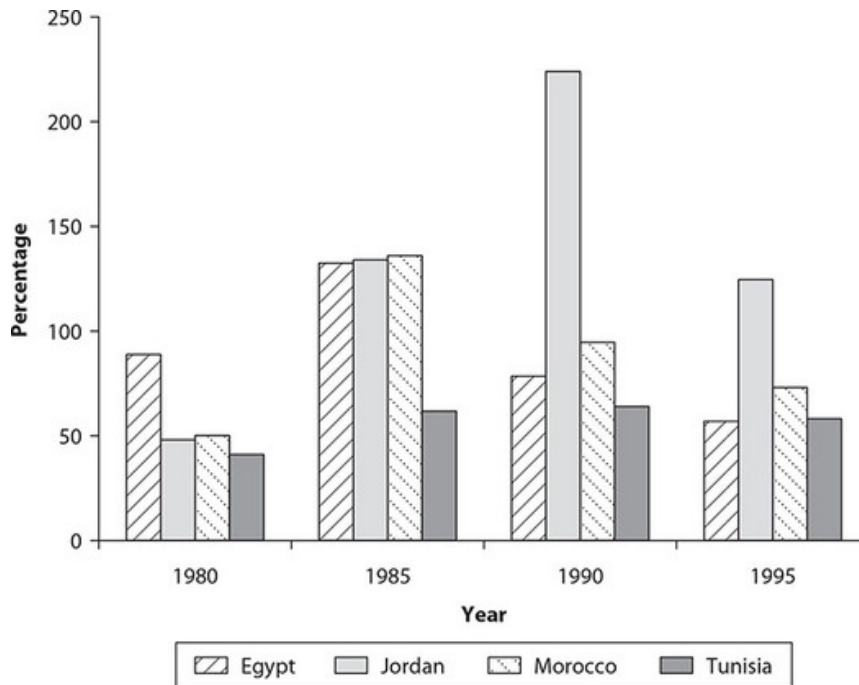
The main resource-poor Middle Eastern countries to sign on to economic reform programs with the support of the IFIs were Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia.⁵³ All four countries experienced mounting debt burdens, albeit to varying degrees, in the lead-up to the adoption of economic liberalization programs. [Figure 7.10](#) shows total debt as a percentage of GDP in the four countries in the 1980s and 1990s, when these countries began to implement structural adjustment programs.

As the figure shows, Tunisia experienced the lowest debt burden of all countries and, therefore, undertook economic reform from a position of relative strength. Jordan faced a particularly high debt burden, which spiked as a result of the first Gulf war when Jordan's perceived support for Iraq compelled some of its regional and global allies to reduce external assistance.

In all cases, trade liberalization, including reductions in trade taxes and tariff barriers, the gradual elimination of quotas and import licenses, and overall deregulation of the economy and privatization were central goals. Yet the actual record of economic reform has varied from country to country. In general, the IFIs regard Morocco, Jordan, and especially Tunisia as more successful cases of economic reform, and Egypt is seen in more qualified terms. Furthermore, economic restructuring has generally come with enormous social costs.

Tunisia has exhibited stronger economic performance than other non-oil countries in the region. Several factors account for the country's relative economic success.⁵⁴ First, it initiated partial liberalization of the economy and especially trade liberalization earlier than other Middle Eastern countries with the creation of its offshore sector in 1972. Second, the competence of the Tunisian civil service contributed to the state's bureaucratic capacity to implement reform. Finally, Tunisia's postindependence investments in public health and education created a relatively well-trained workforce that was more capable of sustaining foreign competition. Beginning in 1986, Tunisia adopted an economic restructuring program with assistance from the IMF. Support from the EU for industrial restructuring also aided firms in adapting to the increased competition accompanying the transition to export-oriented industrialization. Although financial liberalization and privatization have proceeded slowly, Tunisia went far in liberalizing its economy and enjoyed a strong average growth rate of 5.2 percent in the first five years after implementing the reforms.⁵⁵

Figure 7.10 Total Debt as Percentage of GDP in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia, 1980–1995



Source: Paul Rivin, *Economic Policy and Performance in the Arab World* (2001), 98.

Morocco is also cited as a successful case of economic liberalization, yet it has had little to show for its efforts in terms of growth, employment creation, or improvement in living conditions. In 1983, Morocco initiated economic reform programs with support from the IFIs. Trade liberalization made significant advances, with average tariff levels dropping from 400 percent in 1980 to 35 percent in 1993, although the retention of nontariff barriers has limited the extent of actual trade reforms. The government also implemented new investment codes, carried out several currency devaluations, and reduced budget deficits substantially. Nonetheless, exports have not grown as much as expected, limiting overall economic growth. Relatively high poverty rates and underdeveloped public welfare functions have made economic adjustment especially difficult for the poor and have limited human capital development, undercutting Moroccan competitiveness in world markets.

The Jordanian economy differs significantly from those of Morocco and Tunisia. With its historically narrow productive base, Jordan is heavily reliant on foreign aid and remittances. In the 1980s, Jordan faced serious economic challenges as falling oil prices in the Gulf states led to the decline of these revenues. In 1989, Jordan signed on to a stabilization agreement with the IMF in order to reduce budget deficits. As in many other countries in the region, including Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia, cuts in consumer subsidies stipulated by IMF agreements led to riots, and the government was forced to limit price increases. The Gulf War (1990–1992) dealt a severe blow to the Jordanian economy, which was damaged by the severing of trade with Iraq, the

decline in remittances from returning Jordanians and Palestinians who lost their jobs in the Gulf, and cuts in Western aid as a result of Jordan's refusal to join the US-led coalition against Iraq.⁵⁶ In 1994, Jordan signed a peace treaty with Israel, paving the way for closer economic ties with and increased aid from the United States. Despite improved growth rates in recent years, Jordan's dependence on external rents and a limited industrial base have hindered sustained economic improvement.

By the mid-1980s, Egypt faced a serious economic crisis with a large trade deficit, high debt servicing, and declining economic growth, yet the country's efforts to restructure its economy experienced multiple delays. In 1987, the Egyptian government initiated negotiations with the IMF, which subsequently cancelled the agreement because of Egypt's violations of conditions imposed as part of the agreements. In 1991, Egypt again embarked on negotiations with the IMF and received a standby loan and debt forgiveness from its Western and Gulf Arab creditors. In return, the Egyptian government was required to increase energy prices, reduce subsidies, liberalize trade, and privatize some state-owned companies. Egypt committed to another round of economic reforms in 1996, when it signed a new agreement with the IMF, further liberalized trade, and deregulated part of the investment code. During the tenure of Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif (2004–2011), Egypt deepened its commitment to economic opening. Nazif's government streamlined some restrictions on trade, privatized more state-owned enterprises, reformed the tax system, and promoted the domestic financial sector.

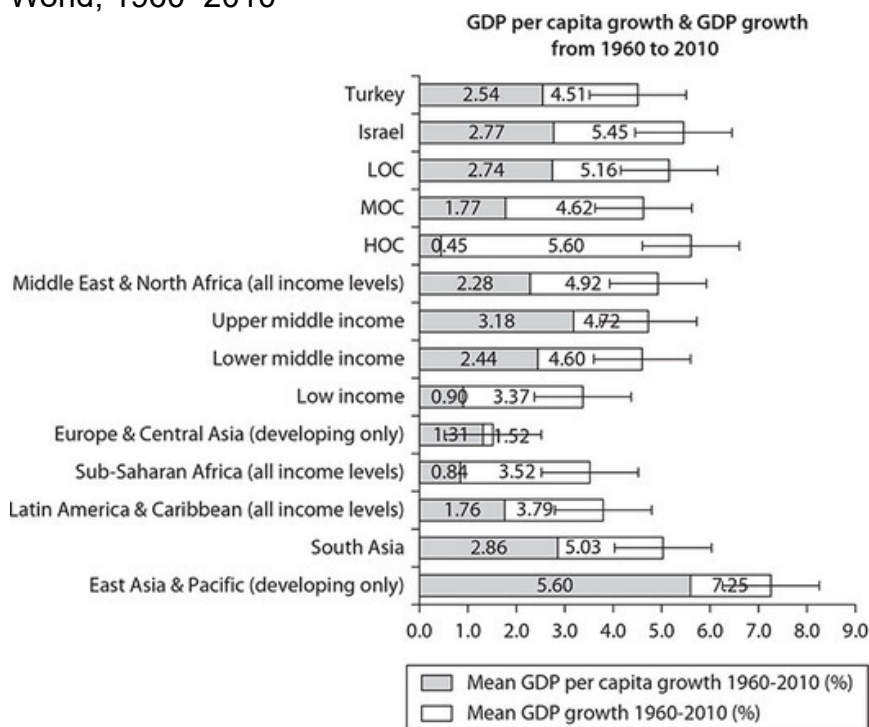
As was true for many countries implementing structural adjustment programs, the Egyptian economic reforms disproportionately hurt the poor. Given Egypt's inadequate public welfare programs and limited social safety net, reductions in consumer subsidies and other elements of economic austerity were particularly severe for ordinary citizens.⁵⁷ Furthermore, economic liberalization did not stimulate export-led growth, as the IFIs had hoped.⁵⁸

Economic liberalization has had a mixed record at best in the Middle East. In general, growth varied across the different types of political economies in the region. In [Figure 7.11](#), we can see that economic performance varied quite a lot among the three types of political economies. If we focus on GDP growth, it is apparent that the RRLP group did best, growing at 5.6 percent a year; this is a remarkable average over such a long stretch of time and is the fastest growth rate for any single region besides East Asia. (GDP per capita is low in the RRLP group because the huge influx of foreign workers distorts the "per capita" aspect.) Given the huge contribution of oil wealth to this growth, this performance is not too surprising, but it does stand in sharp contrast with the notion of a "resource curse" (see Oil and the "Resource Curse" section). More surprisingly, it is the LOC group that comes in second: Its 5.26 percent growth is good performance by global standards, and its per capita performance of only 2.76 percent, while weaker, nevertheless remains around the middle-income average.

The MOC group, which is rich in both oil and people, comes in a distant third place at 4.4 percent average growth per year (and at only 1.3 percent on a per capita basis). This indicates that this group of countries seems to have been hit the hardest by the oil curse. Indeed, the countries exhibiting the lowest performance are those that were once believed to show the greatest promise, as they could combine oil wealth with a large population to develop into industrial giants. Iraq, Iran, and Algeria all had such promise and plans, but they all got mired in internal and external conflicts that ended up undermining their economic potential. Syria has now entered just such a destructive phase.

This brings us to our third point about the variability of growth over time. This variability is partly a result of the dependence of the region on oil revenues—oil prices are determined by international markets and have themselves shown a great deal of variability over time. It is therefore no surprise that the very large variability of growth across periods, especially in the resource-rich countries, is a defining dimension of growth in the region, especially as compared to the rest of the world. We can see this in the coefficients of variation of the growth rate, which are also depicted in [Figure 7.11](#). The standard deviation of growth over the fifty years is about equal in MOCs and HOCs, at around 4 percent, and also about equal to East Asia, which, as we have seen, had much larger growth rates. The standard deviation of growth in the LOCs is 3.35, which is also larger than the various global averages, with the exception of East Asia and the region comprising Europe and Central Asia.

Figure 7.11 Economic Growth in the MENA Region and in Other Regions of the World, 1960–2010



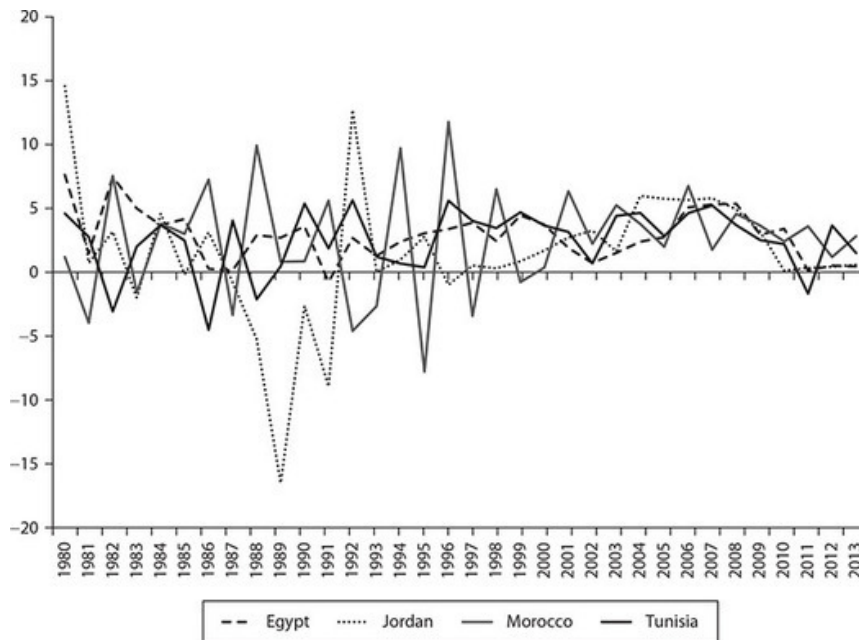
Source: World Bank, WBI data.

Note: Standard deviation of mean GDP growth (percentage) is in parentheses.

One can also see this more directly by looking at the growth rates of our three groups over time in [Figure 7.11](#). Each of these rates varies much more than the rates of the other middle-income countries of the world, and they have a greater tendency to oscillate, more so during some periods (the 1970s and mid-1990s) and less so during others (the 1980s and after 2005). The RRLP countries in particular show an extremely variable growth rate—on a per capita basis, for instance, Saudi Arabia grew at extraordinary rates of around 8 percent a year during the 1970s, shrank to rates of somewhat more than 5 percent a year during the 1980s, and had an essentially flat GDP per capita in the 1990s and 2000s.

Among the LOC economies, which were compelled to adopt structural adjustment programs due to their lack of resource wealth, growth trajectories varied. [Figure 7.12](#) depicts GDP growth rates in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia. The figure shows that growth rates have been erratic, particularly in Jordan, which is especially vulnerable to regional conflict, given its dependence on external rents, and Morocco, which is highly sensitive to drought, among other factors. In the 2000s, growth rates steadily increased in Egypt, reaching a high point in 2008. Although the Arab Spring temporarily brought greater political freedoms, protracted instability has caused growth and investment rates to plunge. As [Figure 7.12](#) shows, the decline in economic growth following the uprisings has been particularly acute in Tunisia and Egypt, which experienced dramatic political shifts after longtime dictators were ousted from these countries. For several years after the Jasmine Revolution, political instability and spikes in political violence and terrorist attacks complicated efforts to promote investment in the wake of the comparatively successful political transition in Tunisia.

Figure 7.12 Per Capita GDP Growth in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia
(Annual Percentage)



Source: *World Development Indicators* (various years), World Bank.

Economic liberalization has also failed to bring benefits to the neediest segments of the population. Political and economic elites, who enjoy close ties to rulers—whether presidents or monarchs—have benefited disproportionately from the new opportunities generated by greater global economic integration and increased emphasis on private sector-led development.⁵⁹ By the 1990s, a consensus had emerged that economic adjustment programs had disproportionately harmed the poor and, therefore, required greater sensitivity to questions of redistribution. Persistent poverty and inequality constitute an important backdrop to uprisings across the region. At the same time, moderate growth in the years leading up to the uprisings raised expectations and aspirations—and not just grievances—particularly among the middle class.

Development Challenges in the Middle East

Middle Eastern countries face persistent challenges to growth and development. Despite strong economic growth during the 1960s and 1970s, the region experienced slow growth in the 1980s and 1990s, with moderate but not inclusive growth in the 2000s. In the past thirty years, the Middle East has had lower growth rates than East and South Asia and, for certain periods, exhibited lower and more volatile growth rates than Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa. In the 1980s and 1990s, GDP growth per worker was less than 1 percent per year, while total factor productivity, a measure of the efficiency of inputs in a production process, declined.⁶⁰ Although most Middle Eastern economies reduced their budget deficits and curbed inflation significantly in the 1990s, they remained vulnerable to fluctuations in oil prices, and growth rates stagnated.⁶¹ To be fair, growth rates in the Middle East have been superior to other regions, even during periods of low performance, but low and volatile growth rates are particularly disappointing, given the rich natural resource endowments and high levels of foreign aid and remittances in the region. Volatile growth rates and, more importantly, perceptions of growing inequality may have contributed to the Arab uprisings, even if growth rates were rising in the 2000s. Indeed, in the decade leading up to the uprisings, the RPLA countries experienced the highest per capita growth rates of all three political economy types in the region, although the benefits of growth clearly did not trickle down equitably.⁶²

Since the turn of the century, international organizations have issued a number of reports documenting and attempting to explain the failure of growth and development in the Middle East. In 2003 and 2004, the World Bank issued several reports highlighting major social and economic problems in the Middle East, such as high unemployment, gender discrimination, and poor governance, which it claims have hindered economic development in the region. For example, the World Bank's 2004 MENA Development Report argues that failure to generate sufficient employment opportunities throughout the region limits long-term growth prospects.⁶³

The Arab Human Development Report (AHDR), first published by the UN Development Program's Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development in 2002, also points to protracted development failures in the Middle East and has generated much controversy within the region. Written by Arab scholars and practitioners, the AHDR adopts a multidimensional understanding of development, emphasizing not only the low levels of per capita income in the region relative to its wealth, but also declining productivity, underdeveloped research capabilities, high levels of illiteracy, and poor health and educational outcomes in comparison with countries of comparable income levels, gender inequality, and persistent authoritarianism. Critics point to the AHDR's apparent adoption of a Western democratization agenda, reluctance to blame external intervention for negative socioeconomic outcomes in

the region, and neglect of the vested interests within states that perpetuate the status quo.⁶⁴ Nonetheless, there is broad consensus both within and beyond the region that the well-being and socioeconomic opportunities of citizens of Middle Eastern countries have declined in recent decades.

Economists generally agree on the proximate causes of underdevelopment in the Middle East—weak integration in the global economy, low levels of investment, lack of technology transfer, industrial noncompetitiveness, high levels of government ownership and investment, the low quality of education, and the high costs of doing business.⁶⁵ But these factors are symptoms of deeper causes. Competing explanations for persistent underdevelopment in the Middle East range from innate and relatively fixed cultural characteristics to the nature of resource endowments in the region and the role of political institutions. This section briefly highlights the strengths and weaknesses of diverse perspectives on the persistent obstacles to growth and development in the Middle East.

Islam and Economic Development

In searching for features specific to the Middle East to explain persistent underdevelopment in the region, some point to the predominance of Islam. Different alleged features of Islamic societies are blamed for inhibiting economic growth and development. Some argue that Islam leads to unresponsive authoritarian governments, obstacles to independent reasoning, and the absence of a rational secular mindset, which impede capitalist economic development.⁶⁶ Others point to particular institutions in Islamic economics, such as the prohibition against *riba*, or interest, and *zakat*, or almsgiving, as religious obligations that could limit capital accumulation. In this vein, Timur Kuran argues that inheritance laws and regulations governing trusts and contracts historically inhibited capital accumulation by channeling resources into social services rather than productive investment, dividing up inheritance among family members, and, more generally, deterring the development of commercial institutions needed for longer-term growth.⁶⁷

Arguments linking Islamic beliefs and traditions with underdevelopment can be critiqued on both theoretical and empirical lines. Economic growth is variable over time, and culture and religion, which evolve very slowly, are unlikely to account for this variation. As already noted, predominantly Muslim countries such as Egypt and Jordan have experienced shifting growth rates in a relatively short time frame. Furthermore, countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia, which are also predominantly Muslim, have enjoyed sustained periods of high growth.

Cross-national statistical analyses show that countries with predominantly Muslim populations are not associated with poor growth and in some instances exhibit higher growth rates.⁶⁸ Other research shows that the share of *zakat* in income and the share of Islamic financial institutions in the financial sectors of the Middle East as a whole are small and, therefore, unlikely to hurt economic performance in the aggregate.⁶⁹ It is conceivable that Islamic institutions have negative effects on development that are erased by the positive effects of other Islamic or non-Islamic institutions in Middle Eastern countries or that there has been sufficient convergence in institutions and policies in recent years, so the negative effects of Islamic institutions have diminished. Indeed, Kuran himself argues that the same Islamic institutions and practices that he blames for economic decline in the long run were sources of innovation and order in earlier centuries, enabling the Islamic world to flourish while the West was still languishing in the Dark Ages. Economic historians, however, argue that alternative factors explain the relative decline of the Ottoman Empire from the sixteenth century onward. In particular, the strong and highly centralized Ottoman state deterred the rise of an independent civil society and private sector and prioritized welfare over economic growth and capital accumulation.⁷⁰

For centuries, the Islamic world outperformed the non-Islamic world, indicating that there is nothing about Islam per se that renders it incompatible with growth. A more nuanced argument centered on Islamic institutions rather than religion also faces theoretical and empirical contradictions. Rather than focusing on Islam or features of Islamic societies, scholars have emphasized other explanations for underdevelopment in the Middle East.

Oil and the “Resource Curse”

A prominent explanation for the relative underdevelopment of Middle Eastern countries focuses on the “curse” of oil wealth. This argument refers to the fact that resource abundance is correlated with poor economic performance, unbalanced growth, and weak state institutions and authoritarianism, among other ills. In its economic dimensions, the resource curse centers on the concept of the “Dutch Disease,” or the theory that an increase in revenues from natural resources will lead to a decline in a country’s industrial sector by raising the exchange rate, which makes the manufacturing sector less competitive. Similarly, states that rely on oil or other forms of windfall profits for a large portion of their revenues are deemed “rentier states,” which derive their income from nonproductive enterprise. These states concentrate their efforts on distributing wealth to the population, often to buy social peace and preempt greater societal demands for accountability, rather than fostering the conditions for the productive generation of wealth in their societies.⁷¹

The resource curse provides a theoretically compelling explanation for underdevelopment in the Middle East, particularly in the oil-exporting countries. Yet when viewed from a larger historical and comparative perspective, there are strong reasons to be skeptical of this argument. Most studies of the so-called resource curse adopt a relatively short-term perspective. Oil-rich countries experience more volatile growth rates and underperform with respect to their own wealth endowments, but their long-term growth rates are no slower than those of non-oil economies.⁷² Furthermore, resource inflows do not necessarily hinder development. Other oil-rich countries such as Norway have managed to escape the alleged inevitability of the resource curse. In the developing world, resource-rich countries such as Indonesia, a major oil exporter, and Botswana, which has vast mineral deposits, have also managed to attain sustained records of economic growth.

Recent studies hold that the timing of the discovery and exploitation of oil in relation to state-building processes shapes how resource wealth affects political and economic development. When oil is exploited in conjunction with the construction of state institutions, it may obviate the need to establish efficient tax bureaucracies because rulers have so much income at their disposal.⁷³ In the literature on the political economy of development, it has become virtually axiomatic that weak state institutions limit the prospects for economic development because state agencies direct resources to productive sectors and facilitate a climate conducive to investment.⁷⁴ Other research suggests that ownership structure is a critical factor mediating the effects of oil resources on economic development. Under private domestic ownership rather than state control, oil wealth is less likely to weaken state institutions.⁷⁵ Yet recent research questions the alleged negative repercussions of oil wealth on state institutional quality: Oil wealth does not diminish state strength but rather requires governments to perform exceptionally well in order to manage windfall profits effectively.⁷⁶

These critiques of the resource curse argument suggest that oil wealth in and of itself does not explain economic decline in the Middle East. Furthermore, although oil revenues have enabled capital and labor flows to circulate throughout the Middle East, not all countries in the region are oil rich, and therefore, resource wealth cannot provide a uniform explanation for economic decline. Even among resource-rich countries, economic and social outcomes vary substantially across high- and low-population oil exporters. As noted earlier, within the Middle East, the resource curse has really afflicted the MOCs, which experienced significantly lower growth rates than the low-population HOC oil exporters (whether measured on aggregate or on a per capita basis). The higher population oil-rich countries lack the per capita resources to spread wealth among their citizens and to invest in growth-promoting ventures.¹⁷

The “Governance Gap”

Beyond the challenges posed by natural-resource wealth for some countries in the Middle East, oil endowments may have contributed to poor economic performance in less direct ways. Oil wealth, which has spread indirectly throughout the region through foreign aid and remittance earnings, facilitated the establishment of an “interventionist-redistributive” development model.⁷⁸ This model is characterized by redistribution and equity in economic and social policy, precedence for state-planning over market-based allocation, protectionism, a comprehensive state role in the provision of welfare and social services, and the suppression of contestation in the political arena.⁷⁹ Aided by resource wealth, then, rulers established bargains or social contracts with their citizens that entailed generous state social programs for citizens in exchange for political acquiescence. The nature of these social contracts, however, varies across the distinct types of political economies. For example, higher resource endowments and lower citizen populations facilitated the establishment of more generous and sustained social benefits in the RRLP countries than in other Middle Eastern countries.

More broadly, variation in social contracts reflects distinct patterns of governance across the different types of MENA political economies. Increasingly, explanations for poor economic performance in the Middle East—and in other developing regions—focus on governance.⁸⁰ As the World Bank holds, “Public governance is good when this process is inclusive of everyone and when the people can hold accountable those who make and implement the rules.”⁸¹ Inclusive and accountable governance is assumed to produce positive developmental outcomes by increasing popular participation and influence on policymaking, thereby increasing the probability that policies serving the welfare of the people will be enacted. With growing emphasis on private sector-led development, good governance has attained increased importance. Respect for the rule of law is critical for firms, which require assurances that their assets will not be expropriated and have a chance of reaping good returns before they will invest. Arbitrary enforcement of laws and regulations, then, is a deterrent to private investment.

The major source of the governance gap between the Middle East and other regions is the lack of public accountability to the population and citizen access to political and civic rights. [Figure 7.13](#) shows that the Middle East’s respectable performance vis-à-vis other regions on a variety of governance indicators, including the rule of law, government effectiveness, and control of corruption, disappears with respect to the indicator for “voice and accountability,” which measures the extent to which a country’s citizens can freely select their government, as well as freedom of expression, freedom of association, and a free media.⁸²

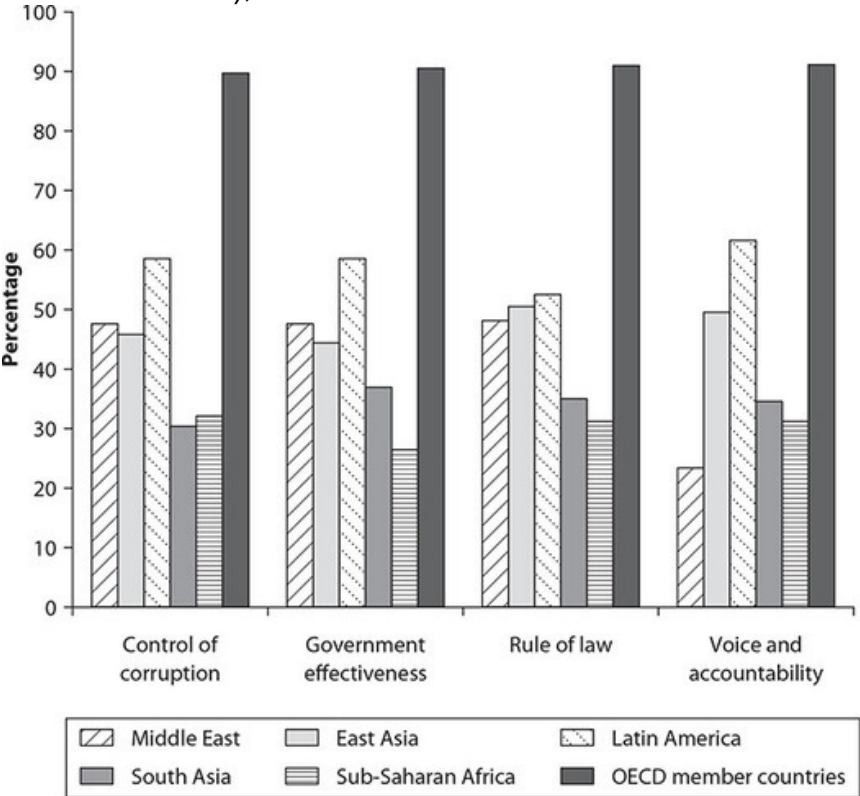
In the case of the oil-dependent economies, governments compensate for limited accountability by providing public goods to maintain citizen satisfaction, although the

HOCs have far more resources to spread around for these purposes than the more budget-constrained MOCs. In the poorer non-oil economies, elites with close ties to rulers profit from limited accountability in the system to maintain their privileged access to economic opportunities.

The World Bank has not been alone in linking the quality of political institutions to relative underdevelopment in the Middle East. The AHDR reports (2002, 2003, and 2004) condemn low levels of freedom and tie them to poor economic outcomes, such as the failure to create the human capital needed to compete effectively in globalized markets. The 2002 report notes,

Human development is inextricably linked with human freedom. Human development emphasizes enhancement of human capabilities, which reflects the freedom to achieve different things that people value. . . . This freedom, the ability to achieve things that people value, cannot be used if opportunities to exercise this freedom do not exist. (p. 18)

Figure 7.13 Governance Indicators in Different Global Regions (Average Percentile Rank), 2010

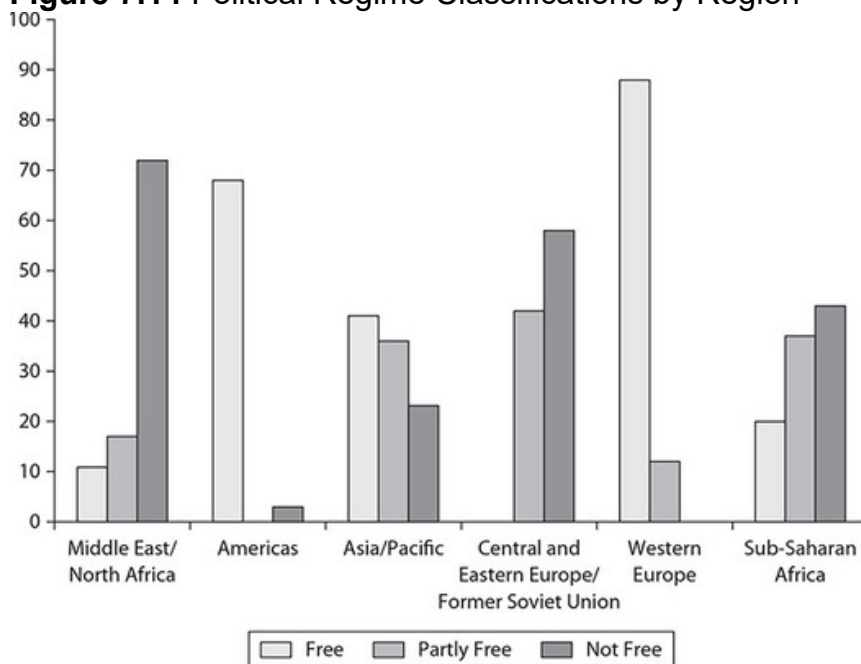


Source: Kaufmann et al. (2011).

Political, economic, and social rights are integral to achieving human development, yet according to the report, the Arab world is particularly deficient in political freedom. As [Figure 7.14](#) shows, even after the Arab uprisings the Middle East hosts the largest number of authoritarian regimes, as measured by Polity IV data on levels of democracy, in comparison with other global regions.

The relative dearth of political freedom and failure to uphold the rule of law inhibit the formulation and implementation of policies that benefit the public good, rather than private interests.⁸³ As Clement Henry and Robert Springborg argue, authoritarianism and the related lack of transparency in the political economies of the region are major obstacles to attracting foreign investment and spurring domestic capital holders to make long-term investments. Corruption and bureaucratic red tape deter the levels of private and foreign investment needed to sustain economic growth and ultimately inhibit further integration of Middle Eastern countries in the global economy.⁸⁴ Furthermore, the selective incorporation of private-sector elites into ruling coalitions deterred business from developing a class consciousness, which might have facilitated more organized defense of collective interests vis-à-vis predatory rulers with short-time horizons.⁸⁵

Figure 7.14 Political Regime Classifications by Region



Source: Freedom House, “Freedom in the World 2015.”

Arguments linking poor governance or authoritarianism with relative underdevelopment in the Middle East are compelling. Political repression inhibits labor and other social groups from organizing in defense of their interests and

makes private capital holders hesitant to initiate new projects and undertake long-term investment. Yet this perspective provokes additional questions. First, in the context of US interventionism in the region, the linkage between authoritarianism and underdevelopment raises normative issues. For example, Middle Eastern critics of the AHDR argue that these arguments are politically motivated and play into the hands of Western democracy-promotion projects and promarket interests in the region.⁸⁶ Second, just as corruption may hinder economic development, underdevelopment and weak state capacity create incentives for corruption. Thus, corruption and poor economic outcomes are mutually constitutive.⁸⁷ Furthermore, divide-and-rule approaches to regime survival may result in a governance trap, in which a lack of coordination between the state, business, and labor inhibits the adoption of more effective and inclusive economic and social policies.

Beyond normative and theoretical critiques, empirical evidence from other regions suggests that corruption and authoritarian rule can be compatible with development under certain conditions, and studies of the relationship between regime type and economic development are indeterminate.⁸⁸ The case of South Korea is illustrative. In the 1970s and 1980s, South Korea experienced double-digit growth rates and rapid economic development. This remarkable transition, which has served as a model for developing countries across the globe, occurred in the context of authoritarian rule, political repression, and corruption.⁸⁹ “Cozy” business-government relations, a feature of most Middle Eastern political economies in various guises,⁹⁰ were also characteristic of South Korea during its high-growth period.⁹¹ The real question, then, is what forms of corruption are associated with lower growth rates and which forms seem less likely to impede or may even promote growth.

Finally, even if authoritarianism and poor governance impede development, the origins of corruption, lack of transparency, and weak state institutions in Middle Eastern political economies deserve much more systematic analysis. Scholars of development increasingly view effective extractive, regulatory, and administrative institutions as critical to development,⁹² and hence, explaining the roots of effective and ineffective state institutions is paramount. Recent studies point to the historical roots of capable state and societal institutions in postcolonial countries and trace the effects of colonialism on subsequent development outcomes.⁹³ In the Middle East, however, relatively little is known about the precise impact of Ottoman and colonial institutions on the evolution of state institutions and forms of economic management in postindependence states. These protracted colonial experiences disrupted and altered existing economic and social practices in the region and, therefore, shaped growth and development trajectories in the long run.

Conclusion

Regardless of the causes and nature of underdevelopment in the Middle East, the stakes are high, particularly for ordinary people throughout the region. The large-scale rollback of the state in the 1980s and 1990s has marked politics and economic change in the Middle East ever since. In order to stabilize the political situation in the face of mounting opposition, rulers liberalized their economies reluctantly and selectively. Resorting to divide-and-rule strategies, rulers have relied on a combination of selective subsidies and repression as well as fear mongering about political Islam, leading to an increasingly fragile and narrow-governing coalition. In so doing, the old regimes reinvented themselves as market friendly but in highly discriminatory ways, creating new rents that accrue as a result of privileges and exclusion. As a result, economic growth was far less inclusive than in the past, much of the private sector became informal, monopolies and *wasta* rather than competitive markets became the rule, little trickle down occurred, and inequalities rose. Although the economies of the region began to expand again after the “lost decade” of the 1980s and 1990s, growth was neither inclusive nor sufficient to drive major economic transformation.

The uprisings and revolutions that touched off in late 2010 had profound negative consequences in many countries in the Middle East, in part because repressive rulers strove to contain the protests while new governments failed to bring about real change. Tourism took a hit, capital flight accelerated, exports declined, and investment collapsed in Tunisia, Egypt, and Yemen. As a result, economic growth declined sharply in 2011 and only stabilized at lower levels in 2012 and 2013. For several years after the protests first erupted, a spate of terrorist attacks threatened the economies of Tunisia and Egypt. While Tunisia has formally transitioned to democracy, ruling elites remain unable or unwilling to deliver meaningful socioeconomic benefits to the population, and Egypt has become even more repressive than it was prior to the uprisings.

A civil war with extensive regional involvement, including a large-scale bombing campaign led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which aims to counter alleged Iranian interference, has wracked Yemen. Output collapsed in Libya, given the disruption to its oil production, and with the virtual collapse of state institutions, political violence is rising and extremist groups have established control over parts of the national territory. Syria has been devastated with a staggering death toll and millions of displaced people and refugees. The Syrian economy has taken a big hit, and the destruction of assets is already estimated in the tens of billions of dollars. The economies of Lebanon and Jordan have also been negatively affected by regional instability and the influx of refugees. Across the region, unemployment has increased.

The political and economic challenges facing these countries are compounded by high popular expectations, which are in part derived from the legacies of social contracts established in the first decades after independence. While the precise role of the state in the economy must be reimagined, the reconstruction of state capacity and the rehabilitation of public services, especially health, education, and social protection, must stand at the center of reforms. Another central focus should be on private sector development. Improving competition and fighting monopolies, reducing politically connected privileges, and democratizing access to credit are essential to reduce informality and make the private sector more dynamic. These are all complicated reforms—politically, technically, and bureaucratically—and they will shape in many ways the challenges for policymakers for years to come.

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8 International Relations

Marc Lynch

The Arab spring unleashed dramatic changes in the international relations of the Middle East. Wars in Syria, Yemen, Iraq, and Libya attracted intense international intervention while unleashing waves of refugees, shattering states, and empowering extremist movements. Traditionally powerful states such as Egypt and Syria receded from the diplomatic scene, while Iran, Turkey, and Gulf states intervened across the region in support of friendly regimes and against rivals. Nonstate Islamist actors such as the Muslim Brotherhood and the self-proclaimed Islamic State took unprecedented international roles. A US-led coalition negotiated a pathbreaking nuclear agreement with Iran only to see the United States later walk away from the deal. Key Arab states worked increasingly closely with Israel against Iran despite the absence of progress on the Palestinian-Israeli peace process.

The region's current political turmoil may seem exceptionally complex, but such patterns are far from unique. In the 1950s, the regional struggle known as the "Arab cold war" saw the fall of multiple governments to popular protests and military coup, the rise of pan-Arabism as a powerful transnational force, the voluntary merger between Egypt and Syria, and a lengthy Egyptian military intervention in Yemen. Nearly thirty years later, the Iranian revolution in 1979 upended the US-led alliance system in the Gulf, set off a revolutionary wave across much of the region, and led to an Iraqi invasion and eight long years of devastating war, just as Egypt realigned with the United States and Israel. The end of the Cold War in 1989 led to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the launch of the Arab-Israeli peace process, and the dramatic introduction of large-scale, semipermanent US military presence in the Gulf. The mid-2000s were shaped by the US invasion and occupation of Iraq, inconclusive war between Israel and Hizbullah, spiraling sectarianism and

terrorism, and tentative moves toward an Israeli-Gulf alignment against Iran.

Not everything in the international relations of the Middle East is so turbulent, however. There have been long periods of continuity and often unappreciated zones of stability. The Palestinian issue has occupied a central role in regional politics since at least the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. Negotiations towards a two-state solution have been ongoing for nearly a quarter century, while the peace between Egypt and Israel has lasted nearly forty years. The United States has maintained a dominant position in the Gulf and the Levant since 1991, and from that point until 2011, it sustained robust alliances with almost every state in the Middle East other than Iran and Syria. Conflict between Iran and both Israel and its Arab neighbors has been a constant since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

How to explain both these long-term patterns and the recurrence of turbulent international politics? These patterns of regional alliances and power struggles in the Middle East have long been fertile ground for theorists in the field of international relations. For some, Middle Eastern regional politics are characterized by a uniquely high level of identity, ideology, and religious concerns. Arabs or Muslims, in this view, have a distinctive political culture that leads them to respect only force or makes them exceptionally susceptible to radical ideological appeals. For others, the region is the epitome of cold-blooded realpolitik, shaped by little more than the survival calculations of authoritarian leaders who bow to public opinion only when absolutely forced to do so. Which view is right—and when? How do the states of the Middle East formulate their foreign policies? Are there consistent patterns of regional international relations? What might change them?

A range of widely accepted theoretical approaches to the international politics of the Middle East offers radically different answers to such questions. Realism, the dominant theory in international relations, argues that Middle Eastern states are fundamentally rational actors competing for power in a hostile,

anarchic environment shaped by the constant threat of war and subversion.¹ A variant of realism—called regime security—contends that the primary concern of Arab leaders in this hostile environment is not the interests of their states, but rather their own survival in power against both internal and external threats.² A political economy school of thought emphasizes the role of oil and of the historical construction of distinctive state forms.³ A constructivist approach focuses on the role of ideas, identity, and ideology in shaping the dynamics and patterns of regional politics—with hostility toward Israel or conflict with Iran, for instance, shaped as much by identity as by security or power concerns.⁴

These theoretical differences have important real-world implications. Whether Iran is understood fundamentally as a realist actor, as a unified state rationally pursuing self-interest in an anarchic and high-risk environment, or as an ideologically motivated actor pursuing power in the name of Islamic revolution matters a great deal in deciding how to respond to its pursuit of a nuclear program. The Iranian pursuit of a nuclear weapons program might be seen as the logical move of a regional great power in a competitive environment (realism), a gamble aimed at preserving the survival of a regime threatened at home and abroad (regime security), or an expression of a distinctive revolutionary ideology (constructivism). Each perspective would point to fundamentally different policies toward Iran.

Iraq offers another example. Whether Iraq embarked on so many wars in the 1980s and 1990s because of Saddam Hussein's unique worldview and ideology or because of Iraq's difficult power position between Iran, the Gulf, and Israel matters a lot for deciding whether invading Iraq to change the regime would fundamentally change regional politics. The realist may read the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 as a response to a rapidly shifting global and regional balance of power in which Iraq seized an opportunity to increase its power but miscalculated the international response. A constructivist may see the same decision as a function of the Ba'athist ideology of Iraq's leadership or of its bid to reshape the norms of the Arab order. But

for the regime security theorist, the invasion may have primarily been about Saddam's perception of threats to his own survival, both internal and external—a desperate bid to escape a closing trap rather than an aggressive bid for hegemony. Which of these explanations best accounts for the behavior of key players clearly matters for our understanding of regional politics and for how best to respond to regional events at the policy level.

While some are most impressed by the timeless, recurring patterns of behavior in the Middle East—whether attributed to a fixed political culture or to the deep realities of geopolitics and the balance of power—at least some patterns of alliances and competition have changed dramatically over the years. Egypt and Israel have gone from fierce enemies to reliable allies, while Iran has shifted from being America's closest regional ally to its most potent adversary.⁵ Foreign policy moves that would have been unthinkable at one time, such as an Arab state making peace with Israel or invading a fellow-Arab state, at other times become normal.

The Arab cold war of the 1950s pitted Arab nationalists against conservative, Western-backed Arab states, and the various would-be leaders of Arab nationalism against each other in vicious political warfare.⁶ During the 1970s, more of a realpolitik dynamic set in as states established their internal dominance over domestic opponents and normalized their relations with one another. Egypt, which fought multiple wars against Israel and led the regional campaign against it for decades, made peace with its enemy, and the two states became close strategic allies. In the 1980s, most of the Arab world backed Iraq against Iran—but Syria, one of the most avowedly Arabist of states, sided with Iran against its Ba'athist rival. But in 1990, those same Arab states largely supported the US-led war against Iraq to liberate Kuwait.

The 1990s were dominated by growing US unipolarity, stewardship of the Arab-Israeli peace process, and maintenance of “dual containment” in the Gulf. Since September 11, 2001, the US invasion of Iraq and the so-called global war on terror have been

accompanied by a renewed cold war between a US-Saudi camp and an Iranian resistance camp. The struggle over Iran's nuclear weapons program seemed to have finally been resolved in 2015 with the negotiation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, but it resurged in 2018 with the US withdrawal from the agreement. The Arab uprisings of 2011 triggered multiple wars and political interventions that featured different lines of conflict and cooperation: Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey against Iran in Syria; Qatar against the UAE and Egypt in Libya.

Which matters more: the persistence of basic patterns such as the pursuit of regime survival or the enduring risk of war and domestic subversion? What best explains these patterns: changes in the international and regional balance of power; new ideas and identities; or the shifting domestic capacity and political stability of states?

This chapter proceeds as follows. First, it lays out some of the key conceptual and theoretical issues that lie at the heart of any systematic analysis of regional international politics. After considering what, if anything, might make the Middle East unique compared with other parts of the world, the first section analyzes the nature of anarchy in the Middle East, the nature of power, the importance of domestic political and security concerns relative to international concerns, and the role of identity and the importance of transnational actors. The chapter then offers a brief overview of the major players in regional politics, highlighting their power potential and their foreign policy proclivities over the years, and looks in some detail at the changing role of the United States and other international actors. Third, the chapter shows the different patterns of regional politics across historical periods—the Arab cold war of the 1950s and 1960s, the state-dominated politics of the 1970s and 1980s, the post-Cold War period of the 1990s, the post-9/11 period of the invasion of Iraq, and the turbulent world shaped by the Arab uprisings that began in 2011. Finally, it considers the potential for stability or change in the post-Arab uprisings Middle East.

Conceptualizing the International Relations of the Middle East

International relations theory builds upon the insight that foreign policy and important political outcomes are shaped not only by the internal politics of states but also by the structure within which those states are embedded. International structures, defined in terms of the distribution of power, threat, identities, and institutions, have their own distinctive logic that must be understood on their own terms. While domestic politics and individual leaders are important, they are insufficient for understanding alliance choices, the initiation of wars, patterns of economic aid, or the conclusion of peace agreements. This section outlines the key dimensions of international structure, including the ordering principle of anarchy and the variety of international institutions, the distribution of power in all its components, the embeddedness of the regional order within a broader international order, identities, and the logic of the security dilemma.

The states of the Middle East, as in every international system, compete with one another for power, security, and ideological influence in an environment that is formally anarchic. The possibility of war and the prevalence of both internal and external challenges to regime stability structures the foreign policy choices of these states. In this intensely competitive environment, Arab leaders are primarily concerned with ensuring their own survival, whether through the formation of foreign alliances or the mobilization of domestic resources. The nature of those threats has changed dramatically over the years, as authoritarian regimes and state structures have hardened, the international environment has transformed, and the ideological stakes have been redefined. The upsurge of popular mobilization in 2011, which toppled several long-sitting Arab rulers and pushed others into civil war, exacerbated those perceptions of threat.

Anarchy and Regional Institutions

International relations theory generally begins with the concept of anarchy. This does not mean chaos; it means the absence of any central authority able to legitimately make and enforce agreements. Anarchy means that war is always possible, even if unlikely, and therefore, every state must above all else be concerned with providing for its own security and survival. States in such an environment can never count on others, even their closest allies, to provide for security because no commitment can be enforced, and self-interest must dominate regardless of intentions or affinity. Realism therefore argues that anarchy forces states to pursue their own security and national interests, even at the expense of ideology, morality, or domestic preferences, or else risk severe consequences.

Such a system of anarchy typically produces a balance of power, in which states form alignments that will protect them from threats while maintaining independence. For realists, ideology, identity, and public discourse are a mask for the underlying state interests and pursuit of power and should not be taken at anything close to face value. Domestic political systems are not particularly important, and democracy would make little difference because ultimately states are forced by the structure of the system to pursue similar strategies. In the end, it does not especially matter to the realist whether Iraq is ruled by a totalitarian Sunni (Saddam Hussein) or by a democratically elected Shi'a (Nuri al-Maliki) because Iraq remains in the same structural position in the region and will have no choice but to balance against its many powerful neighbors.

The security dilemma—meaning the unintended consequences of the search for security under anarchy—is a key concept for those who subscribe to realism.⁷ The security dilemma does not refer simply to the prosaic fact of insecurity or competition—after all, war fought for valid reasons would be destructive but not a tragedy. The security dilemma refers to a perverse logic in which the search for security through increased military power becomes self-defeating as

others feel threatened and arm themselves in response. Israel's efforts to provide for its own security, for example, have led it to adopt a range of hawkish, militaristic policies toward its Arab neighbors that then generated a self-fulfilling prophecy of hostility and mistrust. The security dilemma explains why states so often find themselves spiraling into unnecessary wars and find it so hard to break these cycles of conflict.

Not all anarchy is created equal, however. Recent international relations scholarship has introduced variations in the structural nature of anarchy, with variations in the institutional environment, in the degree of hierarchy, and in the surrounding culture. In densely institutionalized international environments such as the European Union (EU), war becomes exceedingly unlikely and ceases to be a primary motivation for states; international politics then take on many of the characteristics of domestic politics.⁸ Constructivists such as Alexander Wendt have further argued that anarchies have distinctive cultures in which the likelihood of war varies dramatically, independent of anarchy. A region with recent experience of war, borders that cannot easily be defended, few shared institutions, autocratic governments, or irredentist movements will face a more acute risk of war—which then can become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Even by constructivist standards, however, the Middle East seems to remain one of the most realist parts of the world, with a high risk of war, deep mistrust, and fierce competitiveness. There is no central authority capable of making or enforcing binding decisions, and the region's international institutions are notoriously weak and ineffectual. There is nothing to prevent war, which means that states must always prepare for its possibility. And the tense, suspicious, conflict-ridden nature of the region means that the implications of anarchy should be particularly intense. The Middle East remains highly state centric, with few signs of a willingness to surrender control to international institutions in order to achieve the benefits of economic or political integration.⁹ The Arab League has never been an efficacious organization in any meaningful sense. The institution of the Arab Summit, regularly bringing together Arab heads of state

to confer on regional issues, is more significant but has no real institutional component. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) for years offered some limited coordination mechanisms for the Gulf states, but efforts to transform it into a vehicle for economic and political integration have routinely failed—and in 2017, the GCC proved unable to mediate the competition between its member states Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE.

International and Regional Orders

While formally anarchic, the Middle Eastern regional system is necessarily embedded in the wider international environment because of its oil and its geopolitical centrality. As early as 1959, Leonard Binder described the region as a “subordinate regional system,” whose dynamics were fundamentally shaped by the interests of relations with outside powers. Throughout the Cold War, the Soviet Union and the United States identified the region as a crucial battlefield of a global struggle—meaning that few local conflicts could remain truly local. The Egyptian decisions both to launch war against Israel in 1973 and to pursue peace afterward were driven in large part by an effort to engage US support.¹⁰ Since the end of the Cold War, the US role as the primary international patron of almost every state in the region has rendered it virtually impossible to analyze the region’s international relations in isolation from the growing direct role of the United States. From 1990 until relatively recently, the Gulf region looked more like a US imperium than like a true anarchy.¹¹

The nature of the relationship between the global and the regional is complex, however. Local actors pursue their own interests, but within a playing field shaped by the global distribution of power and institutional order. It is important to see the ways in which global structure shapes these local decisions and dynamics, which might otherwise appear unrelated. During the Cold War, there was a tendency to view many of the region’s developments through a global lens, leading to crucial misunderstandings of the importance of local dynamics. The intense focus on the internal dynamics of the Arab Spring may have led to a comparable neglect of the importance of the global system, particularly the changing US role, in shaping the region’s shifting patterns. US hegemony alleviated the effects of anarchy, as it could play the role of interlocutor between potentially hostile states, providing security guarantees to mitigate the pressures of security dilemma dynamics and blocking escalation toward war. The relative decline of the United States over the last

decade and the growing role of competitors such as Russia have reintroduced uncertainty about and competition over the international role in the Middle East.

Box 8.1 Regional Institutions

Arab Summit. Beginning in 1964, meetings of the Arab Summit have brought together the heads of state of the member countries of the League of Arab States to discuss issues of regional interest. There have been thirty-one summit meetings, including a number of emergency summits held at moments of crisis. Meetings of the Arab Summit, rather than meetings of the Arab League, have been the most important location for the formulation of common Arab political positions and for the airing of intra-Arab political conflicts. Among the most important Arab Summit meetings have been Khartoum (1967), which formulated the collective response to the June 1967 War; Rabat (1974), which declared the Palestine Liberation Organization to be the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people; Cairo (1990), which decided to support the United States in its opposition to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait; and Beirut (2002), which endorsed the Saudi peace plan as a solution for the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Gulf Cooperation Council. Created in 1981, the GCC comprises six wealthy Arab Gulf states (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates). Although technically a trade bloc and an economic cooperation zone, the GCC has primarily been a political and security organization designed to coordinate a response to more powerful neighbors such as Iraq and (especially) Iran. After decades of relative success, the GCC was disrupted in 2017 by the blockade of Qatar, led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and has largely ceased to function as an international organization.

League of Arab States. Established in 1945 with six members, the Arab League is a formal international organization composed of all states that identify as Arab (formally, with Arabic being the mother tongue of the majority of the population). It currently has twenty-two members. Based in Cairo, it hosts a number of technical agencies promoting inter-Arab cooperation, but it has little formal authority or power.

Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). Formed in 1960, OPEC includes both Middle Eastern and non-Middle Eastern

states. A cartel designed to coordinate petroleum policy among its member states, OPEC has achieved notable successes in its history, especially the 1973 oil embargo that contributed to dramatically increasing the price of oil. OPEC has been plagued, however, by persistent cheating by countries that produce in excess of their quotas in order to maximize their revenues, and it has struggled in the face of changes in the global oil markets.

The most fundamental characteristic of any international system is its polarity, the number of great powers competing for influence in the region. In the years before the Cold War, the Middle East was profoundly shaped by the multipolar struggle between European great powers. During the Cold War, this resolved into a bipolar structure, with two great powers defining the terms of foreign policy possibility. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States emerged as the sole great power in a unipolar system. Since 2011, American primacy has faded, while Russia and China have taken on greater roles, creating an ambiguous system that is no longer unipolar but not yet truly multipolar. Each of these structures has distinctive dynamics that help to explain a great many patterns that might otherwise seem to have idiosyncratic causes.

The Middle East during the age of multipolarity was a key site of the “great game,” profoundly shaped by the European global competition for power and influence. As [Chapter 1](#) details, colonialism entered the Middle East over the course of centuries of such competition. The decline of the Ottoman Empire was manifested by the steady intrusion of European powers into its realm, culminating in the cataclysmic events of World War I. The international system in the Middle East is a product of the resolution of that war, most obviously with the drawing of the borders of the Levant and its division into British and French spheres of influence. The post–World War I period was shaped by nationalist struggles against European colonial rule and the emergence of new forms of Arab nationalism defined by anticolonial resistance.

The resolution of World War II and the crystallization of the Cold War decisively changed the international structure, with crucial

implications for the Middle East. By the late 1940s, international politics had settled into a tense bipolar struggle between the Western and Soviet blocs. Maintaining the regular flow of oil from the Gulf became a vital national interest for the United States and a key to the reconstruction of Europe's economy. The Suez crisis of 1956 marked a decisive transition from multipolarity to bipolarity in the Middle East. Britain and France conspired with Israel to seize the Suez Canal in a bid to defeat Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser and restore the former colonial powers to a leading position in regional affairs. The United States, concerned primarily about losing vital Arab states to Soviet influence and about asserting its own primacy within the Western alliance, forced its allies to withdraw. This established US primacy and demonstrated the overwhelming priority of the global Cold War over local political interests. Over the following years, France, consumed by the escalating Algerian war for independence, receded as a Middle Eastern power. Britain retained its bases in the Gulf until 1971 before finally ceding that role as well.

During the Cold War, regional states could maneuver between the two competing blocs in search of military, political, and economic support. Nasser, for example, expertly played the United States and the Soviet Union against each other in the 1950s, gaining food aid and support for the Aswan Dam from the West while obtaining arms from Czechoslovakia. Each superpower was closely attuned to the possible defection of its local allies and to the possibility of disrupting the other's alliances. The mutual Security Council vetoes by the two superpowers sharply limited the ability of the United Nations to act. The zero-sum logic of bipolarity meant that the loss of an ally rebounded to the benefit of the other pole, even if the defector did not join the rival bloc: The 1958 Iraqi revolution, for instance, benefited the Soviet bloc by removing a major Western ally even though the successive governments that followed did not become reliable Soviet clients. Egypt's decision to seek peace with Israel in 1979 shifted a key Soviet ally into the American camp. While regular norms of interaction evolved over time, there were moments of real crisis, as in 1973 when the two superpowers came to the brink of nuclear confrontation over the Israeli-Egyptian war in the Sinai.

The unipolarity that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union created an entirely different structural context for regional international relations. With only one superpower, all roads led through Washington, forcing all regional states to choose between becoming part of the US-led system or to be designated as rogue states subject to international sanctions and threat of war. With no Soviet countervailing power, the direct US presence in the region rapidly expanded. American efforts in the 1990s to contain both Iran and Iraq required a massively expanded direct military presence and the consolidation of an extensive network of military bases. It also supervised the Arab-Israeli peace process, which offered not just a potential resolution of that long-running conflict but a route into the American-led system for states such as Syria and for the PLO, as well as a vehicle for sustaining simultaneous alliance with both Israel and its ostensible Arab enemies. By the mid-2000s, almost every state in the Middle East had aligned with the United States, with the sole remaining exceptions being Iran and Syria (following the failure of nearly a decade of US-backed peace negotiations with Israel).

After 9/11, the system remained unipolar, but US policy in the region dramatically changed. Rather than remaining a status quo power working to preserve a regional order, the United States became a revisionist power actively working to change the regional balance of power and the broader regional political culture. The invasion of Iraq removed one of the major regional powers, creating a vacuum filled by Iran, US forces, and a *mélange* of insurgent groups. The global war on terror and the Bush administration's "Freedom Agenda" drastically expanded the American role within the domestic politics and institutions of its regional allies, disrupting long-standing accommodations with the survival strategies of those regimes. The Israeli-Palestinian peace process was downgraded in US policy in comparison to the management of the occupation of Iraq, the regional confrontation with Iran, and the struggle against Islamist terrorism.

On the eve of the Arab uprisings, the United States remained a unipolar power, but its dominance had faded. Scarred by the

occupation of Iraq, the interminable war on terror, and the ramifications of the global financial crisis, Washington sought to step back from its regional commitments. Its withdrawal from Iraq, pursuit of a nuclear accord with Iran, refusal to engage militarily in Syria's war, and mixed response to the Arab uprisings further disrupted its regional alliances. The overall international system could not yet be described as bipolar or multipolar, however, despite rising Chinese influence and resurgent Russian confrontationalism. It would be more accurate to describe the global balance of power as uncertain and less predictable than in the past, with greater questions about the nature of US commitments and capabilities driving new foreign policy tactics by many regional states.

The Elements of Power

What counts for power in the Middle East? Traditionally, military capabilities have been seen as the ultimate source of power in international affairs. The Middle East suggests a more complex definition. The role of external powers discussed earlier somewhat mediates the direct relevance of military capabilities. Economic capabilities, especially oil, have been critical in defining power relations, as have ideological appeals. Media platforms, such as satellite television stations like Qatar's Al-Jazeera and Saudi Arabia's Al-Arabiya, are a crucial form of power projection. So is alignment with a powerful transnational network, such as Qatar and Turkey's ties to the Muslim Brotherhood or Iran's relationship with Shi'a militias. A relationship with an external power can also increase the power of a local actor. Jordan, for instance, parlayed a close relationship with the United States into outsized influence in the region.

In an odd twist—not a coincidence, in the belief of most Arab nationalists, who blame colonial powers for preventing any one Arab state from uniting a large population with great oil wealth—almost no Arab states combine all the aspects of potential national power.¹² Egypt is large and has a strong state, but it lacks oil and has steadily lost both economic stature and ideological appeal since the 1960s. Saudi Arabia is wealthy, but it has a relatively small population and weak military. Iraq combines oil wealth with a sizable population, but it has been wracked by internal sectarian struggles and is checked by powerful neighbors (Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Syria) on most of its borders. Less powerful states—Jordan, Lebanon, and Yemen—receive less attention because they tend to be takers rather than makers of regional alliances and conflict. The North African Maghreb states have also played less of a role over time, as their economies oriented toward Europe and their identities and political concerns grew distant from the central concerns of Arab politics.

Military Capabilities

Realism begins by identifying the great powers of the system, defined primarily by military capabilities. The strong do what they can, as Thucydides told us millennia ago, while the weak suffer what they must. Great powers are those with the material resources necessary to bid for regional leadership.

Realists traditionally focus on material capabilities when evaluating power. The great powers would be those with the size, population, economic base, and military power to compete for leadership or to force their interests to be taken into account. For realism, there are enduring patterns best explained by the distribution of power among leading states—not by ideology or identity. The area of the Persian Gulf is dominated by the balance of power between Iran and Iraq because two powerful states in close proximity will necessarily compete for influence and will fear for their security.

Because of the ultimate possibility of war, the essential measure of power is always military. But do military capabilities exhaust the nature of power in the Middle East? How is it measured, used, and understood? What exactly can Middle Eastern states do to, and for, one another? And based on these criteria, who are the great powers in the region?

Military power is not necessarily correlated with size, however. Qatar and the UAE today are able to project considerable military power abroad despite their tiny populations because they have developed very well-equipped, technologically advanced militaries with highly trained elite forces. They are also able to use their wealth and media empires to support like-minded groups across the region, giving them considerably greater power projection capability than their small size would suggest.

It is often claimed that the Middle East is uniquely war prone (see [Table 8.1](#)). This is not exactly correct, particularly given its level of

economic development. Until recently, most of the region’s wars have clustered around two nodes: Israel and Iraq. Nevertheless, the Middle East remains heavily militarized. The expectation of the possibility of war—so central to realist theory, turning the permissive condition of anarchy to concrete patterns of alliances and conflict—looms large in the Middle East. The perceived threat of war and the ongoing, grinding Israeli and Iraqi war clusters have contributed to a deep structural effect on regional politics. Since 2011, the wars in Syria, Yemen, and Libya have profoundly impacted their neighbors. The threat of war also has had a deeply constitutive effect on states themselves, justifying and sustaining political cultures and governing institutions dominated by national security.¹³ Regimes have shared an interest in perpetuating an atmosphere of conflict and war as a justification for massive security apparatuses and failures of development.

Table 8.1 Major Wars, Interventions, and Conflicts

Table 8.1 Major Wars, Interventions, and Conflicts

1948	Arab-Israeli War
1956	Suez War
1958	Jordan, Lebanon interventions; Iraqi revolution
1962	Yemen proxy war
1967	Arab-Israeli War
1970	Black September (Jordan vs. Palestine Liberation Organization)
1973	October War
1979	Iranian Revolution

1980	Iraq-Iran War
1982	Israeli invasion of Lebanon
1987	Palestinian intifada
1990	Iraqi invasion of Kuwait
1991	Persian Gulf War (Operation Desert Storm)
2000	Palestinian al-Aqsa intifada
2001	al-Qa'ida attack on United States on September 11
2003	US invasion of Iraq
2006	Israeli attack on Lebanon
2008– 2009	Israeli attack on Gaza
2011	NATO intervention in Libya
2011–	Syrian civil war
2015–	Saudi-UAE intervention in Yemen

Economic Factors

Oil and the distinctive political economy of the region have always played an important role in the balance of power and in the nature of politics. The intense international interest in the region is primarily driven by the importance of the regular flow of petroleum at reasonable prices to the functioning of the global economy. The region's political structures have been deeply shaped by what many call the "oil curse," in which the massive flow of revenues directly into state coffers fuels an outsized state security and patronage apparatus while crippling other sectors of the economy. The impact of oil has gone far beyond the oil-producing states. Large numbers of Arabs migrated from the poorer states to the Gulf starting in the 1960s to help build these new states by working as engineers and teachers and in all other sectors and sending their wages back as remittances.

Wealth matters in the calculation of power not only because it can be converted into military power (as in massive Gulf arms purchases during recent decades) but also because it can be used to buy influence or to shape the media and public discourse. Arab oil states have used their wealth to establish or influence a wide array of politicians, newspapers, and television stations—from Saudi ownership of multiple media outlets in the 1980s to Qatar's creation of al-Jazeera in the 1990s. The Middle East, and especially the Gulf, is one of the most lucrative markets in the world for arms sales.

This also translates into diplomatic weight. Saudi Arabia, using its vast wealth to make itself the center of regional diplomacy, has sought to monopolize Arab conflict resolution. Saudi Arabia has funded the establishment of hundreds of mosques and institutions to spread its version of Islam and contribute to a transformation of public culture from below. Qatar and the UAE have used their wealth to support clients and to influence peace negotiations in arenas from Palestine to Libya and Somalia. Wealth also strengthens the domestic resilience of Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar; in

2011, they were able to deflect popular uprisings and destabilization efforts sponsored by their rivals in part through significant increases in public spending. They also used these resources to prop up friendly governments (such as Jordan and Morocco) and to support opposition movements against their rivals (such as Libya and Syria). Wealth also creates vulnerabilities, particularly when it is rooted in petroleum resources beneath territory that could be seized by force (as Iraq attempted to seize Kuwait in 1990). But to the extent that war is impossible or highly unlikely (whether because of international constraints, such as US military bases on a country's soil, or because of an institutional or normative environment in which conquest would not pay politically), then other resources besides military become relevant.

Some posit that the Middle East is uniquely outside of Western economic globalization. Again, this is somewhat misplaced.¹⁴ It is true that the region is largely irrelevant in global trade flows, and it produces few products that are competitive on global markets. At the same time, the region is deeply involved in global capital flows, with petrodollar recycling an overlooked but crucial part of the global economic system. It has been deeply affected by the global information revolution, with rapidly growing Internet penetration and a powerful role for transnational satellite television. It has also been a major contributor to global migration flows, both inside the region (Arabs to the Gulf) and to the outside (from the Arab world to Europe, especially, and from South Asia to the Gulf).

Ideology and Identity

What the Middle East lacks in formal international institutions it more than makes up for with transnational identity and a wide array of informal rules and norms. The Arab order has some characteristics of what Hedley Bull once called an “anarchical society,” in which the absence of central authority is buffered by shared norms and expectations and relationships. Personal relationships and the shadow of the past matter in a system where states are governed almost exclusively by long-serving autocrats. With repeated interactions over decades—and every expectation of decades of interaction to come—Arab leaders tend to know and understand each other quite well (for better or for worse). This has changed over the last decade, however, as long-serving leaders such as Egypt’s Hosni Mubarak, Yemen’s Ali Abdallah Salih, and Libya’s Muammar al-Qadhafi were driven from office, and new leaders have risen to positions of power in Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

In this environment, ideology can be an important form of soft power, with states vying to mobilize public opinion to put pressure on other leaders. Constructivists argue that states compete in part by presenting themselves as the most effective defender of a shared cause, such as Palestine or the Syrian people. Realists counter that ideas often follow material power. Arab politics have been dominated by Egypt and Saudi Arabia—and not by Jordan and Oman, for instance—because Egypt had a large population and military and the other, Saudi Arabia, had a bottomless checkbook, not because of some intrinsic appeal of their ideas.

A common language and a politically salient identity bind the Arab world together, focusing political attention on core issues of shared concern such as Palestine. This has been reinforced in the past decade by the rise of transnational satellite television stations such as al-Jazeera, which broadcast across the region and tend to focus on issues of presumed shared concern and to frame issues within an explicit pan-Arab identity.¹⁵ This regionwide public sphere, bound by

a common language, common media, and common political frames, puts even the European public sphere to shame. This unusually robust transnational public sphere creates a political space that transcends state borders and creates a zone of political contention beyond either state or anarchy. The robust regional political culture and shared identity—a mismatch between state and nation—at least throw into question some of the basic assumptions about the logic of anarchy. When Jordan's King Abdallah warned in 2004 of a "Shi'a Crescent" of Iranian-backed states and movements spanning Iraq, Syria, and Hizbullah, for example, he pointed to a conception of regional politics defined by identity rather than by traditional realist concerns.

Defining identity is therefore a form of power. Regional politics look very different if defined by sectarianism (Sunni-Shi'ite), by religion, or by Arab nationalism. Defining Iran, Israel, or Turkey as fundamentally outside the system because of their non-Arab identity limits their ability to participate in regional institutions or to bid for regional hegemony. Israel's long exclusion from the Arab order defined the limits of its diplomacy and shaped its demand for "normalization" in the peace process. Identity also has behavioral effects. The power of a shared Arab identity could be seen in the rapid and intense diffusion of protests from Tunisia and Egypt to the entire Arab world in early 2011, as citizens across the Arabic-speaking world identified with popular struggles against repression. Such power for identity poses a sharp challenge to realists: Systems, they believe, should be defined not by self-conception but by security calculations. By this measure, Israel, Iran, and Turkey would be in—but marginal Arab countries might not. That few other regions have such potent arguments about who belongs is suggestive of the strength of identity in the foundations of regional politics.

Identity and ideology have been potent weapons and sources of threat for Arab states. More than twenty years ago, Steven Walt argued that Arab states prioritize threat rather than abstract considerations of material power. For Walt, an avowed realist,

A different form of balancing has occurred in inter-Arab relations. In the Arab world, the most important source of power has been the ability to manipulate one's image and the image of one's rivals in the minds of other Arab elites. Regimes have gained power and legitimacy if they have been seen as loyal to accepted Arab goals, and they have lost those assets if they have appeared to stray outside the Arab consensus.¹⁶

Michael Barnett, a constructivist, went further: "Arab states fought about the norms that should govern their relations; social processes, not social structures—defining norms of Arabism was an exercise of power and a mechanism of social control."¹⁷ Gregory Gause argues that "words—if it is feared that they will find resonance among a state's citizens—were seen as more immediately threatening than guns."¹⁸

Those who see identity as highly determinative in shaping political behavior—for example, Samuel Huntington in his famous "clash of civilizations" thesis, asserting the centrality to world politics of deep and immutable conflict between Islam and the West—assume that states that share a common identity will be likely to cooperate with one another and act as a coherent bloc in international politics. By this account, Iraq should become an Iranian proxy because its leadership predominantly shares a Shi'i religious identity, rather than balancing against Iranian power regardless of religious or ethnic identity, as realists would expect. The constructivist theorist Michael Barnett argues convincingly, however, that there is no reason to assume that a shared identity leads to more cooperative behavior. Certainly, the Middle East is full of examples of a common identity driving conflict rather than cooperation. Ba'athist Syria and Iraq were archenemies despite a shared ideology and identity, while the 1960s were dominated by intense conflict among Arab states. Barnett details how strategic framing processes are used to exercise power among a shared identity group, through mechanisms that he labels *symbolic sanctioning* (where actors try to make others pay a political

cost for their positions that stand outside the consensus), *symbolic competition* (outbidding, where actors are forced to up the ante in the face of political challenges), and *symbolic entrapment* (where actors are forced to deliver on rhetoric that they never meant to be taken seriously).¹⁹ Should Islamists come to executive power in multiple Arab countries through post-uprising elections or political bargains in the coming years, this argument would predict intense competition between such Islamist-led states for leadership rather than the easy emergence of a unified “Green Bloc.”

Identity matters in other ways as well. Israel, Iran, and Turkey punch well below their material weight inside Arab politics because of their identity and status. For all its military might, Israel has had very little influence within the Arab world and was ruled out as a possible alliance partner by virtue of the widely shared and deeply felt hostility to the Jewish state and Arab support for the Palestinian cause. Israel’s long struggle for security involved not only establishing military deterrence or peace treaties but also seeking “normalization” with a region that fundamentally rejected its legitimacy and identity. Iran’s Shi’i and Persian identity place it outside the predominantly Sunni Arab identity consensus—a consensus generated in large part by its adversaries’ efforts to deny it political influence. The active nurturing of sectarianism by Gulf states helped solidify the Arab front against Iran in the 1980s and has fueled at least some of the moves by Arab regimes in the 2000s to contain Iran even when public opinion views Iran more favorably. Turkey was a marginal player in the Middle East for decades because of the memories of its imperial past and because of its decision to orient its foreign policy toward the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and its efforts to be admitted into the European Union. It has returned to the Middle East in recent years in part by vocally embracing the Palestinian cause and pursuing dialogue with Iran and Syria, while seeking to maintain its good relations with the United States and Israel.

Identity and ideology have long been potent sources of power in the Middle East, defining the stakes of political competition. Egyptian power in the 1950s could not be reduced to its military might—

indeed, its military defeat in 1956 transformed into a political victory that galvanized Gamal Abdel Nasser's pan-Arab message, and its military challenge to Israel stood at the heart of its ideological appeal. Yasir Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) commanded great power for decades despite lacking a territorial state or even a stable base of operations. This is not to say that ideological appeal is completely independent of material capabilities. Arab states often built and demonstrated military might in order to build credibility for their ideas or used wealth to purchase support in the public realm more directly. They also used their ideas to mobilize support inside other states, to put pressure on their rivals from below, and in some cases, even to overthrow externally powerful rivals (the fall of the monarchy in Iraq in 1958, the voluntary decision by Syria to dissolve itself into a union with Egypt in 1958, and the near collapse of the monarchy in Jordan in the 1950s being the premier examples).

The new Arab media space that emerged in the late 1990s reshaped the nature and salience of identity politics.²⁰ The satellite television revolution, fueled by the Qatari station al-Jazeera, shattered the ability of states to monopolize the flow of information or opinion. Al-Jazeera and its competitors focused on issues of regionwide concern, rather than local affairs, with heavy coverage of Palestine, Iraq, and the need for social and political reform all framed within an overt Arab identity. Arab satellite TV fueled outrage over the second Palestinian intifada in 2000 and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank in 2002, as well as the US occupation of Iraq and the war on terror. This tipped the balance of forces more toward the populist edge of the mass public than had been the case since the 1960s—although regimes soon found ways to hit back against protestors and sought to recapture control over the political narrative. This transnational media, including both satellite television and the Internet, played a crucial role in the diffusion of protests across the region in 2011, as protestors from Sanaa to Tunis chanted identical slogans and issued identical demands against their rulers. But there were always limits to the power of this regional public opinion; it is telling that in 2003, at the height of al-Jazeera's influence and

audience and at a time of virtually unprecedented popular mobilization and anger, most Arab regimes felt comfortable quietly cooperating with the US-led invasion of Iraq.

Finally, it is important to note that there are several competing identities at play in the Middle East. Arabist identity competes with the nationalist identities cultivated by many states, with a real tension often appearing between the self-interest and patriotic feelings of an individual state and the collective interests or identity of the Arab world. Sectarian identity has become increasingly important to regional politics, as a broad struggle between Iran and the Gulf states intersects with the domestic concerns of Sunni monarchs ruling over Shi'i populations. Thus, the Asad regime in Syria, which long claimed an identity as a defender of pan-Arab interests, has been tagged with a *Shi'a* label because of its alliance with Iran and the heterodox Alawi religious identity of the Asad family. Sectarian identities and religious networks typically span borders as well, offering alternatives to state identity and creating opportunities for the mobilization of nonstate actors. Iran's ability to build and support Hizbullah in Lebanon and Shi'i political movements in Iraq have become an essential dimension of its regional power. Saudi Arabia and Qatar's mobilization of competing Sunni Islamist movements, and the UAE's fierce hostility to all Islamist trends, has similarly become an important part of each state's regional power and influence. Sectarian identities became increasingly central to regional politics following the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the Syrian civil war after 2011, each of which facilitated the expansion of Iranian power and spread violent images of sectarian warfare.

The salience of identities waxes and wanes. Islam has become an extremely potent identity in the Middle East during the past two decades, but in the 1950s and 1960s, it played virtually no role whatsoever in the great domestic and international political battles of the day. Finally, many countries in the region have intense internal identity conflicts that shape their international behavior: Jordan is divided between Palestinian- and Transjordan-origin (or West Bank and East Bank) citizens; Iraq is divided among Arab Sunnis, Shi'a,

and Kurds; and Israel faces tension between ultra-Orthodox Jews and secularists, as well as competing conceptions of whether the West Bank should be part of the state of Israel. Indeed, Benjamin Miller views the mismatch between *state* and *nation* as the most important driving force behind the conflict and instability of the Middle East.^{[21](#)}

State Strength and Regime Security

Domestic state strength should be seen not only as a concern of comparative politics but also as a crucial variable in the international politics of the region.²² If outright war has been uncommon, various forms of intervention across borders have been endemic. Strong powers routinely fought proxy political battles in weaker counterparts, from Syria in the 1950s²³ to Yemen in the 1960s²⁴ to Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Iraq today. The utility of such interventions is shaped in part by the degree of ideological potency and in part by variation in the opportunity to intervene—that is, domestic state strength. Since 1970, there has been significant “hardening” of Arab states, which has dramatically reduced their ability to engage in such meddling—except in those states, such as Yemen and Iraq, that are said to have “failed.” The Arab uprisings of 2011 have reopened some previously “hardened” states such as Tunisia, Libya, and Syria to such external meddling and proxy conflict, however. The direct military intervention in Yemen led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in 2015 and the Turkish deployments in northern Syria in 2017 mark a potentially significant shift from covert proxy interventions toward the direct deployment of hard power.

During the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, the great power of Arab authoritarian regimes, with their vast security services and societal control mechanisms, allowed them to largely ignore a vocally pro-Iraqi popular opinion. This contrasts sharply with the 1950s, when shaky regimes risked overthrow if they bucked the tides of a galvanized public opinion. While realists tend to emphasize external threats, in the Middle East “states overwhelmingly identified ideological and political threats emanating from abroad to the domestic stability of their ruling regimes as more salient than threats based upon aggregate power, geographic proximity and offensive capabilities.”²⁵ The focus on regime security offers a unified theory that points toward a specific mechanism driving state foreign policy behavior: Norms and ideology matter when they can mobilize threats to the regime’s survival, while rising powers threaten when they can mobilize domestic opposition against the regime.

This makes domestic state strength a key variable in calculating power balances. Syria, for instance, went from a weak state to a strong one between the 1950s and 1970s not because of dramatic changes in its size, wealth, or military capabilities but because of the consolidation of state power under Hafiz al-Asad. As Syrian state capacity grew, it no longer served as a battlefield on which others could wage their proxy battles. But with the appearance of a sustained uprising in Syria in the summer of 2011, the state lost that smothering control, and the country again became the object of regional power politics and competitive proxy interventions by Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, and others. Iraq today is a minor player in regional politics despite its large size and vast resources, in large part because of the weak state and sharply divided political system that were the outcomes of the US occupation after 2003. Whereas Iraq before 2003 was a major actor in regional politics, after 2003 it became an arena in which the strong states waged their proxy wars. For that to change will require not a larger Iraqi army but a more stable and competent Iraqi domestic state.

The focus on regime survival, rather than state interest, has far-ranging implications. It helps to explain Iraqi behavior in the 1990s, for instance, if Saddam Hussein valued his personal survival over an abstract Iraqi national interest. As Gause convincingly argues, Saddam Hussein launched wars in 1980 and 1990 because he believed foreign forces (Iran, Kuwait, the United States) were working to destabilize the Ba'ath regime and that not attacking meant a greater chance of his regime falling. If Syrian rulers fear that peace with Israel could threaten their hold on power by removing the justification for repressive rule, this could explain their hesitation to conclude an agreement with Israel over the Golan Heights. Even Israeli foreign policy can be understood within this approach, to the extent that major foreign policy decisions are driven by coalition and electoral politics rather than by external threats.

This dynamic has been significantly increased by the 2011 Arab uprisings. The wave of popular mobilization that swept the region in 2011 greatly increased both the perceived domestic threats to

regime survival and the opportunities for external involvement in either supporting or undermining regimes. Leaders in the region feel pressure to intervene where they perceive an existential threat to their own survival from protest movements that diffuse across borders, or when failing states present opportunities for their rivals to advance their interests. Regime security therefore offers a clear alternative to realist logic based on the international dimension of domestic politics and state strength.

The Power Structure of Regional Politics

Based on this conception of the multiple sources of power—military, economic, ideological, institutional, and domestic—in Middle Eastern regional politics, it is now possible to sketch out the relationships among the major powers of the region. Geography matters as well: Some states are destined to be peripheral players by virtue of their location, while others are fated to be central because of their proximity to major zones of conflict. Iraq's long borders with Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Syria mean that its security situation will always be very different from that of, say, Egypt, which enjoys relative security along its borders. Israel and Iran may be bitter ideological rivals, but the vast distance between them could potentially mitigate the security dilemma (see map on inside front cover of this book).

Egypt

For much of the history of the modern Middle East, Egypt aspired to leadership of the Arab world—in the 1950s and 1960s as the avatar of pan-Arabism and in the 1980s and beyond as the would-be leader of the pro-US moderate “peace camp.” Its leadership claims rested on a material base as by far the largest Arab state in terms of population and a large, capable, and well-armed military. Its long history of a centralized, relatively effective state with a strong national identity rendered it largely impervious to the attempted interventions of other states and political movements. Its central location and proximity to Israel made it geostrategically important in ways that marginal powers such as Iran or Algeria could not be.

Egypt's influence began to wane as did its material power, however. With the massive shift of wealth to the Gulf following the oil price shocks of the early 1970s, Egypt found itself relegated to the level of

a poor state searching for budgetary assistance, instead of a powerful leader. Its shift to an alliance with the United States represented in part a search for another source of power, this one through harnessing the superpower in its own interest. But the decline in Egypt's economic power and its increasing loss of ideational power as a US ally and peace partner with Israel at a time when both were unpopular increasingly undermined Egyptian influence.²⁶ The overthrow of President Hosni Mubarak and a long, chaotic transition led to a period of paralysis in Egyptian foreign policy and unprecedented dependence upon Gulf states for financial and political support. Realism would suggest that once Egypt recovers from its domestic turbulence it will have the opportunity to reassert itself as a popular, independent force in regional affairs.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia has enjoyed fabulous economic power, especially during periods of high oil prices. It used this wealth not only to purchase a wide range of advanced weapons systems but also as a key instrument of diplomatic influence through direct and indirect subventions to a wide range of actors. It cultivated close relations with the United States. It also used its wealth to purchase a great deal of control over the Arab media, both through individual journalists and through ownership of newspapers and television stations. Finally, it sponsored the spread of its distinctive version of Islam through the Middle East and the world by extending financial support to mosques, Islamic evangelism, and the publication of religious materials.

For all its assets, Saudi Arabia also had distinct vulnerabilities. Its domestic political system rested on tight control over society, with great power devolved to the religious establishment. Its extensive system of patronage and cradle-to-grave social welfare to purchase loyalty required high oil prices, which left it vulnerable at home when prices slumped. It also found itself challenged ideologically, as its domestic and foreign policies clashed with the austere Islamic ideas propagated by its own religious establishment. The attractiveness of

radical ideas to many in the kingdom proved a potent challenge in the 1950s (Nasser) through the present (al-Qa'ida). Finally, despite all its expenditures on military technology, it remained a military pygmy, as was painfully revealed by its need to call on the United States to protect it from Iraq after the 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

During the Arab uprisings, Saudi Arabia rose to an unusually dominant position in regional politics, leading a counterrevolutionary coalition and intervening widely across multiple theaters. Its relative domestic stability and its deep pockets due to high oil prices, along with the temporary weakness and disarray of competitors such as Iraq, Syria, and Egypt, allowed it to take a lead role in attempting to contain and to shape the direction of the regional changes. Saudi Arabia helped to revitalize the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Arab League. It pushed for a successful NATO military intervention in Libya in 2011, supported rebel groups and lobbied for intervention in Syria, and in 2015 led a large-scale military intervention in Yemen. It supported fellow monarchies in the Gulf and farther afield, including an invitation to Jordan and Morocco to join the GCC, but also to divide the GCC by launching a campaign against Qatar. Its media sought to frame regional politics around sectarianism and the need to contain Iran rather than around popular revolution. Since the rise of Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, Saudi foreign policy has become more erratic and assertive.

Iraq

Iraq was traditionally defined by its role as a central Arab state that combined oil wealth with a sizable population and geographic centrality. It has generally commanded a powerful military machine and supported it with an economic base that included both sizable oil reserves and an educated, mercantile middle class. It regularly bid for Arab leadership, offering a distinctively martial form of Arab nationalism rooted in an ugly ethnic Ba'athism directed against its Persian Iranian rival. It commanded significant support from the Gulf states for its long 1980 to 1988 war with Iran. Overall, it has been far

more likely to launch wars with its neighbors and to use military force against its own people than most other regional states.

Iraq's weaknesses were equally telling. Like Germany in the European balance-of-power system (to which it was often compared), Iraq suffered from its geography, with long borders with powerful competitors that were difficult to defend or to police. Its internal sectarian and ethnic divisions always represented a threat to the central government, which generally led to authoritarian rule from Baghdad. The Kurdish provinces in the north posed an endemic challenge to state integrity, which led in the late 1980s to a vicious campaign of ethnic cleansing, including the use of chemical weapons.²⁷ This meant that the impressive military machine was often turned inward, against Iraqi society, as much as outward. More than a decade of sanctions after 1991 hollowed out the economy and military, significantly weakening the state. After the toppling of Saddam Hussein in 2003, insurgency and the weakness of the state apparatus transformed Iraq from one of the strong to one of the weak, the battlefield on which others waged their battles rather than a powerful player in its own right. Iraq's future regional role will depend heavily on whether it is able to establish effective sovereignty over its own territory, a stable and legitimate political order, and relative independence from its Iranian neighbor.

Syria

Syria ranked as a strong second-tier power in material terms—not quite as big as Egypt or Iraq and nowhere nearly as wealthy as Saudi Arabia or the Gulf states. It maintained a relatively large military, but its reliance on Soviet arms left it weak in comparison with Israel or even other Arab competitors such as Jordan, and its domestic instability meant that many of its guns aimed inward. It presented itself as the “beating heart of Arabism,” the standard-bearer of Arab opposition to Israel (especially after Camp David)—although it found little difficulty in being one of the only major Arab powers to align with Persian Iran against Arab Iraq. From 1990 through 2005, it used a smothering domination of post-civil war

Lebanon as a crucial extension of its power—keeping Israel’s northern front “hot” through support for Hizbullah and putting down efforts by the proxies of other great powers to exert influence. When the “Cedar Revolution,” combined with significant US pressure, drove Syrian forces from Lebanon in 2005, the result was much less about democracy than about curbing Syrian power.

Syria’s ability to be a power player at all is a testament to the importance of domestic state capacity as a crucial variable. During the 1950s and 1960s, Syria’s famously unstable, coup-ridden, and ideologically divided domestic system made it a primary target of the great powers of the era, as recounted in Patrick Seale’s masterful *The Struggle for Syria*. Between 1958 and 1961, Syria formally dissolved itself into the short-lived United Arab Republic with Egypt. After Hafiz al-Asad seized power in 1970, however, this all changed as he created a repressive national security state that prioritized regime survival over all other considerations. The stability at home that this achieved allowed Syria to play a much more active role as a regional power in the following decades. This asset collapsed in dramatic fashion in 2011, as a brutal crackdown on peaceful protestors fueled a spiral into civil war, reducing Syria once again to an object of competitive regional power politics rather than a significant player in its own right. The war that has raged since 2011 has produced one of the greatest humanitarian tragedies in recent history, leaving the state divided between regime-held areas, a variety of rebel factions, and the nascent Islamic State.

Iran

The importance of identity is seen clearly in the case of Iran, which has by far the strongest combination of material power—military, size, economic resources—and state capacity of any state in the region (even without nuclear weapons), but which has largely failed to convert this power into influence. Instead, it has consistently been viewed as a foreign power by the Arabs and as a particularly potent threat to those Arab states with sizable Shi’i populations. This was the case both before and after the 1979 Islamic revolution. Before

the revolution, the shah of Iran was a key US and Israeli ally, one of the pillars of US grand strategy, and Iran was the dominant military power in the Gulf. Its identification with the conservative forces in the Arab cold war limited its ability to wield influence with much of the Arab world. After the revolution, what inspired much of the Arab population terrified Arab leaders who feared both Iran's Islamic fervor and the example of a successful revolution. In the 1980s, Iraq and its Gulf backers mobilized an anti-Persian (and anti-Shi'i) campaign against Iran, similar to the anti-Shi'i fervor whipped up in the mid-2000s in the face of rising Iranian power following the invasion of Iraq. Iran extended its power and presence in Iraq and Syria, and to a lesser extent Yemen, in part by building a sophisticated network of proxy militias and local allies. The 2015 nuclear deal opened the possibility for a significant change in Iran's role in regional order, but those largely failed to manifest and the conflict between Iran and its rivals has again become one of the primary cleavages defining regional order.

Israel

Like Iran, Israel has been unable to convert its dramatic military and economic advantages over its Arab neighbors into influence for primarily ideational reasons. Its military advantages are unquestioned, from technological sophistication to an undeclared but well-known nuclear weapons capability. Israel also has an advanced economy and close relations with the United States, which paradoxically makes the United States perhaps the greatest threat to Israeli interests because of Israel's dependence on US support. Israel has been consumed since its creation by the difficulty of gaining acceptance in the region as a legitimate entity, which has made a constructivist battle over identity and legitimacy central to Israel's place in regional politics. Israel's relations with the Arab world have aimed both at physical security and at what might be called ontological security, a demand for normalization or recognition as a normal state in the region.

The Gulf States

The small Gulf states have become increasingly prominent in the regional balance of power. Their vast wealth, highly capable and repressive states, media empires, and small but well-equipped and well-trained militaries make them especially well adapted to the post-2011 regional environment. Qatar, one of the tiny but extremely wealthy Gulf ministates, set itself off from the other GCC states by using its petroleum wealth to fuel an ambitious diplomacy and the astonishingly successful al-Jazeera television station. For a tiny state that hosted a major US military base and had long enjoyed good relations with Israel, Qatar emerged as a surprising avatar of a renewed Arab nationalism positioned against the old Arab order. With its hyperactive diplomacy, often aimed at contesting the Saudi role, it brokered important agreements in Lebanon and Sudan and took an increasingly active role in the Palestinian issue. The United Arab Emirates has similarly taken on a more active and muscular regional political role since the uprisings, taking a lead role in supporting Egypt's 2013 military coup and the 2015 military intervention in Yemen.

Turkey

Turkey, which for decades had shunned the Middle East and focused on its bid to join Europe, began to refocus on the Arab world after the election of the mildly Islamist Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party) and the diminished prospects for EU membership. After forming a close military alliance with Israel during the 1990s, during the second half of the first decade of the twenty-first century Turkey distanced itself from Israel and began to form good working relationships across the region, including with Iraq and Iran. This earned it considerable popularity with Arab public opinion and considerable suspicion from the Arab states. It overplayed its hand in the Syrian civil war, however, as it pushed unsuccessfully for the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad. Its domestic turbulence, Syrian quagmire, and cross-border conflict with Kurds have sharply challenged its regional influence.

Historical Periods

The various theories described in the previous sections may apply differently in different historical contexts. Many argue that the power of identity and ideology waned in the 1970s after the ignominious Arab defeat in the June 1967 War, giving way to an era of more realpolitik behavior. Others point to the “hardening” of the Arab state in the same period, reducing regime security concerns and perhaps facilitating more realist maneuvering. In this section, I briefly describe a number of commonly identified periods in Middle Eastern regional politics and trace the evolution of Arab-Israeli relations, Iran’s role, and the inter-Arab struggle for leadership.

Arab Cold War

During the so-called Arab Cold War of the 1950s and 1960s, the role of ideology and identity was exceptionally high while internal state strength was unusually low in a number of key Arab states. As the international structure shifted from multipolarity to bipolarity, with the crystallization of the post–World War II environment into the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, the Middle East emerged as a key battlefield. The key lines of conflict were between the Arabist states such as Egypt and the conservative, pro-Western states, as well as between the Western- and the Soviet-backed camps. Those two lines only sometimes overlapped, and often, the local actors worked to harness a superpower to their cause by alleging that their enemies harbored allegiances to a superpower's enemy.

Wars were often key moments in either shaping or revealing the deep changes in the region's politics. The Arab failure in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war that created the state of Israel had deep effects across the region—revealing the hollowness of Arab cooperation and the weakness of Arab states. Transjordan, with a British-led Arab Legion that outperformed all other Arab armies, expanded to incorporate the West Bank as part of the new Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The poor performance of Egyptian troops badly delegitimized the monarchy, spreading the discontent that grew into the 1952 Free Officers coup.

The coup that brought Gamal Abdel Nasser to power in Egypt had the most obvious effects on the region's international politics. Nasser reoriented Egyptian foreign policy around a commitment to Arab unity. The broadcasts of the Voice of the Arabs radio station proved a potent weapon, galvanizing the passions of Arabs across the Middle East and elevating Egypt to a position of leadership. In 1956, Israel collaborated with France and Britain in part in an effort to limit Nasser's rising power after he nationalized the Suez Canal, but their venture failed when the United States under the Eisenhower

administration objected for fear of driving the Arab world into Soviet arms. Nasser's political fortunes skyrocketed in the aftermath, despite his military defeat.

Although Israel was forced to pull back from Suez, it pursued a policy vis-à-vis its neighbors of massive retaliation intended to compel its neighbors to rein in Palestinian infiltration to avoid Israeli collective reprisals. These attacks did succeed in compelling the regimes to control their borders. They also militarized the environment and generated great suspicion, outrage, and anger that hardened Arab views of the new Jewish state. The cycle of reprisals and attacks contributed to the justification of both internal repression and rhetorically aggressive foreign policies. Israel's policy did establish deterrence, while it also generated a self-fulfilling prophecy of hatred and hostility that has yet to be overcome.

The period was defined by an ideological struggle over the definition and practice of Arabism. In general, this struggle was waged in the realm of ideological warfare and subversion, with fierce media battles driving domestic turbulence. Egypt used its pan-Arab ideology to bid for regional leadership as it sought to establish regional norms and dominate Arab collective action. Saudi Arabia's efforts at the regional level were driven at least in part by its own domestic insecurity as parts of the public and even of the royal family clearly preferred the Arabist model.

The combination of domestic instability, intense ideological polarization, and fierce competition for regional leadership shaped the turbulent dynamics of the Arab cold war. Nasserist mobilization kept small states like Jordan and Lebanon in perpetual crisis for much of the 1950s, drawing Western military interventions in both countries in 1958. Syria became a central battlefield between the camps, with a series of military coups serving as the vehicle for regional power struggles. Syria's decisions to dissolve itself into the United Arab Republic with Egypt in 1958 and then to leave the union in 1961 were key moments in the ups and downs of the regional cold war. The Syrian decision to voluntarily merge with Egypt is, in fact,

one of the more remarkable moments in contemporary international history—a major regional power surrendering its sovereignty, even temporarily, to another competing regional power out of ideological conviction rather than military threat. Iraq, another potentially powerful state, changed sides after the bloody 1958 revolution ripped one of the most powerful of conservative states into the ranks of the radicals. And from 1962 to 1967, Egyptian and Saudi forces clashed directly in a proxy war in the isolated mountains of Yemen.

This period in Arab politics culminated in the Arab disaster of the June 1967 War. That war was driven in no small part by the forces described here. Intense ideological competition between Egypt and a radical regime in Syria drove each to take ever-more radical positions toward Israel—including the demand to remove United Nations forces from the Sinai Peninsula—which in turn fueled Israeli fears of encirclement and attack. Egypt found itself in a high-stakes game of chicken with Israel at a time when much of its military was tied down in Yemen and its own economic and political problems at home argued against military adventurism. Because of the enormous popularity of radical positions toward Israel and the continuing instability of Arab regimes, few Arab governments could risk standing on the sidelines, at least rhetorically. When Israel caught Egypt by surprise and destroyed most of its air force on the ground, it rapidly defeated Arab forces and captured a vast swath of Arab lands—the Gaza Strip and Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, the West Bank and Jerusalem from Jordan, and the Golan Heights from Syria.

After 1967 to the End of the Cold War

The aftermath of the June 1967 War set in motion fundamental changes in regional politics. Israel went overnight from being perceived as a small, threatened, and likely transient part of the region to a military powerhouse that occupied vast swaths of Arab land. Much of the region's diplomacy and wars since have been focused on dealing with the aftermath of those occupations. The disastrous performance of the Arab militaries discredited the promises of Nasser's pan-Arabism, taking the air out of the ideological wars of the preceding decades and crippling Egyptian soft power. It also led to the emergence of the PLO as the bearer of Palestinian nationalism (see [Chapter 2](#)).

Photo 8.1 Nasser cheered by supporters after nationalizing the Suez Canal, 1956.



Keystone/Getty Images

Israel's occupation of Arab territories and recognition as the predominant military power in the Mashriq transformed the security balance in the region. Its occupation of the Sinai, Golan Heights, and West Bank gave it a territorial strategic buffer, as well as something over which to negotiate with its neighbors other than its existence. Despite the *Three Nos* of the 1967 Khartoum Arab Summit (no peace with Israel, no recognition, no negotiation), the diplomatic

focus inexorably shifted toward those Arab states determined to reclaim their lost territories. Israeli military superiority also generated overconfidence, however, and Israel failed to take sufficiently seriously the warnings of a coming Egyptian and Syrian attack in October 1973. Even that war primarily aimed at improving the bargaining position of those states, however—and, in the Egyptian case, triggered a realignment away from the Soviet Union toward the United States.

The Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza also transformed the politics of the Palestinian issue. The PLO emerged as the claimant of Palestinian identity and Palestinian sovereignty on the back of the *fedayeen* attacks against Israel (see [Chapter 21](#)). Israeli reprisals against the hosting states and the growing power of the PLO put Jordan, especially, in an impossible position. This came to a head in the wrenching 1970 civil war of Black September, when the Jordanian armed forces moved against the PLO and its supporters. The Arab world stood by helplessly as the Palestinians were crushed by an Arab army; a threatened Syrian intervention did not materialize, while Gamal Abdel Nasser's desperate mediation ended with his collapse from exhaustion and death. Nasserist pan-Arabism quite literally died with Black September.

The early 1970s also saw the beginnings of a dramatic shift in the balance of power away from Egypt and toward the oil-producing states of the Gulf. It was not only Egypt's pan-Arab ideas that faded after 1967; it was also its economic and military position. The enormous influx of wealth into Saudi coffers transformed Saudi Arabia's ability to shape inter-Arab politics and ideas, while Egypt shifted from a deal maker to a taker in its desperate efforts to open its ailing economy. Egypt's decision to negotiate a peace treaty with Israel in 1978 and 1979 confirmed its reorientation away from pan-Arabism toward the pro-US conservative camp. The subsequent Arab boycott of Egypt, including its expulsion from the Arab League, temporarily removed the most traditionally powerful player from the Arab equation. Egypt would not fully return to the inter-Arab game until the late 1980s.

With Egypt out of the military equation, Israel rapidly turned to the north and in 1982 launched a war against Lebanon in hopes of crushing the PLO. After initial easy military success, the Israeli military laid siege to Beirut and the PLO leadership. But then things began to go wrong, as international attention focused on horrors such as the massacre of Palestinians at the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila by Lebanese forces in an area under Israeli control and the sufferings of Lebanese civilians in Beirut. Finally, the PLO leadership was allowed safe passage from Lebanon, and Israeli forces retreated to a buffer zone in southern Lebanon. Hizbullah, the Shi'i movement backed by Iran, emerged to wage a determined insurgency against this Israeli occupation—a campaign that included the devastating 1983 bombing of the US embassy in Beirut—which continued until Israel finally unilaterally withdrew in 2000. After the Israeli withdrawal, Lebanon collapsed into a horrific civil war that lasted until an Arab accord finally agreed in 1990 to establish Syrian military hegemony in order to oversee a fragile truce in a broken country.

The combination of the end of pan-Arabism and the rise of Saudi oil wealth contributed to the dramatic growth in the repressive capacity of most Arab states. In general, whatever regimes happened to be in power in 1970 benefited from the transformation, and with few exceptions, they remain in power to the present day. Oil wealth, along with strategic rents extracted from superpower patrons, allowed most Arab states to construct massive, overwhelming national security institutions designed primarily to ensure regime survival. Suffocating control of the political realm, the media, and even the economy became the norm as the Arab system hardened against the kind of cross-border mobilization that had characterized the previous era.

Then came the Iranian revolution of 1979. No single event—not even the 1967 war debacle or the horror of Black September—so shook the Arab status quo. Arab regimes designed for little more than remaining in power were confronted with their worst nightmare as a militarily strong, modernizing, wealthy Middle Eastern power closely

allied with the United States crumbled in the face of a massive popular mobilization. The Arab response took several forms. Virtually the entire Arab world rallied to the side of Iraq when Saddam Hussein invaded Iran in 1980 out of fear for his own regime's survival in the face of a galvanized Shi'i population and out of hope that the Iranian revolutionary regime might be temporarily vulnerable during the transitional chaos of revolution. When that war degenerated into a bloody eight-year standoff, Arab states contributed both financial support and ideological backing to Saddam's campaign—with only Ba'athist Syria opting to side with Iran against its hated Iraqi rivals. The Arab states of the Gulf formed the GCC to coordinate their response to revolutionary Iran. The other face of the Arab response was to intensify the process of hardening national security states, crushing domestic opposition, and exercising suffocating control over any signs of independent political organization or independent critical public speech.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan also shaped regional politics in the 1980s as Saudi Arabia led a transnational campaign to support the Afghan mujahidin against Soviet occupation. While the details of that campaign are beyond the scope of this chapter, it is worth noting the extent to which the regionwide campaign to mobilize support for the Afghan jihad shaped and established the transnational Islamist networks that would later become so crucial to the evolution of al-Qa'ida. Islamist movements and nominally apolitical mosques alike, with the tacit or explicit approval of governments, raised money and support for the mujahidin. These efforts laid the foundations for the Islamist transformation of regional political culture to come.

In sum, the 1970s and 1980s saw the emergence of a recognizably realist international politics in the Middle East. The appeal of transnational ideologies faded, although new Islamist trends were growing beneath the surface, while state institutions hardened against both external subversion and domestic dissent. Wars were waged over the narrow self-interest of states (the October 1973 War) and peace agreements negotiated based on the balance of power (Camp David). Power shifted from Egypt and the Levant toward

Israel and the Gulf, and the Iranian revolution dramatically unsettled the region.

After the Cold War

The end of the Cold War between East and West was felt immediately in regional international relations, with the August 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Although it took several years to be fully felt, the collapse of the Soviet Union led to a fundamentally new logic of unipolarity in the region and a much deeper, more direct US role in every facet of the region's politics. In the post-1990s Middle East, all roads led through Washington. By the mid-2000s, virtually every regime in the region was either allied with the United States or seeking some accommodation (for example, Libya and Syria). US military bases and troop deployments from Iraq to the ministates of the Gulf created a fundamentally new military and security situation. Across almost the entire region, Israel faced Arab competitors that shared the same superpower patron (the United States, which could presumably shape and to a large extent control their decisions about war) and increasingly conceived of their own interests much as the United States and Israel did—even as Arab public opinion turned in sharply different directions.

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait took place in the eye of the storm caused by the end of the Cold War. Although he was motivated primarily by regime security concerns, frustration over Kuwaiti intransigence, and a bid for regional hegemony, Saddam Hussein also saw the closing of a window to act while the United States was distracted with the reunification of Germany and the reordering of Europe. The decision to invade Kuwait shockingly violated Arab norms (which tolerated competition and subversion but not cross-border invasion) and shocked Arab leaders who had been personally assured by Saddam that force would not be used—violations of norms that help explain why the Arab leaders were willing to undertake unprecedented open military cooperation with the United States.

Operation Desert Storm caused the United States to move much more deeply into the region in several ways. First, the basing of approximately five hundred thousand troops in Saudi Arabia proved

a shock to the system that galvanized domestic criticism of the Saudi ruling family. Even when those forces dispersed to bases strung along the Gulf periphery (Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait), the momentum of direct US military presence in the Gulf proved irreversible. The Clinton administration's policy of dual containment, which sought to maintain a balance of power (including sanctions and no-fly zones) against both Iraq and Iran (the traditional powers in the Gulf), required this massive US presence.

The war with Iraq also prompted a much more direct and intense US role in attempting to broker Arab-Israeli peace. The Madrid peace conference and the effort to implement the surprising Oslo accords between Israel and the PLO brought the United States in as a direct broker of negotiations at the most intimate possible levels.

Even as the regimes of the region adapted to this global international structure, public opinion went in quite a different direction. The forces of globalization came together around the focal point of the al-Jazeera satellite television station, which galvanized Arab identity with news coverage and popular debate programs focused on issues of shared, core Arab concern such as Palestine, Iraq, and general dissatisfaction with the political and economic status quo.²⁸ Arab anger with both the United States and their own governments peaked in the face of the official order's impotence during the second Palestinian intifada, the ongoing sanctions against Iraq, and then the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Meanwhile, Islamist movements across the region were transforming the political culture from below.

The terrorist attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001, built on the trends of the 1990s far more than has generally been realized. The George W. Bush administration's aggressive unilateralism, including the invasion and occupation of Iraq, only accelerated trends evident in the second half of the Clinton administration. The US imperium in the region had been developing for more than a decade, as had the trends in Arab and Muslim public opinion. The global war on terror that defined the Bush administration's engagement with the region combined close

cooperation with security-minded Arab regimes with a vastly intensified engagement with all aspects of Arab politics.

The invasion and occupation of Iraq by the United States had a massive impact on regional international relations, even if the long-range verdict remains unclear. The removal of Iraq as a major power and then its reformulation as a democracy dominated by pro-Iranian Shi'i politicians tipped the balance of power in the Gulf decisively toward Iran even without the latter acquiring nuclear weapons. The spread of concern about the "Shi'i crescent" in the region was driven at least as much by regime fears of rising Iranian power as by genuine religious or sectarian rage (even if many Arab Sunnis were genuinely outraged by the demonstrations of violent sectarianism in Iraq). Many hope that Iraq will transition into a democratic, pro-Western state, but it is far too early to know—and it is important to recall that, for those subscribing to the theory of realism in international relations, such domestic considerations will not likely matter much as the new Iraq formulates its national interests in response to an intensely competitive international environment. For now, the most important effect has been Iraq's weakness, changing it from a powerful actor to an arena in which other powers fight their proxy wars. Whether Iraq reemerges in the near to midrange future as a fully sovereign and territorially unified state playing an active role in regional politics—and whether that role is in alignment with or against Iran—will be decisive in judging the long-term effects of the invasion.

The Arab Uprisings

The popular protests that swept the Arab world in 2010 and 2011 ushered in a distinctive new period in regional politics. The early period of the so-called Arab Spring witnessed an exceptionally intense integration of the Arab political space. Thanks to satellite television and the Internet, and the long cultivation of a shared Arab identity, protest ideas and forms rapidly spread across the region. The powerful regional demonstration effects meant that individual countries could not be meaningfully analyzed in isolation: The Egyptian revolution almost certainly would not have happened without the Tunisian example; and the Syrian uprising would have taken a very different form without the Libyan precedent. The rise of popular mobilization significantly increased the salience of regime security concerns and identity politics but did not sweep away the legacies of realist dynamics or the importance of material power and economic wealth.

If the first days of the Arab uprisings highlighted popular demonstration effects and challenges to regime survival, later developments demonstrated the resilience and power of authoritarian regimes. Saudi Arabia and the UAE, in particular, took the lead in crafting a renewed “official” Arab response to the uprisings that many dismayed activists decried as “counterrevolutionary.” Saudi Arabia intervened directly in Bahrain, where it sent in its military forces to assist the al-Khalifa monarchy in repressing popular protests, and in Yemen, where it brokered a political transition removing President Ali Abdallah Salih while preserving the core of the regime. It offered financial support to other Gulf states, as well as to fellow monarchies such as Jordan and Morocco. And it led the official Arab push for intervention in Libya and Syria, which introduced a new form of military interventionism into the calculus of previously indigenous political struggles. Qatar, for its part, increasingly used al-Jazeera as a political instrument for promoting its own political agenda, most clearly in its unabashed support for the uprisings in Libya and Syria.

The years following the uprisings were shaped by several devastating civil wars and state failures, dramatically expanded proxy warfare, and escalating sectarianism and Islamist extremism. Syria's civil war was the epicenter of regional devastation. Years of war left hundreds of thousands dead and many millions displaced internally or abroad, while power in the areas outside regime control devolved to a dizzying array of rebel factions, including the Islamic State. The Asad regime has to this point survived and arguably defeated the rebels, with the support of Russia and Iran, while a US-led campaign has largely destroyed the Islamic State within both Iraq and Syria; Turkey has established control over parts of northern Syria. Libya's transition collapsed into an intense struggle between competing governments. Saudi Arabia and its allies launched a major but inconclusive military intervention in Yemen after the failure of its transitional government and the seizure of Sanaa and Aden by Houthi rebels. The nuclear agreement reached in 2015 between Iran and the international community held out the possibility for a fundamental restructuring of regional order, but instead, it led to even sharper conflict. Israel has formed ever-closer relations with key Arab states despite the failure to resolve the Palestinian issue. In 2017, Saudi Arabia and the UAE ripped apart the GCC by launching a blockade of Qatar.

Conclusion: Potential Transformative Forces

Are the international relations of the Middle East exceptional? Is there anything unique about the region that requires a theoretical lens different from that employed in the wider literature on international relations theory? The distinctive ideological preoccupations of the region and the transnationalism of its identities and political movements point to the region's singularity. Some theorists point to the unique, deeply embedded, and unchanging culture or religion;²⁹ the common language; and the weak national identities. Others point to the distorting effects of oil, including the rentier phenomenon that directed huge financial flows directly into the hands of the state.³⁰ Still others point to the absence of a single great power, the legacy of colonialism, and historical development.³¹ Others point to the distinct persistence of Arab authoritarianism, the distinctively transnational media, the continuing payoffs to war and conquest, the level of international involvement, terrorism, Islamist movements, and Israel.

But such analyses may confuse the surface for the substance. Much of the behavior of Arab states appears to be grounded in realism beneath the rhetoric, while many of the region's pathologies appear more typical of the third world than distinctive to Arab or Islamic culture. The resurgence of Sunni-Shi'i tension in late 2005 appeared to many observers as the eruption of timeless sectarian hostilities and the expression of the formative essentialism of religious identity.³² To others, no such resort to essentialism or even to distinctive religious culture was required. The demonization of Shi'a in the Sunni-majority Arab countries was clearly led by states, promoted in their official media and in government-monitored mosques, and fairly clearly followed those regimes' concerns about rising Iranian power and influence in the region. A top-down mobilization of domestic hostility against a rising foreign power is not

difficult for an international relations theorist to understand even without deep knowledge of the Middle East or its allegedly unique political culture.

What about the role of Islam and of transnational Islamist actors? During the past thirty years, Islamist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood may not have taken power in Arab countries, but they have played important roles in the democratic process and have contributed to a dramatic transformation of the public culture across the region. Saudi Arabia has a deeply Islamist state that shapes its domestic politics and that seeks to export Islam across the region and the world. Extremist Islamists have waged insurgencies in several key Arab countries, including Egypt and Algeria in the 1990s and Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein. Al-Qa'ida and the Islamic State represent a new kind of transnational violent Islamist challenge to the official Arab order. Although all of these have clearly mattered in important ways, it is important to recall, despite the unique Iranian revolution, how rarely Islamist movements have succeeded in taking control of a Middle Eastern state—in Sudan, a military coup searching for an identity brought in Islamist ideologues, and in Turkey, a moderately Islamist party won elections and continues to govern today. The Arab uprisings have given new opportunities for Islamist parties to play a leading role in governments, from Tunisia and Egypt to Libya, but it is impossible to know at this point whether their ideology will drive significant changes in foreign policy or the demands of international politics will force them into pragmatic, realist policies. The most dramatic of these new Islamist actors has been the self-declared Islamic State, which seized control over a large swath of territory spanning Iraq and Syria and has established local franchises in areas such as Egypt and Libya.

The seemingly unique resistance of the Arab Middle East to political democracy, the deep focus on regime survival, and the oil-fueled overdeveloped state do seem distinctive to the region.³³ As discussed in [Chapter 4](#), political systems in the region have rarely approximated Western notions of democracy, and the region largely resisted the various waves of democratization that swept other

regions in the 1980s and after. The persistence of authoritarianism in the region could arguably have effects at the level of international—not only domestic—politics. International relations theorists have identified a wide range of effects of democracy, well beyond the oft-referenced “democratic peace thesis” that democracies do not go to war against each other. Theorists have argued that democratic systems differ systematically from nondemocracies by increasing the transparency of politics and introducing multiple veto points in the policy formation process and, also, by increasing the points of access for outside actors to engage in efforts to influence political outcomes.³⁴ The political transitions in key Arab countries since 2011, however partial at this point, will pose a challenging test of this hypothesis.

The history of the regional politics of the Middle East suggests a complex mix of enduring patterns and significant changes. The deep substructure remains relatively unchanged: regimes that primarily value their own survival and guarantee it through undemocratic means, the structuring effects of vast oil revenues, publics who value Arab identity, the Palestinian issue and the seemingly unresolvable Arab-Israeli struggle, and the enduring imbalances of power destabilizing the Gulf. Significant changes have occurred, though: The United States is much more directly present in the region than ever before. Arab states have become far more open to coordination—or even cooperation—with Israel despite the lack of progress on resolving the Palestinian conflict. Political Islam has risen from irrelevance in the 1950s to a dominant political cultural position. Iraq has been invaded, occupied, and transformed by the United States. And Iran has gone from an Islamic revolution to what many think is the brink of a counterrevolution while getting ever closer to nuclear weapons capability. What kinds of change are possible in the future in the regional dynamics described in this chapter? What would represent genuine, fundamental change?

For realist theorists, the most likely source of enduring change would be a significant change in the balance of power at either the global or the regional level. The shift from the Cold War’s bipolarity to the

post–Cold War unipolar US imperium in the early 1990s led to profound change in the logic and patterns of regional politics. A comparable global change from unipolarity back to multipolarity would presumably have similar effects. Such trends are already clearly visible. The global financial crisis that devastated the United States and Western economies in 2008 and the vast US expenditures on the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan have dramatically impacted US capabilities and willingness to intervene abroad. The dramatic shift of global wealth toward the East, especially India and China, and those countries' ravenous energy needs suggest a very high likelihood of the restructuring of the global order that will draw those powers into the Middle East. Should that happen, Arab states would be faced with a plausible choice of great-power patrons for the first time since the 1980s, and many of the restraining effects of the US imperium could fade. This structural change could explain the increasingly independent and even erratic behavior of longtime US allies such as Saudi Arabia and the “hedging” behavior of those allies as they cultivate relationships and arms deals with Russia.

The balance of power could also change within the region. The occupation of Iraq created one such massive, unprecedented change in the distribution of power. This is likely to prove temporary, as Iraq reemerges as a centralized state with a competent military and continuing economic power. Should it not, however—whether through a partition that produces several smaller states (Kurdistan and some form of rump Iraq) or a perpetual condition of US or Iranian occupation or control that denies Iraq freedom of political action—then the balance of power in the region would fundamentally change.

Iran succeeding in obtaining nuclear weapons is often suggested as another game changer in terms of regional power dynamics. This is less obvious. Nuclear weapons have limited utility for conventional political influence; and although they might increase Iran's status, they could also increase its political isolation, at least in the short to medium term. Arab states threatened by increased Iranian

destructive power would be more likely to solidify their anti-Iranian alliance choices than to climb on a bandwagon with a feared, rising competitor. Neither Indian nor Pakistani nuclear weapons have fundamentally changed the status or political dynamics in South Asia, and Iranian nuclear weapons might have a similarly limited impact. An Iranian nuclear deterrent could limit the US freedom of maneuver in the region as well as its ability to threaten Iranian interests—which could prove stabilizing, even as it frustrates US policymakers. Israel would also find its nuclear primacy challenged for the first time, which could lead either to a stable condition of mutual deterrence or to an unstable, tense, ongoing brinkmanship or even preventive war.

The entry of new actors into the political arena could also change the patterns if not the underlying structure of the political system. In Qatar, a more dynamic foreign policy fueled by massive oil and natural gas wealth, al-Jazeera's soft power, and an energetic young leadership have already challenged Saudi aspirations to monopolize conflict resolution and media discourse. Turkey's turn to the Middle East, driven by frustration with the European Union, significant economic and security interests, and domestic political trends, puts a powerful new player with great material power and considerable popular attractiveness into the equation.

What about the end of the Arab-Israeli conflict? A negotiated, two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and a Syrian-Israeli peace agreement would at least partially close the door on the most enduring conflict in the region. If this commanded popular support, it could help to fundamentally transform the political culture of the region as well as the strategic balance. Israel could become a legitimate security partner while a major source of destabilization and popular anger would be removed. This would not in and of itself change the power balance in the Gulf or any of the other trends, but it would almost certainly have a major impact across the region. In contrast, the failure of the peace process—the end of negotiations and return to some form of armed conflict—would likely reinforce existing patterns of regime security focus and competition.

Finally, would even successful democratization across the region (however unlikely that currently appears) change the fundamental patterns of politics? It would certainly change the nature of the regime security concerns that seem to be so central to the foreign policy decision-making of leaders in the region. Some, citing evidence of the rarity of democracies fighting wars with each other, argue that this would facilitate cooperation and moderation. This may be too optimistic, however. Arab leaders tend to be far more pragmatic, pro-US, and pro-Israeli than their disenfranchised populations are. More democratic states could increase opportunities for cross-border ideological mobilization as in the 1950s and complicate the well-established routines of international cooperation.

Regional politics in the Middle East have witnessed significant changes during the last half century, even as enduring patterns continue to play out in predictable ways. The shift to a unipolar world in the early 1990s brought the United States into the region in far more intense ways than in the past, a change that profoundly shaped all levels of politics. The steady shift of economic power to the Gulf beginning in the 1970s drove Egypt's decline and Saudi ascendance in shaping Arab political outcomes. Powerful forces of globalization—especially the information revolution—empowered democratic activists and popular protest, but security-obsessed authoritarian Arab regimes sought ways to retain their power. The Arab-Israeli conflict defied efforts at resolution, and popular mobilization around the Palestinian issue escalated dramatically in the 2000s, but the official Arab taboo against cooperation with Israel nevertheless faded. Iraq's removal from the equation created a vacuum at the heart of the Gulf that other, would-be powers struggled to fill—sparking regionwide conflict between Arab states and Iran. The rise of Islamist movements transformed public culture and sparked a new round of insurgencies and the global war on terror in response. Faced with the blizzard of developments and trends, it is essential to keep a careful eye on the underlying balance of power and the enduring imperative of regime security as states compete for power, security, and influence in a shifting and turbulent environment.

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Part II Profiles

9 Algeria

Lahouari Addi

A French colony from 1830 to 1962, Algeria is a vast country of close to forty-two million inhabitants who speak Arabic in the cities and the plains (75 percent) and Berber in the mountains (25 percent). The upper and middle classes also speak French, and the government is unofficially bilingual in Arabic and French. Under colonization, the natives suffered discrimination and were awarded full French citizenship only in the 1950s. The economy rested essentially on wine and citrus fruits, which were exported to France, and on iron ore and phosphate mining. In 1956, at the height of the war of liberation (1954–1962), oil was discovered in the Sahara Desert, which covers 2,000,000 sq km of Algeria's territory of 2,380,000 sq km.

After the country won independence from France in 1962, following a bloody war that killed hundreds of thousands and lasted seven-and-a-half years,¹ Algeria embarked on a socialist path, with one-party rule and a state-controlled economy. Like many other countries governed by a single-party regime, it tried with difficulty to convert to democracy and economic liberalism after the fall of the Berlin Wall. An attempt to democratize led to political violence and a “dirty war” that has claimed approximately 250,000 lives since the annulment of the Islamists' electoral victory of December 1991. Algeria underwent what is called “the bloody decade” (1992–2002) that ended by a settlement of peace between the military and the insurgents. The majority of the Islamists accepted the amnesty offered by the government in the legal framework of the “National Reconciliation Charter.”

History of State Formation

The Algerian regime is rooted in a populist ideology forged by a nationalist movement whose ultimate goal was not only independence but also equality and the fair distribution of wealth. The leader who most embodied this populist ideology was Colonel Houari Boumédiène, the former chief of staff of the clandestine army that fought for independence. He took power in June 1965 after overthrowing the president Ahmed Ben Bella elected in 1963. He was a charismatic leader who gained the support of the masses with speeches that promised to meet the needs of the population and to improve the living conditions of the most impoverished. His regime was considered by scholars of political science as the model of authoritarian modernization. However, although the institutions were consistent with the one-party system forbidding any alternative voice, the regime did not rest on the rule of the National Liberation Front (FLN). Instead, the source of power was the army that embodied the national sovereignty. The political opponents in Algeria and abroad were hunted down by a political police (called Military Security) dependent on the minister of defense.²

Boumédiène sought to implement economic and social development under the political supervision of the army. He proclaimed that the mission of the army was to carry out the program of the nationalist movement—to catch up with the West while defending a culture that France, the former colonial power, had denied the people for more than a century. Attracted by the charismatic Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, Boumédiène also borrowed the political rhetoric of radical Arab nationalism. As the defender of national independence against France, he never spoke in French in public and never officially visited France, which he criticized vociferously. His project was a synthesis of nostalgia of traditional past, revolutionary utopia, exclusive nationalism, and socialist discourse. He tried to implement cultural, industrial, and agrarian revolutions to

shape “the new man” with native authenticity and mastery of modern technology.

Key Facts on Algeria

AREA 920 square miles (2,381,741 square kilometers)
CAPITAL Algiers
POPULATION 42,000,000 (2017)
PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION UNDER 25 43.39
RELIGIOUS GROUPS (PERCENTAGE) Sunni Muslim (state religion), 99; Christian and Jewish, 1
ETHNIC GROUPS (PERCENTAGE) Arab-Berber, 99; European, less than 1
OFFICIAL LANGUAGE Arabic; French and Berber also widely spoken
TYPE OF GOVERNMENT Republic
DATE OF INDEPENDENCE July 5, 1962
GDP (PPP) \$631.2 billion; \$15,275 per capita
GDP (NOMINAL) \$170.4 billion; \$10,715 per capita
PERCENTAGE OF GDP BY SECTOR Agriculture, 8.6; industry, 48.3; services, 43.1
TOTAL RENTS (PERCENTAGE OF GDP) FROM NATURAL RESOURCES 28.2
FERTILITY RATE 2.78 children born/woman

Source: Central Intelligence Agency, *CIA World Factbook, 2017*, and World Bank.

His hostility toward the capitalist West pushed him to nationalize economic sectors held by foreigners and build an industrial base under the control of the state. He created large, nationwide corporations to deal with production and commercialization of goods and services and limited the private sector. In 1971, he nationalized 51 percent of French hydrocarbon companies. That same year, he launched the agrarian revolution to limit landed property to the benefit of landless peasants who were encouraged to form cooperatives. In 1973, state finances were tripled following an increase in oil prices after the Arab-Israeli war in October. Boumédiène decided on an ambitious plan of public education,

state-funded health care, and heavy, Soviet-style industrialization, which created hundreds of thousands of jobs.

Boumédiène sought to mobilize popular support by submitting to public discussion an ideological text—called the National Charter—that reaffirmed socialism and the choice of the one single-party system. After two months of debate in which all levels of society took part, the project of the National Charter was adopted by referendum in 1976. The same year, a National Assembly was elected with candidates only from the ruling party, the FLN. The following year, Houari Boumédiène was elected president of the republic, promising to carry out the program of the FLN contained in the National Charter. Thus, the regime gave itself the institutional legitimacy it had been lacking. The 1960s and 1970s were the golden age of the regime that promised a developed economy in the near future. But the outcome of the heavy investments did not meet the expectations. The state-run corporations, subsidized by the state budget, stopped creating jobs; Algeria did not create wealth—on the contrary, it was wasting the oil revenues. In the 1970s, newly created enterprises employed an urban demographic surplus, but in the 1980s, there were few jobs created for a growing population.

Map 9.1 Algeria



After Boumédiène's death in December 1978, Algeria entered a deep economic crisis. His successor, Colonel Chadli Bendjedid, has been chosen by the military establishment among the high-ranking officers. However, he lacked charisma and authority. The regime faced growing social unrest, with riots in Tizi-Ouzou (1980), Oran (1982), La Casbah (Algiers, 1985), Sétif (1986), Constantine (1986), and nationwide in 1988. Because of the reduction in oil revenues starting in 1985, the state did not create as many jobs as it had in previous years. The decrease in oil revenues, the service of heavy external debt, and a chronic deficit of the public sector put the state's finances to a hard test. Algeria no longer had the means to import food, and this led in October 1988 to widespread riots. The army reestablished order by killing five hundred people and wounding more than a thousand. After a week of chaos, on October 10, the president announced important political reforms, including the end of the one-party rule and the state's monopoly over the economy. But the reforms were not genuine; they aimed for change *in* the regime,

not a change *of* the regime. The military were not (and are not) ready to accept a political legitimacy stemming from the ballots.

Photo 9.1 High State Council President Mohamed Boudiaf (C) greets General Abdelmalek Guenaizia (L), army chief of staff, in Algiers airport on January 16, 1992, upon his return to Algeria from Morocco after twenty-seven years of self-imposed exile. Boudiaf was assassinated in June 1992, allegedly by those who put him in office.



ABDELHAK SENNA/AFP/Getty Images

The riots of October 1988 marked a turning point in the history of the country. The constitution, modified accordingly in February 1989, legalized approximately sixty parties.³ Reformers believed that they could save the regime by liberalizing the economy and democratizing political life. Between 1989 and 1992, the country knew a political openness without precedent for an Arab country. On television and radio, debates were held in which opponents of the regime took part. Private newspapers were authorized, which freed speech more than anywhere else in the Arab world. The political openness empowered grassroots organizations. Although reticent, military leaders accepted the reforms, hoping that they would ameliorate the economic situation and reinforce the regime. Following the pressures of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on the government, they accepted the multiparty system and privatization, which led to economic liberalization.

In June 1990, to the surprise of many, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), an Islamist party, won municipal elections with 80 percent of the vote.⁴ The FLN was the only party that resisted the Islamist landslide (the FFS, well established in Kabylia,⁵ boycotted the elections). Strengthened by electoral support, the Islamists sought a confrontation with the government by calling for a presidential election before the legislative election scheduled for June 1991. They called for a general strike in May 1991, in which few participated, and they occupied the main public squares in downtown Algiers. In order to put an end to a quasi-insurrection, the army demanded the resignation of Prime Minister Hamrouche and arrested hundreds of Islamists, including the two leaders of the FIS, Abbassi Madani and Ali Benhadj. The new leadership of the FIS proved to be more accommodating by renouncing the demand for an early presidential election and agreeing to participate in legislative elections postponed until December 1991.

In the first round of the elections, the FIS won 180 seats (the FFS obtained 25 and the FLN, 15). Scheduled for January 1992, the second round would have given the FIS the absolute majority in the National Assembly. Chadli Bendjedid was ready to govern with an Islamist majority in the National Assembly, but the military forced him to resign. The potential loss of control of the state frightened the high-ranking military officers who decided to cancel the second round of elections. Many elected Islamists were arrested, and Algeria subsequently floundered in violence that has spared neither civilians nor members of the military and security services.⁶ The cancellation of the election in January 1992 and the dismissal of the president Chadli Bendjedid reflected the army's key role in the state as the source of power.

Changing Society

Algerian society changed significantly between 1830, the year of the French conquest, and 1962, when the country won independence from France. In the nineteenth century, 80 percent of the population lived in rural areas, practicing agro-pastoralist activities, while the remainder consisted of craftspeople and traders who lived in cities. The tribal communities in rural areas were relatively closed and produced their own sustenance, essentially cereals and mutton. This self-sufficient economy was extensive and required vast pastoral lands (*arch*) for sheep. The colonial authorities declared this tribal property “ownerless,” confiscated it, and distributed it to European settlers. On one million hectares, settlers would practice intensive modern agriculture oriented toward Europe. After several successive revolts, the largest of which was that of Shaykh Mokrani in 1871, the tribes were eventually defeated militarily.

In 1930, after a century of French domination, there were seven million inhabitants, of whom seven hundred thousand were Europeans, who lived primarily in the four largest cities of the country (Algiers, Oran, Constantine, and Annaba). Eighty percent of the natives, who were denied civic rights, lived in the countryside as landowning families or permanent, seasonal, or daily agricultural workers in farms owned by European settlers. The other 20 percent were urban, coming from impoverished former urban families and, above all, from the rural exodus. Some Algerians worked in factories, ports, and railways and formed the nucleus of the urban proletariat. Others worked in small commerce and in informal sectors. Many unemployed or underemployed Algerians immigrated to France to find jobs. With the exception of a few hundred individuals, there were no teachers, doctors, or liberal professionals among the natives.

It was in this sociological context that modern Algerian nationalism was born in the 1920s. Its social basis was the poor peasantry, and its leadership came from the cities and Algerian immigrants in

France. Some Algerian workers, who became activists asking for independence, learned in France concepts related to civic rights such as freedom of speech under the influence of French unions and their political culture.

In 1962, independence provoked a massive exodus from the countryside to cities where rural families occupied the urban housing abandoned by the Europeans known as *pieds-noirs*. The large migration of extended families to the cities gave birth to a new society, whose members had to live in buildings with neighbors who were unrelated to them and get accustomed to apartments built for nuclear families. In twenty years, the native population in the urban areas grew from 10 percent to 65 percent. The urbanization was also pushed by the government's economic development policies. These policies were focused on establishing industry and assuring education for all children six years and older. A new middle class of teachers, doctors, engineers, lawyers, and civil servants grew in a rather short period following the spread of public education and creation of several universities. In 1962, there were six hundred students; in 1972, there were one hundred thousand. Today, there are more than two million students. Yet the growth of the number of students has not solved problems of underdevelopment. This has had significant socioeconomic consequences, including what is called "the graduate jobless." The rapid growth of the urban population caused a severe housing crisis that led to shantytowns, despite the efforts of the government to build social housing.

The free education profited women, who outnumbered the male students in universities. Their status improved, with women now working in education, administration, and hospitals. Close to 25 percent of urban women work, lowering the birth rate. Official statistics show that the median age of marriage for women rose from eighteen to twenty-eight between 1962 and 1980. That said, however, the family law still does not ensure equality between women and men; according to the family code of 1984, women are inferior in matters of marriage, divorce, and inheritance. Similarly, many women wear the *hijab* (veil) for social and religious

acceptance. This is telling of the contradictions of Algerian society, which on the one hand aspires to modernity and on the other clings to the past.

Institutions and Governance

As many one-party system rule in Third World countries, Algeria shifted to the multiparty system based on electoral competition. Formally, Algeria is a democratic country with freedom of speech and free electoral competition. Any citizen, on the basis of criteria stated by the constitution, can run for office in presidential, legislative, and municipal contests. However, the reality is quite different to the extent that the source of power in politics is not the electorate but the army. Although the multiparty system gives the Algerian regime a democratic façade, the army continues to hold the *real* power. The Algerian military leaders are reluctant to establish a dictatorship because they emerged from an antimilitarist and antifascist liberation movement. They are convinced, however, that the civil elites must be supervised and controlled because they may betray the nation. The consequence is that the judiciary is not independent from the government, which is overseen by the army. The army views its mission as choosing—through rigged elections—civilians who unflinchingly respect the unwritten rule of the Algerian political system: The army is the only source of power. State power is split between an unaccountable military leadership and an administration that takes its legitimacy from this same military leadership.⁷ The political system rests on two legitimacies: the first one, hidden, inherited from the Liberation War and embodied by the Army, while the second is formal, pertaining to the elections. The peculiarity of the Algerian political system is that the state is formed by a real power in the hands of the military command and a formal power wielded by the president and the government.

There is no apparent sign in Algeria that the army plays such a political role in the control of the government. The army's sovereign power is not institutional; it is not inscribed in the constitution, in which the army is presented as dependent on the president of the republic. The constitution states that the armed forces are under the leadership of the president, who appoints the high-ranking officers.

The reality is different insofar as the presidency receives the instructions from the Ministry of Defense regarding crucial political issues and ideological orientations, including foreign policy. The presidency is in fact an emanation of the army, even an annex of the minister of defense. It is the institution by which the army controls the state and draws the line for the government to follow.

The history of the relationships between the presidency and the military shows clearly the political role of the army. In 1962, as soon as the liberation war ended, the military overthrew the civilian leadership embodied by the GPRA (Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic), imposing Ahmed Ben Bella as head of state. In 1965, Colonel Houari Boumédiène took over and put in jail the president Ahmed Bella, who had been elected in 1963. Boumédiène ruled the country as head of state while retaining the functions of minister of defense and chief of staff of the army. After his death in 1978, the military (and not the party, as stated in the constitution) designated his successor, Colonel Chadli Bendjedid, who had to resign in January 1992. In the aftermath of the electoral victory of the Islamists, the military did not accept that he governed with a parliament in which the Islamists have the majority. The military replaced him with Mohamed Boudiaf, a founding member of the FLN in 1954, who had lived in exile since 1963. He was assassinated by one of his bodyguards five months after he was designated as head of the state. He was willing to replace the high-ranking officers by a new generation more faithful to him. In 1995, after an interim period led by Colonel Ali Kafi, General Liamine Zéroual was appointed to run for office in elections he won without surprise. He tried to reach a political agreement with the Islamists to put an end to the insurgency, but the military prevented him from doing so.

In April 1999, Benjedid was replaced by Abdelaziz Bouteflika. Bouteflika was reelected in 2004, 2009, and 2014, making him the longest-running Algerian president to hold office. But he was increasingly weak. In 2005, he underwent a surgery and was hospitalized in France for two months, which greatly diminished his physical capacity. In his television appearances, he sat in a

wheelchair and had difficulty speaking. In 2009 and 2014, the members of the government went on the electoral trail themselves, campaigning for him because he could not walk or make speeches.

In 2019, Bouteflika's term came to an end. In the beginning of the year, he once again stood for elections, poised for a fifth term in office. He was eighty-two years old, and due to his weakness, he had not made a public speech for six years. However, the military establishment wanted him to stay in office in order to avoid electing a political leader who would actually impose on them his policy. The Algerian people felt differently. They were angered by his candidacy, offended by seeing their longtime president sitting speechless in a wheelchair, vying once again for the position. There were massive demonstrations around the country that began on February 22, 2019; by March 15, local newspapers reported that fifteen million people had taken to the streets in various cities, insisting that Bouteflika withdraw his bid for office. The crowds, strikingly, were peaceful and socially mixed—including men and women, old and young, and judges and other stakeholders—and they carried signs that mocked the leadership. It was the first time that Algeria had experienced a peaceful uprising, almost in the image of a national feast (elders reminisced that they hadn't seen such joyful crowds since the celebration of independence in July 1962).

The ruling elites were surprised by the scale of the protest. They threatened demonstrators at the beginning of the protests but eventually retreated. General Gaid Salah, the chief of staff of the army, made statements that emphasized the army would be on the side of the people. On April 2, 2019, President Bouteflika resigned and postponed the elections. As of this writing, the demonstrations have not ended, with the people calling for a regime change so that the administration will stop rigging the elections.

The full implications of the demonstrations remain unclear, but they may shake Algeria's long-standing system. Until 2019, the multiparty system introduced in 1989 had not really affected the rationale of the regime: Military leaders always effectively choose a candidate, and

they manage to have him elected in rigged elections. Algeria may have formally abandoned the one-party system, but it established only a superficial multiparty system. The democratic transition has thus far failed. Indeed, the Algerian experience highlights the fact that elections are not a sufficient index of democracy. The elected bodies do not exercise sovereign power, which belongs to the army, not to the electorate. From this perspective, the Algerian regime is cursed by a major contradiction: It promulgates the right of parties to compete, according to the constitution; however, it denies the sovereignty of the electorate by stuffing ballot boxes to favor parties of the administration and to distort electoral majorities. The reforms caused the regime to lose its ideological-political coherence. On the one hand, the regime changed too much because it moved away from the coherence of the one-party system; on the other hand, it changed too little because the army was unwilling to renounce its historical legitimacy and role as source of power. The lack of real democracy makes the population feel incapable of influencing the social and economic policies of the government. Voters are apathetic and fail to participate in elections; young people riot, upset about unemployment, corruption, and harsh conditions of everyday life.

Not only does the army control the government, but it also controls the political field by infiltrating all grassroots organizations, political parties, unions, associations, the media, the universities, and so on. This mission is devoted to the DRS (Département de Renseignement et de Sécurité), the intelligence service, playing the role of a political police. During the bloody decade (1992–2002), this service gained so much influence that it challenged the military command. Its leader, General Tewfik Mediene, known as “the God of Algiers,” became the most powerful high-ranking officer, threatening the power of his peers. In 2015, he was dismissed by the military command after supposed Islamists attacked the installations of oil wells in the area of In Amenas (Sahara). The Islamists took hostages, among them many foreigners. Refusing to negotiate with the Islamists, the military command launched a bloody attack, killing thirty-three hostages. The DRS reproached the military for its inability to secure such strategic places on which the economy of

Algeria depends. Rumors say that the attack was planned by “fake” Islamists recruited by the DRS without informing the military command. Since then, many high-ranking officers of the intelligence service have been pushed to retire, including General Tewfik Mediène. His deputy, General Hassan, was sentenced to jail for many years by a military court.

The DRS is a vital institution for the regime. It shapes the political field so that neither the elections nor the opposition parties can threaten the regime. A closer look at the parties and electoral politics demonstrates the constraints on political participation. There are two ruling parties—the FLN and the RND (Democratic National Rally)—that perpetuate the style of the one-party system. They are faithful to the state administration that provides them with the finances they need. There are some Islamist parties in competition with one another to obtain seats in the elected assemblies and cabinets in the government. They adjust their demands by insisting not on the political system but on the symbol of Islam in the state and in society. These parties criticize the formal power but never the real power, as if they accept the structural bipolarity of the state power and expect the army to allow them to run the administration. They are faithful to the regime and play the role of the opposition, giving up the hope to have the majority of the parliament or to gain the presidential election.

An analysis of poll results is telling. After the FIS was outlawed in January 1992, the first national elections were the legislative contests of June 5, 1997, which gave the president Zéroural his ideal assembly. His party, the RND, created three months earlier, obtained 155 seats with 3,533,434 votes. It was followed by the MSP (Movement for Society and Peace, Islamist—69 seats with 1,553,154 votes); the FLN (64 seats with 1,497,285 votes); and Nahda (an Islamist party—seats with 915,446 votes). Other results included the FFS, 19 seats with 527,848 votes; the RCD (Rally for Culture and Democracy), 19 seats with 442,271 votes; and the PT, 4 seats.

A new National Assembly was elected on May 30, 2002. The election was marked by the highest rate of abstention ever registered—53 percent. (In Kabylia, the participation was around 2 percent.) The FLN won the majority of the seats (199 of 388) to the detriment of the RND, which suffered a spectacular drop to 48 representatives, losing two-thirds of its previous seats. The other loser in the poll was the MSP; it was outstripped by the MNR (Movement for National Renaissance, Islamist), which went from 38 to 43 seats. The other unexpected winner was the PT (the Workers' Party, a Trotskyist) of Louiza Hanoune, which increased from 4 to 21 representatives. The FFS and the RCD boycotted the elections because of the quasi-insurrection in Kabylia, which started in April 2001. An unknown party—the Algerian National Front—obtained 8 seats. Three parties made their entry with 1 seat each: the Movement of National Harmony, Ennahda, and the PRA.

In 2007, a new assembly was elected with little change, except voter participation (36 percent) was still lower than it had been previously. The FLN remained in first place (136 of 389 seats); the RND followed with 61 representatives; and the MSP obtained 52 seats. Nahda went from 43 to just 3 representatives. The RCD won 19 seats, and the PT (the Trotskyist party) obtained 26 seats. The FFS did not take part in the elections to protest the administration's authoritarian behavior.

The next national elections, held on May 10, 2012, took place after the Arab Spring. Many regional specialists expected a change in results, especially given that the administration had allowed many parties to take part in these elections. Legal Islamist parties such as the MSP and Nahda formed a coalition called "Alliance of Green Algeria" and expected to dominate the new assembly as they had in Tunisia, Morocco, and Egypt. Twenty-eight lists fielded candidates with 30 percent women, given a recent law that sought to increase the number of women in the assembly. The RCD boycotted the elections, but the FFS, to everyone's surprise, chose to participate. Despite the expectations of change, the results were strikingly similar to those of previous assemblies. The FLN, the former ruling

party, increased its number of deputies to 221, and the Alliance of Green Algeria had only 47 members, in stark contrast to the 200 seats its leaders expected to gain. Of the 462 candidates elected, there are 145 women present on all lists. According to the government, the participation rate was 42.9 percent.

The 2017 legislative election did not bring a dramatic change. The parties of the administration (FLN, 164 seats and RND, 100 seats) kept the majority of the parliament, while the Islamists altogether (five parties) won some 100 seats. The non-Islamist parties (FFS, RCD, PT, ANR) got 40 seats, while twenty-five small parties won between 1 and 4 seats each. There were also independent candidates who obtained 28 seats.

What lessons should be drawn from the election results? First, the regime uses elections in order to legitimize itself. Second, it views the parties as auxiliaries, not rivals. The sawtooth results of the parties (the RND dropped from 155 to 48 representatives in 2002; the MSP, from 69 to 34; the FLN went from 64 to 199; and Nahda, from 43 to 3 in 2007) indicate a quota system based on the parties' relationships with the administration. The elections (see [Table 9.1](#)) are not an index of the popularity of the parties; rather, they are a way for the administration to award docile parties and punish unfaithful ones. The Algerian experience shows that elections are not sufficient to establish democracy insofar as democracy requires that, first, parties must be strong enough to defend their electoral results, and second, the judiciary system must be autonomous and able to try those accused of fraud.

Actors, Opinions, and Participation

As in any political system, there are in Algeria actors, opinions, and a kind of political participation. However, the authoritarian nature of the regime does not accept autonomous actors, including political parties whose leadership is under pressure from the administration. The result is that the opposition is not inside the legal framework of the institutions but outside. The different segments of the public opinion are not conveyed by legal grassroots organizations taking part in politics. A dynamic of radicalization leads to recurrent riots and enduring social violence. There are no negotiation channels between the different social groups and the administration. The official union of workers (UGTA, General Union of Algerian Workers) is dependent on the state, and unions find it difficult to have legal activities. They resort to illegal strikes with the consequences of arrest and crackdown. Moreover, the judiciary is not independent from the executive branch of the government, so any public protest could be repressed as crime or felony.

The retreat of the state from certain economic sectors and the end of the control on foreign trade gave rise to a new class of private businessmen. In a few years, huge fortunes have been built in the import sector and in construction of infrastructure as roads, schools, and housing. To obtain the lucrative contracts with the administration, the businessmen associate themselves with people who have family ties with the rulers or become part of corruption networks.⁸ The increase of oil prices between 2000 and 2014 gave huge financial means to the state that allowed vast programmes of construction and importation of commodities from abroad. More than \$100 billion was invested during 2000 to 2014 to implement what was called the programme of the president: one million apartment units, hundreds of freeway kilometers, tramways in big cities, hydraulic infrastructure for agriculture, and the like. As long as the price of oil was around \$100, the economy was thriving, benefitting mainly foreign enterprises and the private local sector. A new

bourgeoisie emerged whose peculiarity is that its fortunes do not stem from a creation of wealth through manufactures but through the state budget. In this case, this new bourgeoisie cannot ask for political change since, first, it benefits from the authoritarian rule and, second, it is politically weak insofar as its wealth depends on contracts with the state administration. It explains the hostility of the new bourgeoisie to democracy that could harm its immediate interests.

However, the opposition is vigorous among a middle class made of teachers, civil servants, lawyers, and doctors who express their demands for a democratic rule. In 2008 and 2009, they organized many protests in big cities such as Algiers, Oran, and Tizi-Ouzou against the reform of the constitution that allowed the sitting president to run for office as many times as he wished. But these social groups do not have the support of the majority of the population more concerned by unemployment and the housing crisis than the rule of law. The rulers have been able so far to curb any protest movement that would ask for a regime change.

As for the press, it appears that the journalists have the freedom of speech. There are dozens of private newspapers in Arabic and French in which different opinions are expressed. Some articles are hostile to the policy of the government, giving the impression that in Algeria journalists enjoy freedom of speech. Indeed, the press is free to report on corruption and many cases of embezzlement involving high-ranking civil servants or even the entourage of the president. The journalists however cannot write about corruption involving high-ranking officers or elaborate on the political power of the army. Any newspaper that would dare to do so will be deprived of advertisement. Censorship is not exercised through police arrest but through advertisement blackmail. The editors of newspapers deal with this blackmail to avoid bankruptcy. This pattern leads to a distrust of the press that tries to compensate in criticizing a scapegoat: the formal power, including the president and his ministers. The narration imposed to the press is that the president is an authoritarian ruler and his entourage is corrupt. Respecting the

constitution, the military will not intervene in the political field. Any newspaper that does not endorse this narration will not have the advertisement from ANEP (National Agency for Edition and Publicity).

Table 9.1 Parliamentary Elections in Algeria, 1997–2017

Table 9.1 Parliamentary Elections in Algeria, 1997–2017

June 1997		
Party	Votes (percentage)	Seats (of 380)
RND	33.6	159
MSP	14.8	69
FLN	14.3	61
Nahda (Islamist)	8.7	35
FFS	5.0	20
RCD	4.2	19
PT	1.8	4
Others	1.3	5
Independents	4.4	8
<i>May 2002</i>		
Party	Votes (percentage)	Seats (of 389)

June 1997		
Party	Votes (percentage)	Seats (of 380)
FLN	51.1	199
RND	12.1	47
MNR	11.0	43
MSP	9.8	38
Independents	7.7	30
PT	5.4	21
Algerian National Front	2.0	8
Others	0.6	3
<i>May 2007</i>		
Party	Votes (percentage)	Seats (of 389)
FLN	23.0	136
RND	10.3	61
MSP	9.6	52
PT	5.1	26
RCD	3.4	19

June 1997		
Party	Votes (percentage)	Seats (of 380)
FNA	4.1	13
Others	20.8	82
<i>May 2012</i>		
Party	Votes (percentage)	Seats (of 389)
FLN	14.2	221
RND	5.6	70
Alliance de l'Algérie Verte	5.1	47
FFS	2.0	21
Parti des Travailleurs	3.0	17
Independents	7.2	19
Others		68
<i>May 2017</i>		
Party	Votes (percentage)	Seats (of 389)
FLN	26.0	164

June 1997		
Party	Votes (percentage)	Seats (of 380)
RND	15.0	100
MSP	6.1	33
TAJ	4.2	19
NAHDA Adala Bina	3.7	15
FFS	2.4	14
MPA	3.7	13
PT	3.0	11
RCD	1.0	9
Independents		28

Sources: Psephos, Adam Carr's election archive, <http://psephos.adam-carr.net/>; European Institute for Research on Mediterranean and Euro-Arab Cooperation, <http://www.medea.be/en/>.

Box 9.1 Algeria's Main Political Parties

FLN (Front de Libération Nationale, or Liberation National Front)

Created in 1954 in order to gain independence, the FLN lost some of its dynamism as soon as its objective was achieved. Since 1964 under the Algiers Charter, the government entrusted the party with defense of the regime's policies, including industrialization and agrarian reform. After 1965, the party's authority depended on the charisma of Boumédiène, but it lost all credibility after his death. During the riots of October 1988, its offices were destroyed first—an indication of the party's unpopularity. After the constitutional reform of February 1989, the leaders hoped that the FLN, despite competition from other parties, would remain hegemonic. They hoped to patronize smaller groups, following the example of Mexico's PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party). It was incapable, however, of playing this role, even if at the time of the polls it managed to keep the party faithful. In the December 1991 elections, it had 15 seats in the new assembly, with close to half of the voices of the FIS, which had obtained 188 with gerrymandering. The FLN did not outright oppose annulment of the elections. In January 1995, with the prompting of Abdelhamid Mehri, secretary general from 1989 to 1996, it participated in the Rome meeting, which brought together the FIS, the FFS, the MDA, Nahda, the PT, and the LADDH (Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights) to sign what is called the platform of Rome, which recommended a political solution to the crisis. It was the first time that the FLN took an initiative that irritated the military hierarchy, which consequently founded in 1997 a rival party, the RND, to neutralize (if necessary) the FLN. Meanwhile, Mehri was replaced by Boualem Benhamouda, who brought the FLN back to its original mission of supporting the regime. Since then, the FLN and the RND have competed to defend the regime in return for various perks.

RND (*Rassemblement National Démocratique*, or National Rally for Democracy)

General Mohamed Bechine, adviser to President Liamine Zéroual, set up a new party to support the president in elections. In record time, the new party disposed of offices, funds, and staff with a view to the legislative elections of June 1997. From its birth, the RND has attracted adherents motivated more by personal interest than by political conviction. Before elections, the party feverishly compiles electoral lists. This is often accompanied by local crises that give way to arguments that make the front pages of newspapers. The militants attracted by the RND—and to a lesser extent by the FLN—divert funds when they take office. According to the daily paper *al-Watan*, 1,050 officials elected in an October 2002 local ballot were suspended, and five hundred have since been arrested and imprisoned. Citing official sources, the newspaper reported that 349 mayors (that is, a quarter of the mayors of Algeria) were prosecuted for embezzlement.

FIS (*Front Islamique du Salut*, or Islamic Salvation Front)

Since its prohibition in March 1992, the FIS has disappeared as a legal party. The leadership that remained after the arrests and the assassinations became divided after the Rome meeting failed. In September 1997, the Armée Islamique du Salut (AIS), an armed branch of the FIS, gave up its weapons and signed a truce with the DRS. Some supported the truce (Rabah Kébir, settled in Germany), while others (Mourad Dhina, settled in Switzerland) expressed reservations, hoping to negotiate a political solution. In August 2002, a conference of the FIS was held in Europe. It confirmed Mourad Dhina as spokesperson of the party abroad, proposed a political solution, and proclaimed commitment to free elections and respect for human rights. With the July 2003 release of its leaders, Abbassi Madani and Ali Benhadj, the authorities sought to definitively turn the page on a party that nearly created a new regime. Dhina resigned as spokesperson in 2004, and it seems that the FIS as a structured party no longer exists.

MSP (*Mouvement pour la Société et la Paix*/*Harakat al-Mujtama' wa al-Salam*, or Movement for Society and Peace)

The second Islamist party, MSP (formerly Hamas), is rather legalist. It has participated in all the polls and has accepted cabinet posts. Its founder, Mahfoud Nahnah, who died in June 2003, attempted to establish an Islamic state while participating in the regime's institutions. Using the public media, he frequently denounced every project that harmed the Islamic character of the state and regularly defended the Arabic language, which he felt had been marginalized by French in the administration. From his point of view, MSP existed to mobilize those sensitive to "the national values" (*al-thawabit al-wataniya*). The party essentially recruits from the urban middle classes, among the civil servants and teachers. Its checkered election results indicate either that its electoral base is volatile or that it agrees to stuffing ballot boxes—sometimes in its favor, sometimes not. Because its discourse is tolerant of the regime, numerous observers think of it as the third party of the administration.

MNR (Mouvement pour la Renaissance Nationale, or Movement for National Renaissance)

The third Islamist party is MNR, led by Abdallah Djaballah. It differs from the MSP only in that its founder prefers being the leader of a small party to being second-in-command of a larger one. Although present in the large cities, MNR draws its strength essentially from eastern Algeria, particularly from Skikda, its leader's hometown.

FFS (*Front des Forces Socialistes*, or *Front of the Socialist Forces*)

Created in 1963 by Hocine Ait Ahmed, one of the founding fathers of the historical FLN, the FFS always opposed the regime, which in its eyes had been illegitimate since its takeover in 1962. It recommended reestablishment of institutions based on a constituent assembly that would write a new constitution. Legalized in 1989, it organized marches on Algiers that attracted thousands of people and became the principal non-Islamist opposition party. In January 1992, it called for a large protest in Algiers that gathered more than one million people under the watchwords “neither dictatorial state, nor fundamentalist state.” With the electoral victory of the FIS—which it accepted—it intended to unite all the non-Islamist political currents to propose a democratic alternative. The annulment of the elections, which it condemned, prevented it from being a political counterweight to Islamism. Three years later, it took part in the meeting in Rome, which recommended a political solution to the bloody crisis. It was the only party besides the FIS that demanded the army return to its barracks and denounced the influence of the military hierarchy on the institutions of the state and what it considered the illegal prerogatives of the DRS. Based essentially in Algiers and its environs and in Kabylia, it advocates official recognition of the Berber language. The FFS suffers from the image of a regional party, despite the national status of its leader. Its discourse seduced the urban elites of other regions (Oran, Constantine, and Annaba), but they did not provide it the electorate it needed outside Kabylia. The ideology of the FFS is similar to those of European social-democratic parties (it is a member of Socialist International), from which it borrowed the model of electoral alternation and the respect of democratic values, notably freedom of expression and human rights. Its strength, paradoxically, is also its weakness—namely, identifying with a charismatic leader and a particular region.

RCD (*Rassemblement pour la Culture et la Démocratie*, or Rally for Culture and Democracy)

Founded by militants from the FFS, with which they were at odds, and the Berber cultural movement, the RCD imposed itself on politics and the media thanks to the dynamism of its leader, Saïd Saâdî. Its virulent anti-Islamism led it to support the most radical fringe of the army, of which it sought—in vain—to be the political expression. It advocates “republican and democratic values,” but not opening institutions to religious groups. Its model is French secularism, which neatly separates politics and religion. Recruiting among secularist groups frightened by Islamists, the RCD does not fear being a minority on the electoral map. To its militants, democracy cannot be reduced to elections—which can be fatal—and requires changes in education, which is dominated by Islamists. Saïd Saâdî defends modernization through authoritarianism. He has long wooed the military, so it entrusts him with the formal power needed to carry out his program. But the military has judged him as too audacious and has only offered his party two ministerial portfolios in exchange for his support of political security and his oversight of human rights. When the events of Kabylia exploded in April 2001, the RCD withdrew from the government, afraid of cutting itself off definitively from its stronghold.

PT (Parti des Travailleurs, or Workers' Party)

The PT is known through its spokesperson, Louiza Hanoune, a popular woman who has criticized the country's economic and social situations. Comfortable in Arabic and French, Hanoune, in militant Trotskyist fashion, developed a virulent discourse against any liberal economic reform. She recommended reinforcing the public sector and meeting the demands for employment, housing, health, and schooling. A signatory of the Rome agreements in 1995, PT was satisfied with its integration into the National Assembly, where it obtained 4 seats in 1997 and 21 in 2002. Long allied, the PT and the FFS split over the international demand for a commission of inquiry into the massacres and the assassinations during the 1990s. For Hanoune, the Algerian crisis must be resolved without intervention from foreign nongovernmental organizations or the UN Commission on Human Rights.

Many journalists and academics have been surprised that the uprisings that shook the region in 2011 did not affect Algeria. There are three reasons why Algerians did not revolt. The first is that Algeria had just emerged from a traumatic period of ten years of bloody conflict (1992–2002) that claimed more than two hundred thousand lives. A majority of Algerians were scared to experience such a period again. The second reason is that the Western intervention in Libya also frightened Algerians. A young Algerian in Orian said, "I hate Bouteflika but I do not want to give Sarkozy, the French president, the opportunity to bomb Algiers." The third reason is that the government responded to the uprisings by creating an organism called ANSEJ (*Agence Nationale de Soutien à l'Emploi des Jeunes*) to distribute free loans to any young person who wanted to create his or her own business. This was possible in part because the state enjoyed a budget surplus of \$200 billion, thanks to rising oil prices. Many of these businesses succeeded as public transportations, cyber cafes, dry cleaners, and such, creating thousands of jobs, but others went bankrupt and were not able to reimburse the loans to the banks.

Religion and Politics

In Algeria, as in many Muslim countries, religion is linked to politics for two reasons. First of all, Islam is not (yet) a secularized religion; second of all, the nationalist movement that fought for independence used Islam as a vector of popular mobilization against the colonial power. It gives the conservatives the strength to oppose the secularization that is underway in social practices and in everyday life. The conservatives imposed Article 2 of the constitution, declaring that the religion of the state is Islam, and in another article, it is stated that any candidate running for office has to be Muslim. The religious law still has influence with regard to family law: Polygamy is legal, and women inherit only half of what their brothers do. However, even though religion is notable in public space and in everyday language, society is undergoing a deep process of secularization. God is symbolically everywhere, but everyone acts according to her or his own interest, “forgetting” that the Koran calls to help the poor. Since there is no one interpretation of Islam, the sacred is used to vindicate vested interests at the detriment of fairness at all levels of society. Islam is used to defend self-interests and not the sacred—individualism replaced the old spirituality of past ages. A majority of young women, for instance, embraced the Islamist discourse to free themselves from the weight of traditional customs. They use Islam to enjoy freedom to study, to go out with their female friends, and even to have their word in the choice of the future husband. This is new in comparison with traditional society, which is fading away.

The Algerian regime is symbolically respectful of religion, but the leaders do not claim religious legitimacy as leaders do in monarchies such as Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan. For the leaders, there is no conflict between Islam and their ideology; they think that when Islam “is better understood,” it enhances the nationalist spirit. For them, there is a bad interpretation of Islam and a good one. The good one would be the religious doctrine taught in the public school.

It has been elaborated by the reformist trend led by late Cheikh Abdelhamid Ben Badis (1890–1940), who is a disciple of the Nahda movement whose leaders (Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh) tried to reform Islam in the nineteenth century to make it consistent with modernity. After independence, the new state encouraged the puritan conception of A. Ben Badis at the detriment of popular Islam of the rural areas attached to sainthood. However, this puritan conception did not separate religion from politics. Two decades after independence, the religious teaching radicalized, giving birth to Islamism that is not foreign to the political history of Algeria; on the contrary, it is the dialectical by-product of nationalism and puritanism of the Nahda.

After the bloody decade (1992–2002) that took the lives of more than two hundred thousand people, the military have defeated the insurgents and allowed those who give up weapons to benefit from amnesty. Taking advantage of the increase in the oil income that started in 2000, some Islamists got involved in wealthy (i.e., “big”) businesses, giving rise to what is called “Islamobusiness.” Importantly, the Islamists do not appear to be the main actors of social protest as they were in the 1980s and 1990s. Islamists call for gradual and peaceful steps toward an Islamic state. They participate in elections and accept the political role of the army. There are many legal Islamist parties enjoying the freedom of speech that allows them to put pressure on the government to forbid alcohol in the country. Radical Islam still persists, but it does not have popular support as in the 1980s and 1990s.

Protest and Social Conflict

Following the cancellation of the national elections that Islamists won in 1992, Algeria went through a period of political violence that lasted ten years. In 1999, the army reached a secret settlement with the military branch of the Islamist party FIS. A referendum was organized in 2002 to approve a text called “National Reconciliation.” The majority of the population voted in favor of peace. Since then, the military conflict ended, despite some terrorist attacks of radicalized Islamists who made allegiance to AQIM (Al Qaida of Islamic Maghreb). The victory over the Islamists is a victory over the most popular and dangerous adversary of the regime. If the Islamists could not overthrow the regime, there will be no political force that can threaten it.

However, the threat comes from the social unrest fueled by the decrease of the purchasing power and the incapacity of the local economy to create wealth. The government has to import commodities, including food, to meet the needs of a population that reached forty-two million in 2017. So social peace rests on the price of oil in the international market. In the period of decreased state income, the government carried out devaluations in order to create more local currency with the same amount of foreign currency. From 1992 to 2000, the local currency was devalued 370 percent, which means that purchasing power decreased in the same proportion. The situation of war made it difficult to protest and ask for an increase of salaries. But as soon as the price of oil started to increase, the government stopped devaluing during the 2000 decade. If we take the dollar as a yardstick, from 1992 to June 2015 the dollar rose from 22.78 dinars to 105 dinars. This means that the purchasing power of the local currency lost more than 500 percent of its value during this period of time (1992–2015). Salaries did not increase in the same proportion.

The government had to raise the military and police salaries in 2002 at the end of the conflict. Following this decision, other professions and employees of the state asked for a raise. Many university professors went on strike, followed by schoolteachers, physicians and nurses of hospitals, employees of local administration, and others. The government had no choice but to raise salaries. These workers and employees created numerous unions—which are not recognized by the administration—in order to demand adjustment of salaries to inflation.

Thanks to the increase of the price of oil in the international market, the government had the financial means to handle this growing social unrest fueled by the demand of better salaries. The financial bonanza allowed the government to launch a huge program of infrastructure construction: freeways, railroads, tramways in big cities, housing to eradicate the shantytowns, and so on. As a result, the unemployment rate decreased, and with the exception of local riots for housing, the social unrest faded away. It was not the case, however, in the southern part of the country. Numerous demonstrations took place first in Ghardaia, where many activists were sentenced to jail, and second in other cities of the huge Sahara. Thousands of young unemployed expressed their anger, shouting, “We are born in the Sahara, and we don’t benefit from the oil of the Sahara.” The government made some vague promises while the police were cracking down on the protesters. The protest amplified in the southern part of the country with opposition to the exploitation of shale oil. Huge demonstrations took place in all the cities of the Sahara, with people shouting, “You took our oil, leave our water clean.” President Bouteflika answered the protest by saying that “the shale oil is a gift of God and we shouldn’t refuse it.” The government is determined to move forward in the exploitation of the shale oil, especially since the decrease of the price per barrel of oil after 2014.

Beside the social protest about the purchasing power, there is protest denouncing abuses of human rights. In the absence of the autonomy of the judiciary system, the police in general and the

intelligence community in particular are inclined to violate human rights of scholars, journalists, activists, and the like who are liberated as soon as the local and foreign media report on them. The government does not like to appear in foreign newspapers as human rights abusers. The government is also worried by the families of fifteen thousand to twenty thousand people who disappeared during the "dirty war." The majority of these families accepted money under the condition they stop asking about husbands and sons who disappeared during the 1992 to 2002 period. But some families did not accept the deal and are still looking for the truth, demanding the government to tell them the fate of those arrested by security services. The police regularly harass these families, despite support from nongovernmental organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. Many of these cases have been brought to the UN Commission for Human Rights in Geneva.

Political Economy

The Algerian economy depends heavily on oil prices on the international market. World Bank and governmental figures reveal the economy's dependence on exports of hydrocarbons, which account for 98 percent of revenue. Exports other than hydrocarbons amount to less than \$1 billion per year, according to official figures.⁹ The riots of October 1988, which put an end to the one-party system, erupted because of a sharp decrease in the oil revenues. The state could no longer afford to import goods of wide consumption such as cereals, coffee, sugar, cooking oil, and drugs. As discussed earlier, the government's economic policy since independence has favored a state-led economy that protects the poorest against the inequalities and injustices of the market. State-subsidized housing, schooling, health, transportation, and the like have their origins in the ideological populism inherited from the liberation war; however, they have been made possible thanks to the oil exports. The sheer magnitude of wasted financial resources forced the leaders to recognize the need for reform.

By the end of the 1980s, the government was aware of the serious deficits of the public enterprises. Financial reforms after nationwide riots in 1988 were combined with political reforms, including the introduction of the multiparty system. They aimed at ending the state monopoly over the foreign trade and at ending the rentier system that benefited the clientelistic networks. Since then, the economic policy of successive governments has been characterized by liberal discourse, still-strong presence of the state in the economy, and privatization beneficial to people linked to the ruling class. During the 1990s, the reforms did not help the state budget that underwent a severe crisis and was on the verge of bankruptcy. Loans had to be negotiated with international financial institutions, including the IMF, which required a structural adjustment program. State finances were saved by credits from the IMF and the European Union. Algerian negotiators, who played on the fear of the European states about the Islamist threat, said in effect, "It's either us, with all our defects, or an Islamist republic just one hour's flight from Europe." Alarmed to the

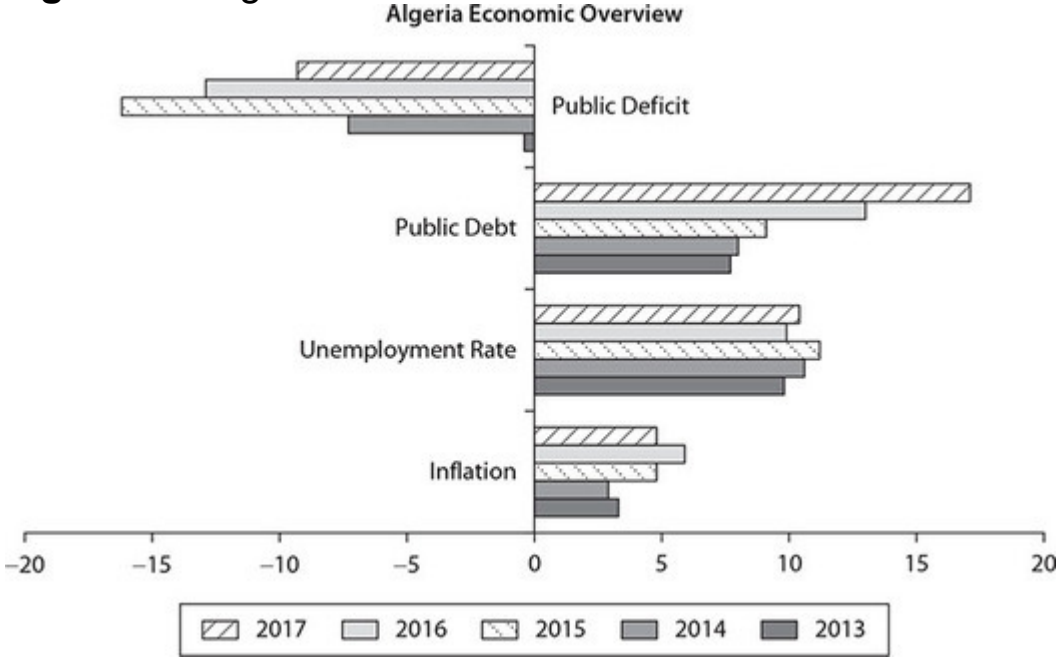
point of panic, the EU paid up without any conditions on how their credits were to be used. The government did partially apply the IMF directives, dissolving hundreds of local public enterprises. This put two hundred thousand people out of work, although the job loss was partially offset by employing a new militia to fight the Islamist groups. The National Assembly worked to privatize the public sector, but only enterprises such as hotels, which made easy profits, were sold.

The IMF encouraged the government to devalue the local currency in order to attract foreign investors. A weak dinar would make the salaries competitive. It turned out that the reasoning of the IMF was not effective, and it had negative consequences on the domestic private manufactures. The devaluation of the currency has created difficulties for a number of small- and medium-sized enterprises in the private sector, which have been forced to close and lay off workers because of the excessive cost of imported products and the competition of foreign products permitted on the domestic market. Liberalization of foreign trade, by lowering customs duties, has opened the domestic market to Southeast Asian products, such as clothing and shoes, threatening domestic production. This policy has shrunk the local production and has reinforced the trade and rentier character of the economy by distributing wealth through speculation. Consequently, agriculture and industry account for barely 25 percent of total employment. According to the Algerian Office National des Statistiques, the unemployment rate was 27.3 percent in 2001. By 2005, unemployment decreased to 15.3 percent, and the most recent data, from 2015 to 2018, show unemployment hovering between 10 percent and 12 percent. Despite this, youth unemployment remains disproportionately high; 29.1 percent of the population ages sixteen to twenty-five were out of work in the third quarter of 2018,¹⁰ specifically among urban centers, which explains the *harraga phenomenon*—young people trying to reach Spain and Italy in small boats that they make themselves.

The harsh consequences of the liberal reforms were offset by the financial surplus fueled by the increase of the oil price in the first decade of the 2000s. This surplus relieved the Algerian government

of pressure from international monetary institutions. It also made possible a program that injected \$50 billion into the economy over five years. Public infrastructures have improved, including the East-West Freeway, railways, urban transportation, agriculture, and social housing. As the program got underway, the growth rate rose to 6.8 percent in 2003. Even though construction, public works, and services—all necessary—may distribute wealth, they do not create it.

Figure 9.1 Algeria Economic Overview



Sources: Central Bank of Algeria and IMF World Economic Outlook 2016.

Box 9.2 Ease-of-Doing-Business Score

Algeria scores considerably below other countries in the Middle East and North Africa in the ease of doing business. The ease-of-doing-business score captures the gap of each economy from the best regulatory performance observed on each of the indicators across all economies in the *Doing Business* sample since 2005. An economy’s ease-of-doing-business score is reflected on a scale of 0 to 100, where 0 represents the lowest and 100 represents the best performance. The

ease-of-doing business rankings range from 1 to 190 (see www.doingbusiness.org).

Morocco (Rank: 60) 71.02
Egypt, Arab Rep. (Rank: 120) 58.56
Regional Average (Middle East & North Africa) 58.30
Lebanon (Rank: 142) 54.04
Algeria (Rank: 157) 49.55

The government policy was not effective in the long run. The huge investments to develop the infrastructure were skimmed off by foreign outflows. In fact, foreign companies, better equipped and more efficient than the national enterprises, were awarded contracts to carry out projects. The government did not reinforce the productive capacity of national enterprises—public or private—to implement projects submitted to international competition. Instead of enhancing the local enterprises and manufactures, the government resorted to foreign companies, letting the domestic economy depend on oil income.

The lesson to be drawn from the Algerian experience of reform is that economic reform would succeed only if there is a genuine political reform. The rentier nature of economy will end—the declared objective of the reforms—only if bold political change is implemented. It will be necessary to identify and neutralize hidden forces within institutions, abolish the duality (real and formal) of state power, make the legal system independent enough to end corruption, protect the press, submit all parts of the economy to legislation, and liberate civil society from the security services. The high-ranking officers would have to renounce control of the government and to dissolve the DRS in order to empower social actors capable of modernizing power relationships. In a perceptive article that recognized the intimate relationship between the economy and the nature of the regime, William C. Byrd, a British scholar, remarked,

[Algeria's] ostensible objective is [to have] modern and neutral institutions, but the fundamental function of these institutions is to protect the transactions of a caste of economic agents whose power is based on control of the army and the security services. . . . Numerous magistrates act on behalf of the clans when they wish to eliminate or imprison managers that are inconveniencing the business of these interest groups.¹¹

The World Bank Group Flashing Report 2019 ranked Algeria in 157th place out of 190 countries.

International and Regional Politics

During the 1960s and 1970s, Algeria symbolized the fight against imperialism and the right of people to self-determination. In 1973, Algiers hosted the summit of the nonaligned nations, which gave Boumédiène international status. Algiers was the mecca of the national liberation movements of Africa, Asia, and Latin America; there, they found financial and diplomatic support. Even the American Black Panthers found an audience and hospitality in Algiers at the end of the 1960s. Before being imprisoned, Nelson Mandela went to Algeria several times to seek support against apartheid. In his speeches, Boumédiène referred to the struggles of South Africans and Palestinians—victims, in his view, of racism and Zionism. His bold position placed the Algerian regime in the anti-Western camp, which led it to increase its economic and military cooperation with the Soviet Union and strengthen its ties with the socialist countries of Europe and China. Relations with the United States and Western Europe were limited to the commercial sector.

After the death of Boumédiène in 1978, the anti-imperialist rhetoric sharply decreased, then ceased completely after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The United States and Europe became respectable partners that invested in the hydrocarbons sector. The United States is second to Europe in exporting hydrocarbons and in foreign investment, but relations with the United States cooled in 1992 after the US State Department condemned annulment of the elections won by the Islamists. American officials irritated Algiers when they cited the human rights violations reported by the US State Department and Human Rights Watch. Disputing the security services' versions of events, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch called for an inquiry into the murders of thousands of civilians. Their suspicions greatly weakened the Algerian regime diplomatically, put under pressure to deal with the Islamists.¹²

After September 11, 2001, the US attitude changed radically, and numerous officials passing through Algiers affirmed their desire to learn from the Algerian government's experience in combating "Islamist terrorism." Since then, the CIA has worked in concert with the DRS in order to track the *Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat* (GSPC), an organization that lent its allegiance in 2003 to Osama bin Laden and from then on called itself *al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb* (AQIM). American authorities fear that bin Laden's networks, undone in Iraq and weakened in Afghanistan, will spread into the African Sahel, from Mauritania to Chad. In order to counter this potentiality, the Americans asked Algiers if they could place The United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) in Tamanrasset, a city in southern Algeria. After hesitating for several months, the Algerian government refused under the pressure of the nationalist wing of the military.

After the 2011 Arab uprisings that led to the instability, Libya became a weapons marketplace for Islamist organizations that threatened the states of the Sahel, among them Mali. The western countries needed Algeria's support to curb the menace and to help Mali to defeat the Islamists. However, the antiterrorist struggle in the region suffered from the conflict between Algeria and Morocco, which began after Morocco annexed in 1975 the Western Sahara, a former Spanish colony. To Algeria, the Saharan population must be allowed to choose between integration into Morocco or independence. The Organization of African Unity, the Arab League, and the UN got involved unsuccessfully to resolve the conflict, which prevents the two neighbors from normalizing relations and cooperating economically.

Weakened by the Islamist insurgency and discredited by the numerous violations of human rights, the Algerian regime is not heard anymore at the international or regional level. Its diplomacy focuses more on the conflict with Morocco about the Western Sahara than any other conflict in the Arab world. Algiers does not have a consistent position about Syria, Libya, Saudi Arabia-Iran antagonism, or the enduring conflict in Yemen. The government

chose not to side with one or the other in crucial crises that are unfolding in the world in general and in the Arab region in particular.

Conclusion

At the independence in 1962, Algeria chose the single-party system and took a path toward a state-led economy aimed at alleviating poverty and inequality. It invested a large proportion of its GDP in the industry, having nationalized hydrocarbons owned by foreign companies. However, the investment effort, one of the highest in the world per capita, has not kept its promises. Industrial enterprises created with advanced technologies have become a burden for the state budget forced to finance their deficits. The October 1988 riots showed the failure of the populist model defended by a single-party authoritarian regime. These riots occurred twenty-three years before the Arab Spring of 2011. The attempted democratic transition that followed failed, leaving a decade of conflict that resulted in more than two hundred thousand people dead.

The question to ask is why the Algerian experience of economic development failed, despite heavy industrial investments and the presence of qualitative human resources. The answer is to be sought in the limits of the ideology of radical Arab nationalism that also failed in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Libya. Modernization in these countries could have succeeded if the state power was not privatized by the military elite and if a religious reform had been implemented to assert the freedom of consciousness.

Addendum

This chapter was written before the advent of “the joyful revolution” that started in Algeria on February 22, 2019.¹³ The contradictions of the political system addressed in this chapter led to the collapse of the regime that repeatedly ignored expectations of the population. As soon as Abdelaziz Bouteflika declared that he was running for a fifth term, even though his age and physical condition were obvious detractors to his leadership ability, millions of people poured into the streets of Algerian cities and expressed their anger. The citizens protested peacefully, demanding not only that Bouteflika be removed from office but also that there be a radical regime change. Surprised by the scale of the protest, the military forced the sitting president to step down and promised to implement a transition toward a new regime, resting their decision on Article 7 of the constitution: “The people are the only source of power.”

In contemporary Algerian history, three dates need to be remembered:

- 1962—independence of the country
- 1992—the failure of the transition from the single-party system
- 2019—the collapse of the regime and the end of military control over the state

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10 Egypt

Tarek Masoud

“Egypt is the most important country in the world,” Napoleon Bonaparte is reported to have said during his imprisonment on the South Atlantic isle of St. Helena.¹ It is a sentiment that has been echoed repeatedly throughout history, albeit in slightly more modest form and by slightly more modest individuals. King Farouk I, who ruled Egypt from 1936 until his ouster in 1952, did not go so far as to say that his country was the most important on the entire planet, but he did declare it “the keystone in the arch” of the Arab world.² Of course, Farouk, as Egypt’s head of state, had reason to overstate his country’s case, but concurring opinions can be heard from less obviously biased quarters. Arnold J. Toynbee, arguably one of the twentieth century’s greatest historians, declared, “There is a great Arabic-speaking world of which Egypt is the cultural centre.”³ More recently, *The New York Times* pundit Thomas Friedman dubbed Egypt the “center of gravity of the Arab world,” Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu called Egypt the “most important Arab country,” and a White House aide explained that former President Barack Obama chose Cairo for the venue of his 2009 address to the Muslim world because Egypt “represents the heart of the Arab world.”⁴

These encomiums to Egypt’s centrality are not simply a function of its size—although, with almost one hundred million inhabitants, it makes up almost a quarter of the Arab world’s population. Instead, Egypt commands our attention because practically every social, intellectual, and political movement of note in the Arab world finds its roots there. Among Arab states, Egypt was first in war—battling Israel in 1948, 1956, 1967, and 1973—and first in peace, becoming in 1978 the first Arab country to recognize and be recognized by the Jewish state. Arab nationalism (or pan-Arabism)—the grand project of unifying the Arabic-speaking peoples in one polity spanning from the Maghreb to the Arabian Gulf—had its greatest exponent in

Gamal Abdel Nasser, Egypt's leader from 1954 to 1970.⁵ Moreover, pan-Arabism's sole-surviving institutional manifestation, the twenty-two-member Arab League, was founded in 1945 in Egypt's capital, Cairo; is headquartered there; and, except for a brief period during which Egypt was expelled for making peace with Israel, has always been headed by an Egyptian.⁶

Political Islam, too, has Egyptian roots. Of course, the desire to subordinate political and social life to the will of Allah is in some ways as old as the faith itself, but it was twentieth-century Egyptians who gave it a defined program and plan of action. From Morocco to Malaysia, some of the most popular and electorally successful political parties emerged from the Muslim Brotherhood, an "Islamist" movement that aims to refashion the world in the image laid out by the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, and which was born in the Egyptian town of Ismailia in 1928. Egypt is also the birthplace of Sayyid Qutb, the fiery Muslim thinker whose writings are thought to have inspired the men behind al-Qa'ida—Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri (another Egyptian). Egypt is home to al-Azhar University, one of the most important seats of Islamic learning for the world's 1.5 billion Sunni Muslims, which draws students from around the globe, and which bills itself as a bulwark against radicalism and militancy. On top of all of this, Egypt produces the bulk of the Arab world's books and movies (movies that have, by many accounts, rendered the Egyptian dialect the most familiar and recognizable of Arab vernaculars).⁷

In fact, the only notable Arab development not to have originated in Egypt is the so-called Arab Spring. That season of protest and revolution began not in Egypt, but in nearby Tunisia with the dramatic popular overthrow of dictator Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali in January 2011. To date, Egyptians, Libyans, Syrians, Bahrainis, Yemenis, and others in the Arab world have attempted—with varying degrees of success—to follow Tunisia's lead, but it was Egypt's revolution that made the diffusion of the Arab Spring possible. As the gifted scholar of revolutions Valerie Bunce has noted, the unprecedented and historic overthrow of Tunisia's dictator might

never have resonated with other Arabs had not Egyptians followed suit and overthrown their own dictator, Muhammad Hosni Mubarak, scarcely a month later.⁸ According to Bunce, Egypt was central and familiar to Arabs in ways that tiny Tunisia, a Francophone North African country of ten million, could never be. As a former operative of the Central Intelligence Agency put it, “As goes Egypt, so goes the Middle East.”⁹

Today, seven years after the onset of the Arab Spring, where Egypt seems to be going is somewhere quite different from the liberal, democratic order that many scholars, observers, and activists believed was possible in those early days of 2011. People disagree about *when* Egypt’s democratic experiment went off the rails, but there is little disagreement over the fact that it *has*. For some, the problem began shortly after Mubarak’s overthrow, when power was assumed not by representatives of the people, but by an interim government of military generals. For others, Egypt’s democratic experiment was doomed when parliamentary and presidential elections convened in 2011 and 2012 delivered power to a collection of illiberal, Islamist parties led by a semisecret religious society called the Muslim Brotherhood. And for still others, the end of Egypt’s democratic hopes came when, in July 2013, the army, ostensibly in response to massive popular discontent, overthrew Egypt’s first democratically elected president—an Islamist engineering professor named Muhammad Morsi—threw him into prison, and began a systematic crackdown against the Muslim Brotherhood. That crackdown, which is ongoing, included the August 2013 killing of hundreds of Brotherhood protesters encamped near the Rab‘a al-‘Adawiyya mosque in the NaŒr City suburb of Cairo, and in Midān al-Nahḍa near Cairo University in Giza.¹⁰

Regardless of *when* one thinks Egypt’s democratic experiment came to grief, it is clear that today, Egypt is a deeply troubled country. Supporters of the ousted president—who was sentenced to death in May 2015—stage acts of civil and uncivil disobedience against the government and security services. A radical fundamentalist insurgency in the Sinai, claiming affiliation with the Islamic State in

Iraq and the Levant, challenges the very coherence of the Egyptian state. And the country's economy, momentarily bolstered by cash transfers from oil-rich countries in the Arabian Gulf, continues to founder. Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to try to divine where Egypt is headed, it is difficult to be optimistic. In fact, one must wonder if the early testimonials to Egypt's regional importance and political centrality with which we began this chapter will continue to be accurate descriptions of a country increasingly consumed and confounded by internal demons.

History of State Formation¹¹

Unlike many of its fellow Arab countries, such as Jordan or Iraq or Syria or Lebanon, which were essentially willed into existence by colonial administrators at the end of the First World War,¹² Egypt as an “identifiable polity” has existed since the time of the pharaohs more than three thousand years before the birth of Jesus.¹³ The world’s first historical document is Egyptian—an engraved piece of granite called the Narmer Palette, which allegedly relates the unification of northern (Lower) and southern (Upper) Egypt by Narmer in the thirty-first century BCE.¹⁴ Egypt is the only country mentioned in the Qur’an, a fact from which Egyptians draw considerable national pride (even if one of Egypt’s appearances in Islam’s holy book is as the home of one of the faith’s greatest villains).¹⁵ But as the great historian Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot points out, this ancient sense of Egyptian identity is coupled with an equally long history of political subjugation.¹⁶ For most of the latter half of Egypt’s five-thousand-year history—from the Persian invasion in 525 BCE to the Arab conquest of 642 CE to Napoleon’s relatively brief incursion in 1798 to the formal end of the British occupation in 1954—Egypt was dominated by foreign powers. In fact, by some accounts Gamal Abdel Nasser was the first native-born Egyptian to rule his country since the pharaoh Nectanebo II, in the fourth century BCE.¹⁷

Egypt’s ancientness makes any attempt at offering a brief history of the country an almost impossible undertaking. Where should one begin? The seventh-century Arab conquest eventually gave Egyptians a new language (Arabic) and a new religion (Islam), and, in a sense, a new history—today’s Muslim Egyptians are much more likely to identify with the founding narratives of the early Islamic community in Mecca and Medina than with that of their pharaonic ancestors.¹⁸ But between the Arab arrival and the present day is a history so rich and fascinating as to be daunting for any student of

modern Egypt. It is a history punctuated by multiple personalities and dynasties: from the Fatimids, a Shi'i dynasty that ruled Egypt from 909 to 1171 and that in the tenth century founded al-Azhar, now the world's second-oldest university; to the Ayubids (1171–1250), a fiercely Sunni dynasty founded by Saladin, the great and chivalrous rival of Richard the Lionheart during the Third Crusade; to the Mamelukes, a class of slave warlords whose often predatory rule of Egypt survived the Ottoman conquest in 1517 until their final extermination three hundred years later by a remarkable man named Muhammad Ali (about whom more will be said shortly).¹⁹

Key Facts on Egypt

AREA 386,660 square miles (1,001,450 square kilometers)
CAPITAL Cairo
POPULATION 96,278,514 (2018)
PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION UNDER 25 49.53
RELIGIOUS GROUPS (PERCENTAGE) Muslim (mostly Sunni), 90; Coptic Christian, 9; other Christian, 1
ETHNIC GROUPS (PERCENTAGE) Egyptian, 99.6; other, 0.4
OFFICIAL LANGUAGE Arabic; English and French widely spoken by upper and middle classes
TYPE OF GOVERNMENT Republic
DATE OF INDEPENDENCE February 28, 1922 (from UK protectorate status; the revolution that began on July 23, 1952, led to a republic being declared on June 18, 1953, and all British troops withdrawn on June 18, 1956)
GDP \$286.5 billion; \$10,900 per capita (2015)
PERCENTAGE OF GDP BY SECTOR Agriculture, 29; industry, 24; services, 47
TOTAL RENTS (PERCENTAGE OF GDP) FROM NATURAL RESOURCES 10.93
FERTILITY RATE 2.83 children born/woman

Source: Central Intelligence Agency, *CIA World Factbook 2015*, the World Bank database, and the 2018 Statistical Yearbook of the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, Arab Republic of Egypt.

Map 10.1 Egypt



Given the complexity and sweep of this history, most students of modern Egyptian politics and society begin with Napoleon Bonaparte's invasion in 1798.²⁰ Of course, one may complain that this—or any—starting point for a history of the Egyptian state is arbitrary. But by all accounts, though the French were in Egypt for only about seven years (Napoleon himself left scarcely a year into the adventure), they left a discernible and lasting impact on the course of Egyptian state formation.²¹ Not only did they bring with them the radical ideals of *liberté*, *égalité*, *fraternité*, they also cultivated an abiding interest in the ancient history of Egypt (which lives on today in the form of the academic discipline of Egyptology); catalogued the Nile valley's flora and fauna; and imported revolutionary technologies such as the printing press.²² But the most important French contribution to Egyptian history, and the reason the Napoleonic invasion is so often identified as the beginning of Egypt's

modern era, is that the French landing set the stage for the appearance of the man who would grab Egypt by the scruff of its neck and shake it into a modern nation-state—the aforementioned Muhammad Ali.

Ali was an officer in an Albanian regiment dispatched by the Ottoman sultan in 1801 to recapture Egypt from the French forces (or what was left of them after Napoleon's exit). After all, Egypt was nominally a province of the Ottoman Empire, albeit, in Arthur Goldschmidt's words, a "poor, isolated, and neglected" one. And though the Ottoman Empire may have at that time already begun the steady downward march into the enervation and enfeeblement that would later earn it the unfortunate sobriquet "the sick man of Europe," it was not yet willing to accept the chipping away of its empire without a fight. Marsot tells us that the Ottomans were aided in their efforts to recapture Egypt by a British Empire eager to clip France's wings.²³

Alas, though the Ottomans were successful in forcing the French out of Egypt, Ali would eventually do the same to his Turkish masters. By 1805, he had so ingratiated himself with Egyptian religious scholars and other notables that he was able to maneuver himself into the governorship of Egypt and again reduced the Ottomans to a negligible role in the country's governance.²⁴ Once safely ensconced in this position, he brutally eliminated all opponents and embarked upon the great task of harnessing Egypt's potential. It should be noted, however, that Muhammad Ali was not acting out of altruism, nor did he necessarily harbor a desire to better the lives of his subjects. Egypt for him was a grand plantation, and he was determined that it should turn a profit.

To that end, Ali imported European ideas and technology with an avidity approaching abandon. And by all accounts, it worked. During his forty-five-year reign, he transformed the territory under his control: building canals and other transport systems, introducing cotton cultivation and textile manufacturing, fostering education, and bringing in scholars from Europe.²⁵ He also built a modern army and

navy that were so effective that the Ottoman sultan relied on him to quell rebellions in the Hijaz (by radical Islamist forbearers of what is now Saudi Arabia) and in Greece.²⁶ But Ali's thirst for greatness was not easily slaked, and he soon turned his forces against his erstwhile Ottoman masters, capturing the Levant (which, Marsot argues, he desired as a market for his cotton manufactures) in the early 1830s. By 1839, he was in a position to pose a challenge to the Sultan himself. This the European powers would not countenance—not out of affection for the Ottomans, but from fear of the upending of the delicate balance of power that had been worked out between them. Intervening on behalf of the Turks, the European powers forced Ali to abandon his imperial ambitions and, in the words of Lord Palmerston, the British secretary of state, to “retreat to his original shell of Egypt.”²⁷ However, the adventure did enable Ali to achieve de facto independence from the Ottoman sultan and a guarantee of hereditary rule for his family, which reigned over Egypt (with varying degrees of competence) until 1952.

The historians tell us that Muhammad Ali's son, Ibrahim, who was one of the greatest military commanders in Egyptian history, died in 1848, a year before his father. It is possible that the course of Egyptian history, and of the dynasty of Muhammad Ali, would have been very different had the competent Ibrahim lived. Alas, however, when Ali himself passed away a year later, succession fell to his grandson, Abbas, who by all accounts reigned indifferently for five years and was succeeded by Ali's son (Abbas's uncle), Said.²⁸ It was the corpulent Said who granted the concession to the French entrepreneur Ferdinand de Lesseps for construction of the Suez Canal, which would link the Mediterranean and Red Seas, dramatically shortening the sea route from Europe to Asia.²⁹ The canal, dug with corvée labor at great cost to the Egyptian treasury, opened in 1869. The enterprise was profitable, and Said's successor, Khedive Ismail,³⁰ had, in the words of Max Rodenbeck, deluded himself into thinking “that he was rich enough to turn Egypt into France, Cairo into Paris, and his court into Versailles.”³¹ To fulfill his dreams, Rodenbeck tells us, Ismail embarked on an ambitious

program of remaking Cairo in Paris's image. When his own funds proved insufficient, he borrowed from the many European banks that had "stampeded to offer credit."³² When he was done, Ismail reportedly said to one of his creditors, "My country is no longer African, we now form part of Europe."³³

As the gifted historian of modern Egypt Donald Reid has memorably written, Ismail's "wistful assertion that Egypt was now a part of Europe was to be realized in . . . a way that he had not intended."³⁴ Ismail had so indebted his country to the Europeans and had come to be seen as so financially incompetent that in 1879 they had him deposed. By 1882, the prospect of Egypt repaying its debts became so dim that Britain—eager to protect (and no doubt expand) its extensive financial holdings, including partial ownership (with France) of the Suez Canal Company—invaded the country outright. The British would remain in Egypt for almost seventy-five years.

Though Egypt was on paper a constitutional monarchy nominally run by the descendants of Muhammad Ali—who appointed and fired prime ministers and cabinets with regularity—there was little doubt that the British were in charge of the country's affairs. In 1914 at the outbreak of World War I, Britain declared Egypt a protectorate, ending the legal fiction that Ottoman sovereignty still prevailed. By the end of the war, a delegation (or *Wafd*) of leading Egyptian nationalists went to the Versailles peace conference to demand their country's independence from British domination, preferably in the form of a democratic republic. In 1922, Britain granted Egypt nominal independence, declaring it a monarchy and placing Fuad—the son of the deposed, spendthrift Ismail—on the throne. The delegation that had gone to Versailles soon became Egypt's premier political party, naming itself *Hizb al-Wafd* (the Party of the Delegation). A new constitution, with expanded powers for the elected legislature, was promulgated in 1923. A three-way struggle for power among the king, the Wafd, and the British characterized Egyptian politics for the next several decades.

In 1936, Fuad concluded a new agreement with Great Britain that, formally at least, led to the termination of the British military occupation. British troops remained along the Suez Canal, however, and London continued to exercise great influence over internal Egyptian affairs. During World War II, Egypt became a base of operations for Great Britain and its allies. Disputes between the British and the Egyptians continued, as did disagreements over the direction of the country between King Farouk (who had succeeded his father, Fuad, in 1936) and the Wafd. In 1942, Sir Miles Lampson, the British high commissioner for Egypt and the Sudan, fearful that the government of Egypt was tilting toward the Germans, demanded that King Farouk appoint a Wafdist prime minister. When the king refused, Lampson ordered British tanks to surround Abdin Palace. Fearful of being deposed, Farouk acquiesced to Lampson's demands. But this brazen violation of Egyptian sovereignty was to have a searing effect on the psychologies of many an Egyptian nationalist, including an army officer named Muhammad Naguib, who was so "disgusted" at the king's surrender to British bullying that he attempted to resign his commission. "Since the Army was given no opportunity to defend your Majesty," he wrote to the King, "I am ashamed to wear my uniform."³⁵ Farouk refused Naguib's resignation, an act he would have reason to regret a few years later.

Though under British tutelage, Egypt did attempt to assert some independence in foreign affairs. In 1945, Egypt joined other Arab states in establishing the Arab League, which became an important tool of Egyptian foreign policy. Three years later, King Farouk sent Egyptian troops to fight in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war (known by Israelis as the War of Independence and by Palestinians as the "Nakba" or "catastrophe," in light of its eventual outcome for them). The Arab armies were routed by the nascent Israeli state, which they imagined they would defeat within a matter of days. According to Marsot, during an Egyptian siege of an Israeli position in Gaza, one young Egyptian officer "often chatted across the lines with his Israeli counterparts and asked them how they had managed to get rid of the British presence in Palestine."³⁶ That officer, Marsot tells us, was a man named Gamal Abdel Nasser (of whom we will hear much

more later). Egypt and the new state of Israel signed an armistice in February 1949, and Gaza—a small parcel of land along the Mediterranean coast—came under Egyptian administration.

Blame for the poor showing of the Egyptian army fell on the government, which was accused of corrupt military procurement and incompetent leadership. The Muslim Brotherhood, or *Ikhwan al-Muslimun*, a religious movement founded in 1928 in the town of Ismailia on the Suez Canal, was intent on ridding Egypt of the British presence and began intense protests both against the foreign occupier and the Egyptian government. The prime minister at the time, Mahmud Fahmi al-Nuqrashi, operating under British pressure, had the movement banned in 1948. When he was assassinated shortly thereafter, suspicion naturally centered on the Muslim Brotherhood. In February 1949, the movement's founder, Hassan al-Banna, was gunned down on the street (by many accounts, at the behest of the palace).³⁷

The tense and volatile political atmosphere culminated in the breaking out of anti-Western rioting in Cairo in January 1952. In July of that year, the monarchy was overthrown by a group of military officers calling themselves the Free Officers, organized by Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser (at one time a sympathizer of the Muslim Brotherhood) and headed by Major General Mohammed Naguib (the man whose resignation Farouk had refused to accept a decade earlier). Naguib served as president of Egypt for a short while but was cast aside by Nasser in 1954. The Muslim Brotherhood, which had been an ally of Nasser's, was repressed brutally (after allegedly attempting to assassinate the Egyptian leader in 1954).³⁸ Labor organizers, ostensibly representatives of the workers Nasser claimed to serve, were swiftly and cruelly brought under state control.³⁹ Once he had consolidated power, Nasser began a crash program of nationalization and industrialization; established "Arab socialism" as the hegemonic state ideology; and, in a way not seen since Muhammad Ali 150 years prior, put his stamp on modern Egyptian life. It is a legacy—of good and ill—with which Egyptians are still grappling.

Institutions and Governance

Although Egypt has undergone three “revolutions” since 1952—the removal of Farouk in 1952, the popular overthrow of Mubarak in 2011, and the popularly backed military ouster of President Muhammad Morsi in 2013—the fundamental nature of Egyptian politics seems remarkably constant. Throughout the last sixty years, Egypt’s political landscape has been marked by three interrelated phenomena—strong executive authority concentrated in the president (and before him, the king), the overweening role of the military in the country’s politics and economics, and the endemic weakness of institutions charged with maintaining the rule of law.

Executive Supremacy

For most of the past sixty years, the configuration of Egyptian political institutions is one that is on the surface familiar to most Americans. Like the United States, Egypt has been a presidential republic. Unlike the United States, however—except for a brief period during the so-called Arab Spring—the Egyptian president has typically been all powerful and the legislature possessed of few resources to hold the president accountable. This tradition of executive dominance is deeply entrenched in Egyptian politics. Egypt has had some form of legislature ever since the French conquest in 1798, and it has always been subordinate to the executive.⁴⁰ This includes the 156-member council established by Muhammad Ali, as well as the first *elected* assembly, established by Khedive Ismail in 1866.⁴¹ It was not until the constitution of 1923 that a parliament with lawmaking authority was established, although even then the balance of power between the legislature and the monarchy always tilted toward the monarchy.⁴² Thus, the super-presidencies of Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak could be viewed as merely continuations of a long-standing pattern that began during Egypt's monarchic period.

Although one of the six guiding principles of the 1952 Free Officers' "revolution" was "establishing sound democratic life," this was just a slogan. Nasser may have been a man of the people, but he was not a democrat, and he had little faith in the formal institutions of representative democracy. He could be forgiven for this. During the colonial period, Egypt's parliament had come to be seen as an abode of corruption, factionalism, and instability (there were thirty cabinets in the thirty years between the promulgation of the 1923 constitution and the 1952 Free Officers' revolt). In a speech, Nasser declared that "democracy" was not to be found "in parliaments . . . but in the life of the people."⁴³ Thus, Nasser and the Free Officers moved quickly to dismantle the remnants of Egypt's admittedly dysfunctional democratic edifice. The constitution was abolished in

1952, and political parties were banned a year later. Political rivals—including members of the Muslim Brotherhood—were jailed, a tactic that persisted through Mubarak’s time to today.

When a new constitution was enacted in 1956 (it was revised again in 1958 and 1964), it gave the president extraordinary powers, rendering the legislature a generally inconsequential cheering section for Nasser’s policies. As Robert Springborg notes, Nasser’s “commitment to political institutions was never wholehearted, and while on occasion he sought to mobilise support for his regime through its organisations, in the final analysis the magnet he relied on to attract support was not organisational but personal.”⁴⁴

When Nasser died in 1970, his successor, Anwar al-Sadat—who had been a member of the Free Officers’ movement that overthrew the monarchy—sought to chart a different course and slowly set about liberalizing the country’s economy and its politics. In part, Sadat was motivated by desire to shift Egypt out of the Russian orbit and into the American one, and he apparently thought that reforming domestic political institutions to make them more palatable to the West would aid in this effort.⁴⁵ Sadat also wanted to increase foreign investment in the country, and this too required a partial political overhaul in order to reassure investors wary of dumping their money into a fickle Middle Eastern despotism. Sadat put a new, more liberal constitution in place in 1971 and strengthened judicial oversight of the government, particularly as it related to the violation of property rights.⁴⁶ The Arab Socialist Union—a totalitarian political party that was the sole legal political organization under Nasser—was slowly dismantled. In 1977, Sadat legalized political parties, and in 1979, he held Egypt’s first multiparty parliamentary elections since the end of the monarchy.

Sadat’s changes had many of the desired effects. Egypt did become an American client, and foreign investment did increase. But the country’s new democratic trappings masked the persistence of a deeper, authoritarian reality. The president remained almost all powerful. And when Sadat was faced with disagreement over his

economic and foreign policies, he responded with the same heavy-handed tactics that Nasser had used. For example, a month prior to his October 6, 1981, assassination at the hands of Islamist extremists, Sadat had arrested more than a thousand of his political opponents from across the political spectrum.⁴⁷ The limits of Sadat's political liberalization had become painfully clear.

Sadat's successor, an air force general named Hosni Mubarak, also made an initial show of political liberalization early in his rule. He released political dissidents jailed by Sadat and declared war on corruption. *Newsweek* reported on December 21, 1981, that he commanded government ministers to turn down gifts and ordered the destruction of "523 luxury weekend bungalows owned by rich Egyptians (and a handful of Western embassies) near the Pyramids of Giza," including a "bungalow used by Sadat to entertain Jimmy Carter." This had the effect of winning over domestic opponents and reassuring foreign patrons. But Mubarak, too, eventually regressed to Egypt's long-standing dictatorial mean. The executive remained supreme. Though Mubarak had initially vowed to serve for only two terms, he reneged on the promise in 1993 and eventually served four complete terms before being ousted toward the end of his fifth. In 2005, he took the radical—and to many, promising—step of introducing multiparty elections for the country's presidency (previously, the president had been nominated by the parliament and voted up or down in a rigged national referendum). But that election proved no different from all of the others that had been held in Egypt over the previous decades. Mubarak's victory, with an improbable 88 percent of the vote, signified to all that the change was more cosmetic than real.

Most importantly, throughout Mubarak's term in office the legislature remained the rubber stamp it had always been.⁴⁸ The president retained (and exercised) the power to dissolve parliament, block its laws, and bypass it completely with his own edicts and decrees. In addition, parliamentary elections—of which there were eventually six during Mubarak's thirty-year rule—were routinely rigged in order to guarantee that Mubarak's party maintained a comfortable legislative

majority.⁴⁹ According to Springborg, this allowed the president's party "to terminate debate, pass legislation virtually without comment, reject opposition demands for investigation of alleged improprieties and illegal activities, and so on."⁵⁰

After Mubarak's removal in February 2011, there were great hopes that Egypt's political institutions would be reformed to trim executive power. However, this was not to occur. Although a parliament was democratically elected in January 2012, it was dissolved by court order a few months later, on the eve of Egypt's first democratic presidential elections. Thus, when Muhammad Morsi came to power, he was unconstrained by any legislature.⁵¹ A constitution passed during his administration in December 2012 introduced presidential term limits and enhanced legislative checks on presidential authority. However, Egyptians had no opportunity to observe whether these new constitutional provisions would have any effect: Elections to replace the dissolved parliament were never held, and Morsi was overthrown a little more than six months later. For his first year in office, President Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi, who was elected in May 2014 with more than 95 percent of the vote, ruled more or less by decree. Although parliamentary elections were completed in December 2015, the newly elected body has not meaningfully disrupted Egypt's lugubrious tradition of executive supremacy. The scholar Robert Springborg has described Egypt's current legislature as "politically supine."⁵²

Military Dominance

Another fundamental and almost unchanging aspect of Egyptian politics has been the dominance of the country's military in the country's politics. Indeed, if the parliament is subordinate to the executive, both are subordinate to the "deep state" (which is comprised of the military and the assorted security and intelligence services).⁵³ It is worth remembering, after all, that until 2012 all of Egypt's presidents—Naguib (1952–1954), Nasser (1954–1970), Sadat (1970–1981), and Mubarak (1981–2011)—were military officers (as is Egypt's current president, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi). Muhammad Morsi was not just the first democratically elected president in Egypt's history, but he was also the first civilian one. Egypt's army has long been accustomed to what the scholar Steven Cook has called "ruling, but not governing"—which meant that the men with guns were the ultimate power behind the throne, even if they did not trouble themselves with the day-to-day business of making Egypt's trains run (it would be too much to say "on time").⁵⁴ Scholars have documented the military's control over large segments of the economy, including, as Springborg has noted, the production of everything from clothing to foodstuffs to pots and pans to kitchen appliances to automobiles.⁵⁵ They have also noted how local governments, the boards of major publicly owned companies, and the directorships of key government agencies are all studded with military men.⁵⁶ The overwhelming impression conveyed by these studies is of a military that sees itself as the natural ruler of Egypt and that is eager to maintain its political supremacy.⁵⁷

The military's role in Egypt's governance since the overthrow of Mubarak in 2011 would seem to validate this perspective. When Mubarak resigned on February 11, 2011, he did not hand power to his vice president, Omar Suleiman (hastily appointed during Mubarak's last days) or to the speaker of the parliament (as the constitution required). Instead, he ceded authority to a twenty-one-member committee made up of the country's senior military leaders.

This grandly named Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), dissolved the parliament that had been elected under Mubarak and issued a declaration that would serve as the country's interim constitution. The document stipulated that, until elections could be held, the SCAF was both legislature and executive—with the power to make policy and pass and ratify laws at will.

If some feared that the SCAF was trying to establish direct military rule, the SCAF for its part made at least half-hearted attempts to demonstrate that this was not the case. Parliamentary elections were held from November 2011 to January 2012. And true to its promise, the SCAF relinquished its legislative authority once the new parliament was seated. But the SCAF retained its executive role, and it did not cede to the new legislature the right to appoint the prime minister or members of the cabinet. In June 2012 after the Supreme Constitutional Court ruled that the electoral law by which parliament had been elected was invalid, the SCAF dissolved the parliament and once again assumed legislative authority. In July 2012 after Muhammad Morsi's election to the presidency was certified, the SCAF officially ceded executive authority to the newly elected president but continued to claim to constitute the government's legislative branch.

In August 2012, Morsi came to a deal with the SCAF in which it relinquished its legislative powers to him, rendering him both president and parliament. However, although the military was now nominally excluded from policymaking, this state of affairs was to last less than a year. Amid calls for Morsi's resignation by political elites fearful of Islamists' consolidation of power and by ordinary Egyptians tired of the country's year-long flirtation with economic crisis, the minister of defense Abdel Fattah al-Sisi eventually stepped in and, with what appears to be by all accounts considerable popular support (as evidenced by mass protests), removed Morsi. Although the chief of the constitutional court was installed as interim president, many observers saw the July 3, 2013, intervention as a military coup intended to restore the armed forces to its place atop the Egyptian political pyramid.⁵⁸

Evidence in support of this interpretation is provided by the provisions of the new constitution, passed in December 2013 after Morsi's overthrow by a body of mostly non-Islamist Egyptian elites. That document largely exempts the military's budget from parliamentary oversight, prohibits a civilian from serving as minister of defense, and places the regulation of military affairs in the hands of a council dominated by generals. It is worth noting, incidentally, that these provisions were largely held over from the 2012 constitution passed under Muhammad Morsi, suggesting that even Egypt's first democratically elected president had felt unable to seriously challenge the military's autonomy and political centrality. And of course, the elevation to the presidency of former minister of defense Abdel Fattah al-Sisi further reinforces the impression that Egypt's military is fully back in power.[59](#)

Weak Rule of Law

In addition to strong executive authority and an overweening military, Egyptian politics has long been characterized by poor, uneven, and erratic application of the rule of law. The two institutions that should serve as the pillars of any legal order—the police and the judiciary—have troubled histories.

The Egyptian police have long been accustomed to impunity, emboldened by a 1958 emergency law that expands police powers and restricts political freedoms and has remained in more or less continuous application (with brief interruption between 2011 and 2013) since 1967. Political activity—such as protests and demonstrations—was heavily regulated; any gathering of more than five people required a permit; opposition activists were routinely detained by the security services.⁶⁰ The police and the central security forces—and the Interior Ministry of which both are a part—were thus seen by the Egyptian people not as their protectors, but as their tormentors. The murder in the summer of 2010 of a young Alexandrian named Khalid Said by two policemen was merely one incident in a long history of police brutality. Habib al-Adly, the minister of the interior under Mubarak, was almost as much a focus of the Egyptian revolution as was Mubarak himself. It is therefore not an accident that protesters chose January 25—which is formally a national holiday to celebrate the police—to commence their demonstrations against the Mubarak regime.

However, if the police had been seen as too heavy-handed during Mubarak's time, they came to be seen as erring too much in the other direction after he was overthrown. Likely in response to popular anger at their abuses under Mubarak, the police reportedly took a hands off-approach to their duties during Morsi's tenure, resulting in a marked decay in daily order.⁶¹ By many accounts, however, the police have recently resumed their old ways.⁶² In fact, in June 2015 President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi took to the airwaves to ask for his countrymen's forgiveness for the police's infringement on

their basic dignity, declaring, “I apologize to every Egyptian citizen who has been subjected to any abuse. I am responsible for anything that happens to an Egyptian citizen.”⁶³

Despite the president’s sentiments, serious attempts at police reform remain elusive. In July 2015, the government released a draft “antiterrorism” law that would, according to press reports, expand police powers, muzzle journalists, and allow the government to circumvent judicial due process.⁶⁴ Thus, things seem to be moving in the wrong direction. As the scholar Yezid Sayegh has testified, until the government reforms the security sector, “the culture of police impunity will deepen and democratic transition will remain impossible in Egypt.”⁶⁵

The judges, like the police, are an important player in Egyptian politics and a key to its future as a stable, prosperous society. Though the state legal apparatus that currently exists in Egypt is a holdover from the prerevolutionary era, the judiciary has traditionally been a highly legitimate institution in Egypt, benefiting from the respect of ordinary citizens.

This was not always the case. During Nasser’s last years in power, he had attempted to emasculate the judiciary, and in 1969, he dismissed large numbers of judges and restructured the judiciary to bring it more firmly under executive control.⁶⁶ However, in an effort to increase foreign investment, Nasser’s successor, Anwar al-Sadat, moved to strengthen the judiciary and the rule of law more generally.⁶⁷ Key to this effort was the establishment of a Supreme Constitutional Court with the power to review the constitutionality of government decisions.⁶⁸ The twenty-two-member court often decided against the regime; for example, in 2000 it ruled that all elections must be overseen by members of the judiciary.⁶⁹ And although the government could get around the Constitutional Court’s rulings by amending the constitution itself—as it did in 2007 in order to remove grounds for judicial oversight of balloting—the fact is that the courts then and now represented the principal check on the executive’s authority.

If the judiciary earned accolades during the Mubarak period for standing up to the regime, under Morsi it was often seen to be complicating Egypt's democratic transition. In June 2012, the Constitutional Court ruled that the Islamist-dominated parliament had been improperly elected, and it declared the body null and void. The ruling was decried as an attempt by Mubarak loyalists in the judiciary to thwart the will of the people. President Morsi tried to reconvene the parliament, but the SCAF backstopped the court's decision, and Morsi was forced to acquiesce.

Photo 10.1 An invalidated ballot from the May 2014 presidential election. By drawing a large X next to each candidate's name, the voter has indicated his or her rejection of both Abdel Fattah al-Sisi (the eventual winner) and his opponent, Hamdin Sabahi.



Ibrahim Ramadan/Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

The tussle over the parliament marked the opening scene in a year-long struggle between Egypt's first democratically elected president and the Supreme Constitutional Court. In November 2012, Morsi tried to sideline the judges entirely, issuing a dramatic amendment to Egypt's interim constitution that rendered him beyond judicial oversight. Morsi's allies on the one hundred-member committee then writing the country's constitution followed up this move by hurriedly finishing the draft constitution and putting it to a vote, which it passed. The episode caused many to view Morsi as a dictator-in-the-making who sought to loose himself of the shackles of the rule of law and did much to erode his already-fragile legitimacy.⁷⁰ But it also did

much to erode the judiciary's legitimacy—casting it as a player in Egypt's polluted political game rather than as an honorable, impartial arbiter of the rules. Today, the Egyptian judiciary mainly receives international attention for passing dramatic, mass death sentences against supporters of the ousted president. For example, in 2014 a court sentenced more than 650 Egyptians to death for participating in a riot that resulted in the killing of a police officer.⁷¹ This diminution of judicial legitimacy domestically and internationally cannot but constitute a major obstacle to the establishment of the rule of law in that troubled country.

Parties and Movements

Despite its relatively long history of elections and parliaments, Egypt today lacks the stable political parties and cleavages that mark more-established polities. Political parties had been banned under Nasser, and though allowed to reemerge under Sadat and Mubarak, none (aside from the ruling National Democratic Party) was a credible claimant for national power. To the extent that the political landscape did harbor a potential challenger to the ruling party, it was in the form of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamic pietist political movement established in Egypt in 1928 and banned by Nasser in 1954. Egypt under Mubarak did feature liberal, leftist, and secular political parties, but these were by all accounts weak—hemmed in by the authoritarian state and lacking the resources necessary to establish durable connections to voters.⁷²

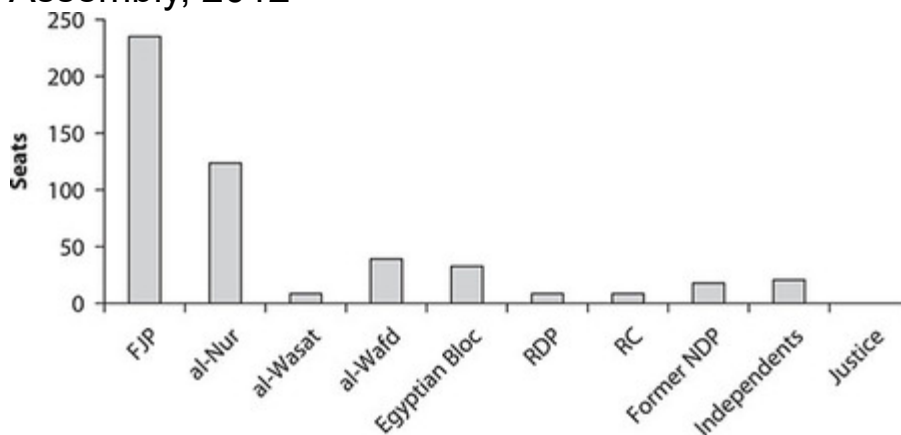
Given regime regulation of the political space, activists had to carve out opportunities for political participation wherever they could find them. Labor organization by textile workers, real estate tax collectors, and others constituted a major form of popular mobilization during the late Mubarak period.⁷³ Professional syndicates—akin to labor unions for doctors, lawyers, engineers, and journalists—became sites of considerable political debate and often provided opposition voices platforms for articulating grievances against the regime. Independently owned magazines and newspapers became increasingly bold in their criticisms of the regime, and the rise of satellite television and Internet-based social media generated a public sphere that the Egyptian government was nearly powerless to control.⁷⁴ Islamist political activists agitated against the regime and mobilized potential supporters through the country's myriad mosques and other religious institutions.⁷⁵ It is widely thought that these liminal spaces of political contestation eventually incubated the forces that compelled the military to overthrow Mubarak in 2011.

The political parties that emerged after Mubarak's overthrow were of three broad types.⁷⁶ The first were the Islamists. Chief among these was the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP; *Hizb al-Hurriya wa al-'Adāla*), established in May 2011. In the parliamentary elections held from November 2011 to January 2012, the FJP captured 217 out of 498 elected seats.⁷⁷ In second place, with 107 seats, was the Party of Light (*Hizb al-Nūr*), also an Islamist party that grew out of a Salafi (or ultraorthodox) preaching society based in Alexandria.⁷⁸ The Salafi party was widely considered to be even more socially conservative than the Muslim Brotherhood, and its strong showing seemed to testify to a strong popular desire for Islamic law. In total, approximately 70 percent of the parliament elected after the revolution was made up of so-called Islamists.⁷⁹

The second pillar of the political landscape was made up of so-called *secular* or *liberal* parties, although these terms must be used with caution. Chief among these was the Party of the Delegation (*Hizb al-Wafd*). Al-Wafd was founded in 1978 as the modern successor to the original al-Wafd Party of 1919, which had controlled the cabinet at several points between 1923 and 1952 and which in 1954 was banned by Nasser, along with all other Egyptian political parties. Though al-Wafd was the largest opposition party in parliament in 1984 and the second largest in 1987, by the end of the Mubarak period it had come to be seen as an almost inconsequential player in Egyptian politics. In 2005, the party controlled 5 seats out of 444, compared with the Muslim Brotherhood's 88. In the aftermath of that election, a leadership squabble in the Wafd resulted in the consumption by fire of a section of the party's headquarters, a multimillion dollar mansion in the once-affluent Cairo suburb of Dokki.⁸⁰ A new party leader, a media and pharmaceuticals tycoon named al-Sayyid al-Badawi Shahata, was elected in the summer of 2010 and promised to breathe new life into the party, but al-Wafd performed poorly in the 2010 elections later that year, winning only 6 seats (out of 508). However, after Mubarak's overthrow, the party's relatively high name recognition enabled it to capture a respectable 41 seats in the 2011 and 2012 parliamentary election.

Also in the secular camp was an electoral alliance of parties calling themselves the Egyptian Bloc (*al-Kutla al-Misriyya*). The Bloc captured 35 seats in the 2012 election. The major components of the Bloc were two new parties: The first, with 16 seats, was the left-leaning Social Democratic Party, and the second, with 15 seats, was the Free Egyptians Party (*Hizb al-Misriyin al-Ahrar*), founded by Naguib Sawiris, a billionaire industrialist and investor who was the scion of one of Egypt’s most distinguished Christian families. Also part of the Bloc was the National Progressive Unionist Rally (usually called Tagammu, after its Arabic name, *al-Tajammu’ al-Watani al-Taqadumi al-Wahdawi*), which was founded in 1978 by Khalid Muhyuddin, a legendary figure in Egyptian politics and a former member of the Free Officers. After the 2011 and 2012 parliamentary elections, however, the Bloc collapsed and failed to field a joint presidential candidate in the May 2012 presidential contest (see [Figure 10.1](#)).

Figure 10.1 Distribution of Seats in Egyptian People’s Assembly, 2012



Source: Egyptian High Judicial Committee for Elections; *Al-Ahram* newspaper.

Finally, there the offshoots of the former ruling National Democratic Party. As several scholars have noted, the NDP was a “big-tent” party that co-opted big businessmen, rural notables, and other community leaders by doling out the spoils of corruption. At its peak

under Mubarak, the NDP claimed to have between two million and three million members. After the January 25, 2011, revolution, the party was dissolved by court order in April 2012 and its assets seized by the state. Predictably, a number of parties emerged to take up its mantle, scattering its already-diminished support base. Consequently, none of the NDP successor parties managed to earn more than a handful of seats in parliament. That said, it has been argued that the strong showing of former NDP member Ahmed Shafiq in the 2012 presidential election—who won approximately 48 percent of the vote in the second round of the June 2012 presidential election—was a testament to the residual strength of the now-defunct NDP's networks.

The weakness of non-Islamic political parties in post-Mubarak Egypt had far-reaching effects. It was not just that Egypt's first parliament was ideologically lopsided in favor of religious conservatives or that the country's first democratically legitimated constitution mandated what some considered an outsized role for religion. Instead, the major effect of the imbalance in Egypt's postrevolutionary partisan landscape was to convince non-Islamist politicians that electoral competition was not in their interests. Egypt's so-called secular, liberal politicians and parties came to believe that elections would always be won by the Islamists, who (in their view) played on popular religiosity. Thus, these liberals not only acquiesced in the military's seizure of power on July 3, 2013—they welcomed it, believing that a military coup was the only way to dislodge the Muslim Brotherhood from power.⁸¹

In 2015, Egypt conducted elections for a new, 596-seat parliament—after three years without legislature. However, far from ushering in a rebirth of political parties, it was clear almost from the outset that the opposite would happen. Several observers noted that electoral law by which the parliament would be elected was one that appeared designed to severely disadvantage political parties and privilege nonpartisan, “independent” members.⁸² First, approximately 80 percent of the legislature's seats were elected according to a single-member district system in which individuals could run as

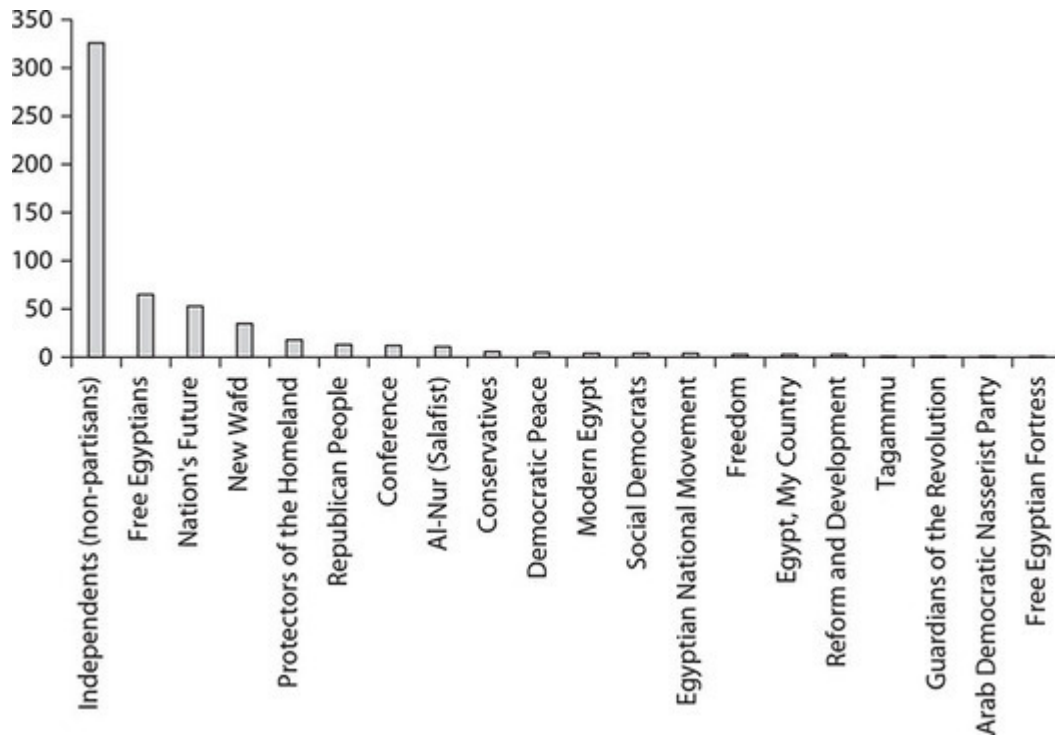
independents, without being members of political parties. The remaining 20 percent of seats were divided among four districts (two with 15 seats, and two with 45 seats), in which political party lists would compete. However, unlike most party list systems in which seats are allocated to parties in proportion to the share of the vote they earn, this system was a winner-take-all affair in which the party that earned the majority of the vote would receive all of the seats in the district. The result of this system was a legislature dominated by independents with a smattering of partisan members. According to the official breakdown of members of parliament, 58.7 percent of members are independents (although by all accounts, these independents are largely regime supporters).⁸³

How did the parties fare? If Islamists dominated elections during Egypt's brief democratic interregnum, there was little reason to believe that they would repeat their performance in al-Sisi's Egypt. A survey conducted in January 2015 found that only 13 percent of those surveyed said they would support Islamist parties, 55 percent said they would support "civil" or non-Islamist parties, 24 percent were undecided, and 8 percent were indifferent to party ideology.⁸⁴ In any case, the country's principal Islamic movement, the Muslim Brotherhood, was excluded from politics entirely, having been declared a terrorist group in December 2013 and its political party banned in August 2014.⁸⁵ The principal Salafist party, Hizb al-Nūr (Party of Light), which remained legal due to its support of the 2013 military coup, was able to run in the new elections but suffered a major regression, earning just 11 seats. This was partly due to popular anti-Islamist sentiment but also due to the fact that many supporters of that party were opposed to the overthrow of their fellow Islamist, Morsi, in July of 2013 and seem to have refrained from participating in any polls conducted under the new, military-backed regime.⁸⁶ The secularist camp's fortunes were also poor. The Free Egyptians Party, which was established after the 2011 revolution and which seemed poised to become a major force in Egyptian politics, joined a promilitary electoral alliance called For the Love of Egypt (*Fi Ḥub Miṣr*), along with key labor leaders and anti-Muslim Brotherhood activists.⁸⁷ It earned 65 seats, becoming the largest

political party in the new legislature (although that status is currently in doubt, for reasons that will become clear momentarily). The second-largest political party in the new legislature is a new, proregime party called The Nation's Future, which won 53 seats. That party seems poised to add to its seat total because, according to reports in the spring of 2018, the bulk of members of the Free Egyptians Party's parliamentary bloc have declared their intention to defect to it.⁸⁸ The third-largest party in the legislature is the Wafd, which, riven by internal disputes, failed to improve on its 2012 electoral performance and earned just 35 seats. The overall picture one gets from the results of Egypt's 2015 parliamentary elections (see [Figure 10.2](#)) is that they have done very little to change Egypt's long tradition of weak legislatures and weak political parties.

Further evidence of the weakness of Egypt's political parties came during Egypt's 2018 presidential election, in which President al-Sisi won another four-year term of office. That election was notable for the fact that the only party that was able to muster a candidate to stand against al-Sisi was one that had actually formally endorsed the president's reelection (al-Sisi's "opponent" earned around 3 percent of the vote).

Figure 10.2 Results of Egypt's 2015 Parliamentary Election



Sources: International Parliamentary Union and Egyptian High Elections Committee.

Domestic Conflict

It increasingly appears that the most consequential political conflict in Egypt will take place not at the ballot box, but on the battlefield. The five years since Morsi's overthrow have seen hundreds of Egyptians (including civilians, soldiers, and policemen) killed and thousands more jailed.⁸⁹ In September 2013, a group called *AnṢār Bayt al-Maqdis* (Supporters of the Sacred House, abbreviated ABM) attempted to assassinate Egypt's then-interior minister, Muhammad Ibrahim.⁹⁰ In May 2015, Islamist militants in the northern Sinai town of al-ʿArīsh massacred three judges, allegedly in retaliation for the death sentence handed down to former Egyptian president Muhammad Morsi.⁹¹ The following month, in June 2015, Egypt's public prosecutor (akin to the US attorney general) was killed by a car bomb, allegedly planted by a group calling itself "Giza Popular Resistance."⁹² Militants have especially targeted Egypt's Coptic Christians. That long-beleaguered minority has seen several attacks against churches by Islamist militants, including bombings in April 2017 that killed almost fifty Egyptians and wounded scores more.⁹³ The deadliest attacks, however, have targeted Muslims. In November 2017, almost 250 worshippers at a mosque in the Sinai were killed by explosives and gunfire thought to be the work of the local affiliate of the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant.⁹⁴

Much of the violence is related to the July 2013 military coup, but in this author's opinion, it would be a mistake to say that all of it is. For instance, recent attacks against military installations and personnel in the Sinai Peninsula, perpetrated by Islamic militants in the Sinai may, in this author's view, be more properly linked to long-standing grievances of the neglected inhabitants of the Sinai and to the regionwide emergence of affiliates of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. The pacification of opponents of the Egyptian state in the Sinai will therefore require not just the application of force against terrorists, but sustained attention to the issues of economic underdevelopment and underprovision of basic government services

that render local populations supportive of the insurgents operating in their midst.

Religion and Politics⁹⁵

For any observer of Egypt's politics, it seems obvious that religion plays an important role in the life of the country. Egyptians have long been recognized to be a religious people. In fact, the electoral dominance of Islamists during Egypt's brief democratic interlude caused many so-called secular and liberal politicians and intellectuals to conclude that free and fair elections would only deliver Islamic theocracy. The Muslim Brotherhood, which is the country's major Islamic party, tried to allay these fears and repeatedly declared its commitment to democracy and pluralism, even putting some secular parties on its ticket in the parliamentary elections, but—as we now know—these efforts proved unsuccessful. More than twenty years ago, the American diplomat Edward P. Djerejian concluded that Islamist electoral victories in the Middle East would destroy democracy. In his view, this was because Islamists believed not in “one man, one vote,” but in “one man, one vote, one time.”⁹⁶ In other words—they would use elections to get into office, after which they would pull the democratic ladder up behind them. What Egypt's dismal post-2011 history reveals is that Djerejian was correct that Islamist victories would destroy democracy, but for the wrong reasons. It was not that Islamists were insufficiently committed to democratic procedures, but that their opponents were so fearful of continued Islamist dominance under democratic institutions that they decided to call upon the army to undo those institutions. Thus, understanding why Islamists dominated those elections in the first place can help us to understand why Egypt's democratic experiment was so brief.

At one level, the electoral dominance of Islamists in Egypt's postrevolutionary politics was not surprising. During the Mubarak era, the Muslim Brotherhood, though banned, was routinely able to win more seats in parliament than any other opposition party by running its candidates as independents. Scholars and journalists regularly predicted that the Muslim Brotherhood would win a parliamentary majority in Egypt if the country ever held a free and

fair election. And when elections finally were held after Mubarak's overthrow, those predictions—as we have seen—came true.

For many scholars, the Islamists' capture of a supermajority in the 2011–2012 elections was evidence that Egyptians had a strong desire for Islamic law. For others, it was evidence of the superior organizational resources possessed by Islamists, who could mobilize voters through a variety of religious institutions such as mosques, Islamic charities, and religious schools.⁹⁷ The scholar Ellen Lust and her coauthors have argued that most Egyptian voters were actually concerned with bread-and-butter economic issues—an argument also advanced by the author of this chapter.⁹⁸ In the latter account, people are thought to have voted for Islamists not because they wanted to legislate seventh-century religious regulations, but because the disciplined, organized, and “locally embedded” Islamists did a better job than other parties of convincing voters that they would better their economic welfare.⁹⁹ The rapid diminution of popular support for Islamists over the course of 2011 to 2013 is evidence in support of the latter proposition. Recall that in the parliamentary elections of 2011 and 2012, Islamists captured a supermajority. A mere six months later, in the first round of the presidential election the main Islamist candidate, Muhammad Morsi, only managed to garner approximately 25 percent of the vote. And then, a year after his election millions of Egyptians (many of whom had voted for him) took to the streets to signify their discontent with him and his party, opening the way for the military's ouster of the president. These facts are inconsistent with a view of Egyptian voters as driven by fundamentally religious concerns. After all, if Egyptians really were seized by a desire to implement Islamic law, it is unlikely that they would have lost patience with the Muslim Brotherhood as rapidly as they did. That said, readers of this chapter should be aware that this is an active area of research for which settled answers remain elusive.

The Fate of Egypt's Christians

Though the question of how Islamists came to dominate Egyptian politics is obviously of great interest, almost no group had a greater stake in the answer than Egypt's Christians, who make up approximately 10 percent of the population. For this minority, long persecuted (although in ways more subtle than overt), the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafis to power represented a genuine threat to the tolerance and pluralism that all Egyptians hoped for in the wake of Mubarak's overthrow. Though the Muslim Brotherhood during its time in power made attempts to reassure Christians that the group believed in equal rights for Egyptians of all faiths, its insistence on establishing the shari'a as the country's principal source of legislation, as well as the inflammatory statements of some of its militants and allies, rendered Christians doubtful of the sincerity of the Brotherhood's commitment to pluralism.

Christianity is not a recent import into Egypt—in fact, it was the religion of the majority of Egyptians on the eve of the Arab-Muslim conquests in the seventh century. Though Copts have been victims of official and nonofficial discrimination (and, at some times, communal violence), they are abundantly represented in the middle and professional classes. However, many live in villages in southern Egypt and are poor farmers. During Anwar al-Sadat's crackdown on dissidents shortly before his assassination in 1981, he banished Coptic pope Shenuda (1923–2012) from Cairo for allegedly inciting Coptic-Muslim strife and banned publications issued by Coptic associations. Only after Mubarak became president did hostilities between the government and the Copts begin to subside, and in 1985, the government allowed Pope Shenuda to return to Egypt. However, restrictions on the building of churches, in place for more than a hundred years, largely continued.

Violence against Copts continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s, including deliberate attacks by Islamists seeking to undermine the Mubarak government as well as episodes of tension between

Muslims and Copts living in close proximity. In one particularly troubling incident, a dispute between two merchants provoked widespread violence in the village of al-Kushah in early January 2000, leading to the death of twenty-one Christians and one Muslim. A botched police investigation and perhaps a desire on the part of the government to avoid provoking Muslims could be the reasons why no one has ever been convicted of the killings. Though Mubarak made conciliatory gestures toward Christians—notably declaring Coptic Christmas (January 6) a national holiday in 2003—and Al-Azhar’s Shaykh Tantawi (1928–2010) and Coptic Pope Shenuda frequently appeared together publicly to appeal for national unity, this did not put an end to tensions between the two communities. On January 1, 2011, an explosion at a Coptic church in Alexandria killed more than twenty worshippers and occasioned renewed critique of the Mubarak government—which would fall a little over a month later.

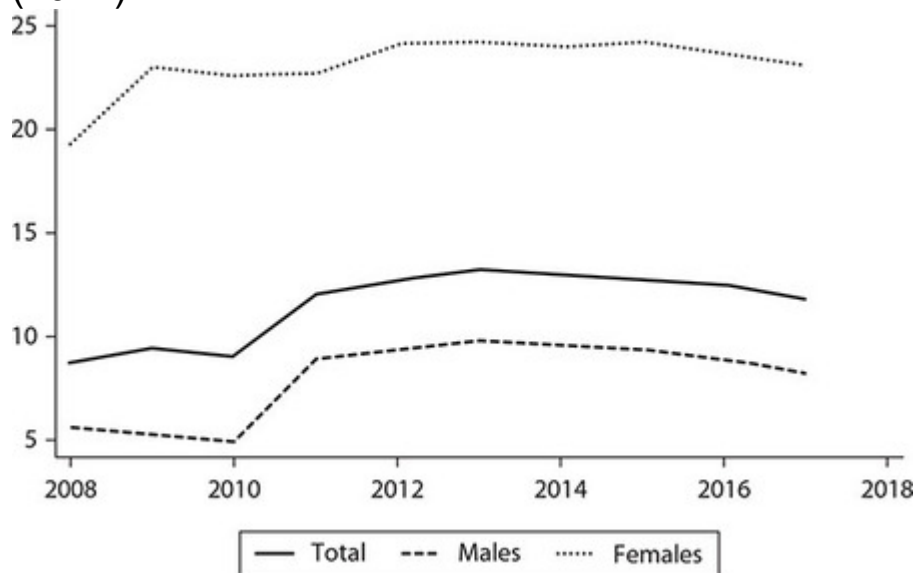
The postrevolutionary period saw an intensification of anti-Christian violence. On October 9, 2011, Christian demonstrators marched in Cairo to protest the destruction of a church in Upper Egypt by unknown elements (widely presumed to be Salafi jihadists). The then-ruling military junta cracked down on these peaceful protests by force, resulting in several deaths (among both the protesters and the soldiers sent to quell them). Less than a year later, during the presidency of Muhammad Morsi, a Coptic émigré in the United States produced a film denigrating the Prophet Muhammad, leading to massive protests in Cairo (in which some youths trespassed the grounds of the American embassy and took down the American flag). Though the protests were largely anti-American and not anti-Coptic in nature, the Muslim Brotherhood–controlled government commenced legal proceedings against several Copts living outside Egypt in a move that threatened to give the incident a communal cast.¹⁰⁰

The Muslim Brotherhood’s year in power gave Egyptian Christians plenty of reasons to fear for their status in Egyptian society. At best, the Muslim Brotherhood presented a schizophrenic face to their non-

Muslim countrymen. Brotherhood literature is replete with references to the equality of Muslims and Christians (although they stop short of endorsing a Christian's right to serve as president). At the same time, however, Muslim Brotherhood supporters tended to frame their tussles with political opponents (most of whom were Muslim) in sectarian terms.¹⁰¹ For instance, at a pro-Morsi rally in December 2012 Islamic preacher Safwat al-Higazi (currently imprisoned) delivered what he called "a message to the Egyptian Church and to all the symbols of the Church," warning Christian leaders, "Don't you dare ally with the remnants of the old regime against the legitimate elected representatives of the people."¹⁰² Muhammad al-Biltāgī, the now-jailed secretary general of the Cairo branch of the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party, said in a radio interview that 60 percent of the anti-Brotherhood protesters then encamped in front of the presidential palace were Christians angry at the ascent of Islam in Egypt.¹⁰³ During the first phase of voting in Egypt's December 2012 constitutional referendum, the Muslim Brotherhood published an article on its website claiming that Christians in the southern governorate of Sūhāg were being sent text messages from an anonymous source urging them to vote against the constitution. "Say no to an Islamic state," the text messages allegedly read. "We want a Coptic state."¹⁰⁴

Incidents like this help to explain why the Coptic Church and most Egyptian Christians were supportive of the military's overthrow of Muhammad Morsi and the subsequent ban on the Muslim Brotherhood. In March 2014, the Coptic Pope Tawadros called on minister of defense Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi to run for president, saying that "Egyptians view him as a savior and the hero of the June 30 revolution."¹⁰⁵ The rule of Muhammad Morsi, he declared, "was not suitable under any circumstances for Egypt's civilization and history."¹⁰⁶ The wave of violence experienced by Egyptian Christians since Morsi's overthrow—ostensibly committed by supporters of the ousted president—highlights both the legitimacy of Coptic concerns over Islamist bigotry and the failure of the current regime to guarantee the safety of its citizens.

Figure 10.3 Unemployment in Egypt, by Educational Category (2017)



Source: 2017 Statistical Yearbook, Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, Arab Republic of Egypt.

Political Economy¹⁰⁷

Egypt's largest economic challenge has long been generating jobs for a rapidly growing population, and its largest social challenge is educating that population to be qualified for the jobs being created. Unemployment for holders of university degrees exceeds 20 percent (see [Figure 10.3](#)). The problem of unemployment is particularly acute among the young, and this lack of opportunity for the country's youth was one of the main drivers of the revolutionary fervor that ended in Mubarak's removal and that continues to frustrate Egyptians today. As we have seen, since the mid-1970s the country has been in the process of a slow transformation from the statism embraced after the 1952 coup to a free-market economy, but many aspects of state control—extensive public subsidies, inefficient public industries, and a bloated government bureaucracy—remained in place because the country's leaders feared that dismantling them completely would generate social and political instability. The legacy of state socialism on Egyptian economic growth is hard to exaggerate. Consider that up until the mid-1960s the real gross domestic products (GDPs) per capita of Egypt and South Korea were roughly equivalent: In 1964, Egypt's per capita GDP was \$1,620, while South Korea's was \$1,983 (in 2005 constant prices). Since then, Egypt's income has increased 3.5-fold while South Korea's has increased twelvefold (see [Figure 10.4](#)).

Leading Egyptian exports include oil and petroleum (with bright prospects for increased natural gas exports), as well as steel, textiles, apparel, and cotton. The value of Egyptian exports has fluctuated in recent years, driven in part by the fluctuating price of fuel. Manufactured goods—the hallmark of an industrialized, advanced economy—as of 2007 made up only 19 percent of Egyptian exports (see [Figure 10.5](#)). Overall, exports have not risen appreciably as a share of the country's GDP (see [Figure 10.6](#)). Egypt's largest trading partner is the European Union, with the United States its largest single-country partner.

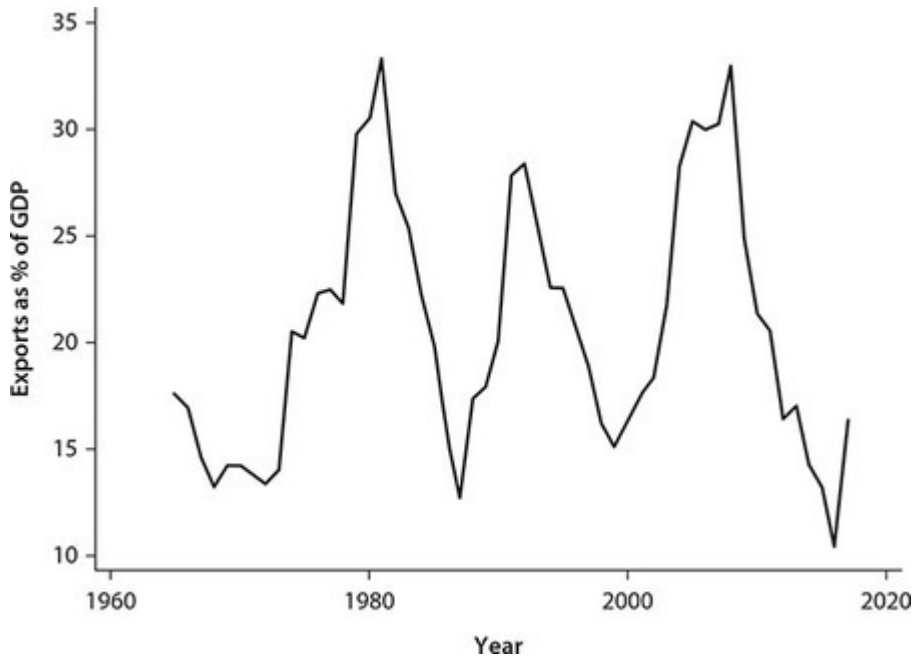
Figure 10.4 Comparison of Gross Domestic Product per Capita of Egypt and South Korea, 1950–2005



Source: Alan Heston, Robert Summers, and Bettina Aten, Penn World Table Version 6.3, Center for International Comparisons of Production, Income, and Prices at the University of Pennsylvania (August 2009).

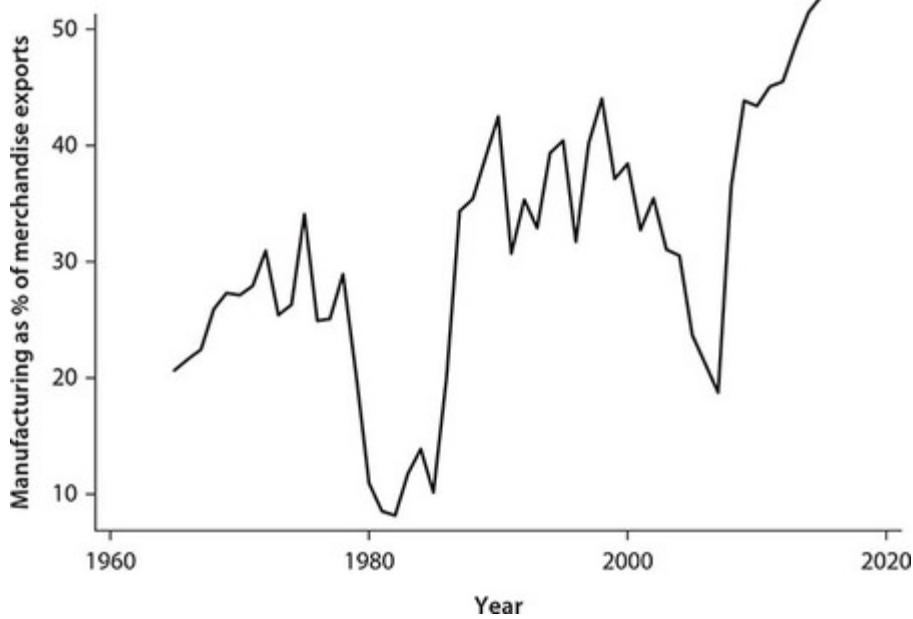
The service sector employs roughly half of the working population, with another third working in agriculture and the remainder in industry. The official unemployment rate is around 10 percent, but many observers suspect that the actual figure is more than double that; in addition, underemployment is rampant, particularly among the young and educated. Remittances from family members working abroad remain an important source of support to Egyptians. Most estimates of economic inequality in Egypt suggest that it is relatively low. However, this is likely due to Egypt's chronic underdevelopment (i.e., a large proportion of the population is poor) and due to shortcomings in the way that top-end incomes are measured. For a visual picture of Egypt's economic inequality, see [Figure 10.7](#), which plots Egypt's GINI index (a measure of inequality) over the past three decades. (The United States' scores are included for comparison. Higher scores signify greater inequality.)¹⁰⁸

Figure 10.5 Manufacturing as a Share of Egypt's Exports, 1965–2017



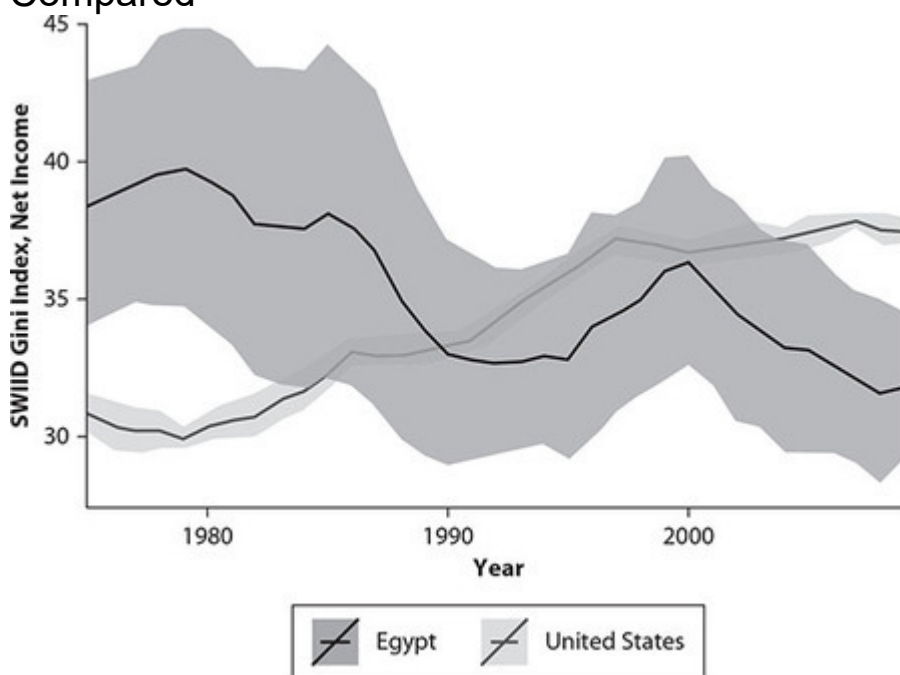
Source: World Development Indicators (2018), World Bank.

Figure 10.6 Egypt's Exports as a Share of GDP, 1960–2018



Source: World Development Indicators (2018), World Bank.

Figure 10.7 Inequality in Egypt and the United States Compared



Source: Solt, Frederick. 2016. "The Standardized World Income Inequality Database." *Social Science Quarterly* 97. SWIID Version 7.1, August 2018.

Note: Solid lines indicate mean estimates; shaded regions indicate the associated 95 percent confidence intervals.

Chronic budget deficits have perpetuated Egypt's dependence on foreign aid. US aid accounts for almost half of the economic assistance that Egypt receives from all foreign sources. The rest comes chiefly from international lending institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, and the governments of Western Europe and Japan. Since the Camp David accords, Egypt has received about \$64 billion in aid from Washington; only Israel has received more. That assistance, military

and economic in various forms, for many years averaged about \$3 billion a year for Israel and \$2.2 billion for Egypt. By mutual agreement, economic assistance to both countries began declining gradually in the mid-2000s. In 2006, the United States gave \$1.3 billion to Egypt in military assistance and \$495 million in economic assistance (see [Figure 10.8](#)). Aid to Egypt is explicitly conditioned on its continued observance of the Camp David agreements and, as stipulated in the early 1990s, its pursuit of economic reforms.

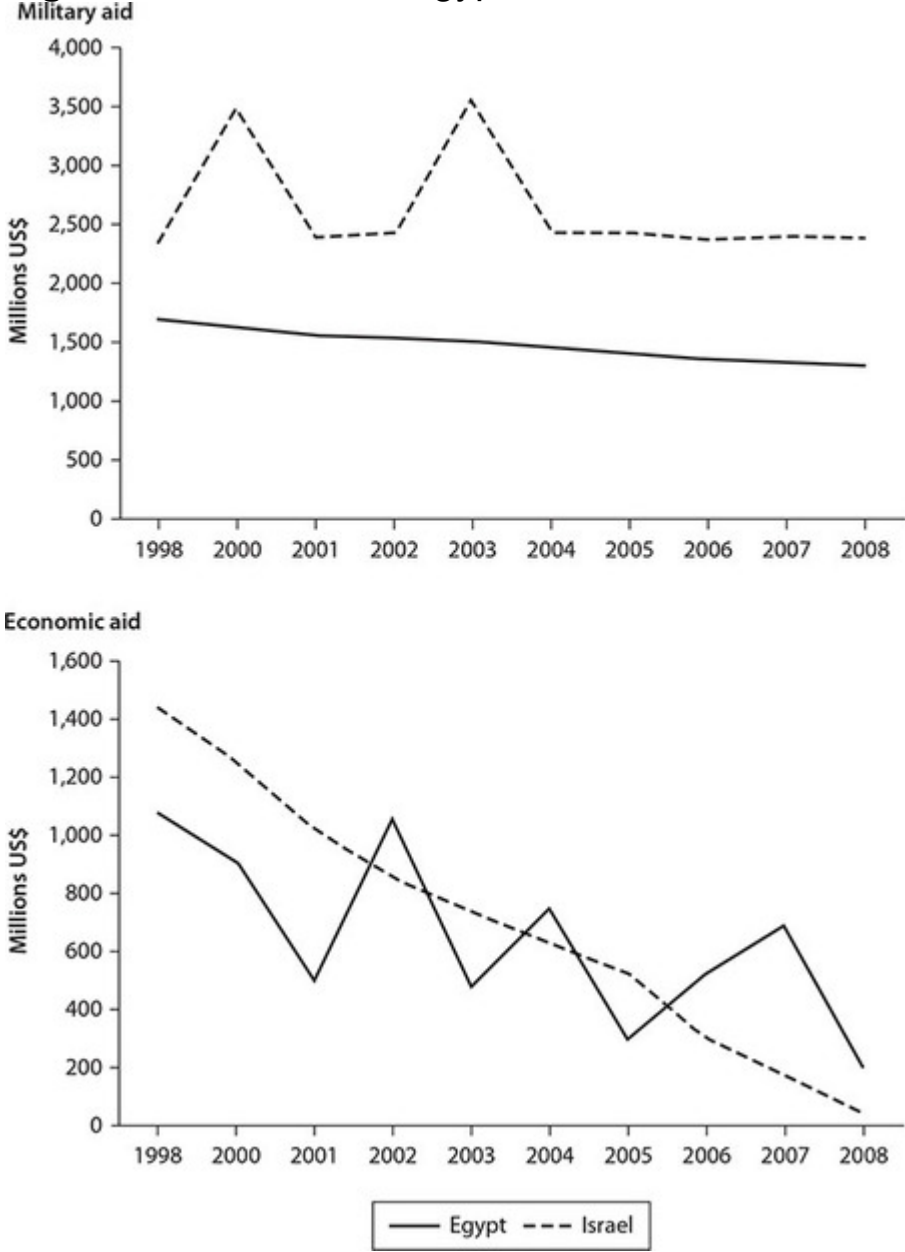
Increasingly under pressure from the United States and the IMF to reform Egypt's economy, Mubarak gradually continued Sadat's conversion from a centrally controlled economy to a market economy more open to private enterprise and foreign investment. The IMF's demands included devaluing the Egyptian pound (effectively raising prices), eliminating state subsidies on consumer goods, reforming tax collection, and reducing imports. The dilemma for Mubarak's government was maintaining the delicate balance between the conflicting demands of foreign creditors and the masses of Egyptians living at or below the poverty line. These dilemmas have continued to bedevil Mubarak's successors.

In 1991, Mubarak signed on to a comprehensive structural adjustment program under the aegis of the IMF and the World Bank. By 1998, Egyptian implementation of its IMF program had met with impressive results. Budget deficits, long a serious handicap to government economic activity, had been reduced to manageable levels. Foreign currency reserves had increased, and privatization had begun taking hold in the banking sector.

But after initial successes, the pace of reform stalled. In 2004, Mubarak appointed a cabinet of reformist technocrats, and the country embarked on a serious program of measures to encourage investment. The government initiated structural reforms in taxes, trade regulations, and the financial sector, and it resumed privatization of public industries.¹⁰⁹ It also floated the Egyptian pound in 2004, leading to a sharp drop in value and increase in inflation to approximately 18 percent. Real GDP growth hovered

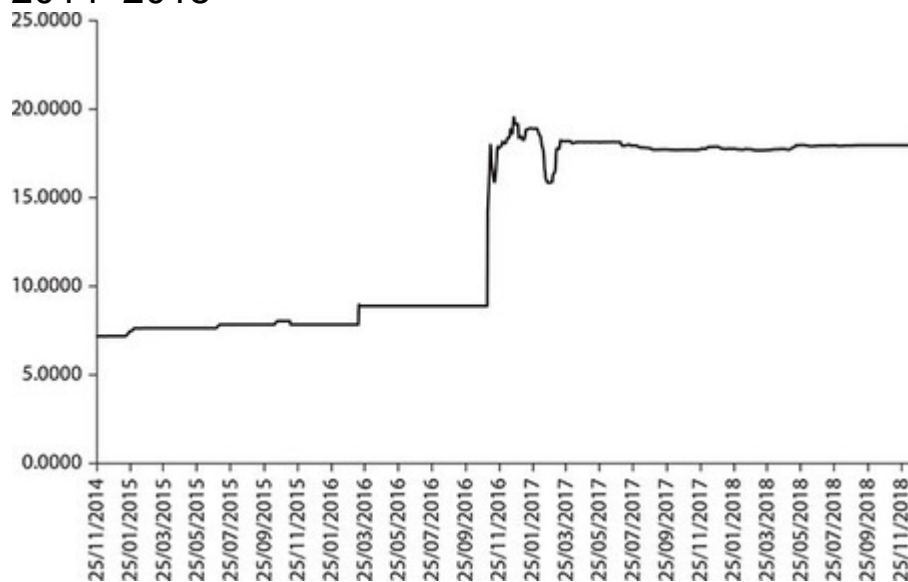
around 6 percent as of 2010, but unemployment and inflation remained major challenges and proved to be proximate causes of the widespread public protests that culminated in Mubarak's February 2011 ouster.

Figure 10.8 US Aid to Egypt and Israel, 1998–2008



Source: US Overseas Loans and Grants (database), US Agency for International Development, <http://gbk.eads.usaidallnet.gov/>.

Figure 10.9 Exchange Rate: Egyptian Pounds to US Dollars, 2014–2018



Source: Central Bank of Egypt.

The economic picture in Egypt remains challenging. During Morsi's short tenure, limited progress was made on the structural reforms called for by international financial institutions. President Morsi's successor, Abdel Fatah al-Sisi, has been more aggressive in his pursuit of these reforms. Shortly after being elected in May 2014, President al-Sisi reduced subsidies on fuel, reportedly saving Egypt 50 billion EL (Egyptian pounds) per year.¹¹⁰ His government has also attempted to reform the inefficient food subsidies regime, providing smart cards to indigent Egyptians enabling them to buy bread at any shop in the country, instead of the old system of paying selected bakers to produce cheap bread (which could be purchased by any Egyptian, rich or poor, willing to wait in line for it).¹¹¹ In 2016, the Central Bank announced that it would allow the Egyptian pound to float freely on international currency markets, resulting in a major devaluation (see [Figure 10.9](#)). These and other measures are estimated to shave billions of pounds off the Egyptian government budget, even as they result in short-term costs (in the form of price increases) for ordinary Egyptians. However, to the extent that the

country has been able to stave off calamity, it is due to the largesse of its oil-rich neighbors across the Red Sea. According to a report produced by the Atlantic Council, a Washington-based think tank, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait have together “given or pledged about \$35 billion to Egypt in aid in the form of oil shipments, cash grants and central bank deposits since Morsi’s removal.”¹¹²

Perhaps in recognition of the fact that it cannot rely on the generosity of its oil-rich allies indefinitely, Egypt is trying to develop more independent sources of revenue. Shortly after his election in the summer of 2014, President al-Sisi announced that Egypt would undertake a project to enlarge a section of the Suez Canal, which would enable more ships to pass through the waterway and more than double the revenue earned from transit fees.¹¹³ That project, whose likelihood of success was initially doubted by many observers (including the author of this chapter), has been completed, although recent statistics do not suggest a dramatic increase in revenue from the canal.¹¹⁴ The 2015 discovery of the large Zohr gas field off Egypt’s Mediterranean coast has resulted in a significant boost to Egyptian coffers—\$2.5 billion annually, according to one estimate.¹¹⁵ In March 2015, the government also held a large investment conference in the Red Sea resort town of Sharm al-Sheikh, which produced a reported \$19 billion in promised foreign investments, as well as a \$45 billion plan to construct a new capital east of Cairo, which was to be funded exclusively by foreign capital.¹¹⁶ Negotiations between the Egyptian government and the United Arab Emirates–based firm that was to undertake the new capital’s development failed, and the capital is now being built with investments from China.¹¹⁷

Regional and International Politics[118](#)

As the Arab world's most populous country and the producer of much of its intellectual and cultural output, Egypt is one of the region's most important powers. In the years since Mubarak's overthrow, however, Egypt's regional position has been in considerable flux. The collapse of state authority in Libya, Iraq, Yemen, and Syria, the concomitant rise of the Islamic State (which also operates in the Sinai Peninsula), and an increasingly assertive Iran all have powerful implications for Egyptian foreign policy conduct in the coming period. In this section, we survey Egypt's international relations under Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak before turning to the ways in which Egypt's foreign policies are being reshaped by the so-called Arab Spring and its unfolding aftermath.

Nasser between the West and Eastern Bloc

For the past thirty years, one of the key features of Egypt's foreign policy was its close alignment with the United States. This relationship emerged after decades of near enmity between the two countries. When the Free Officers came to power in 1952, they articulated a policy of neutrality or "nonalignment" between the United States and its chief rival at the time, the Soviet Union. Nasser played a prominent role in the 1955 conference of nonaligned nations in Bandung, Indonesia, and shared the world stage with such leaders as Josip Broz Tito of Yugoslavia, Jawaharlal Nehru of India, and Zhou Enlai of China. But Egypt's neutrality was not to last for long. Western nations were reluctant to sell Egypt arms, and in 1955, Nasser agreed to purchase weapons from Czechoslovakia, which was at the time a member of the Soviet bloc. The US secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, viewed the purchase as a step by Egypt toward the communist world, despite Nasser's professed aversion to communism and his banning of the Egyptian Communist Party. On July 19, 1956, Dulles announced that the United States planned to withdraw financial support for the Aswan High Dam, the centerpiece of Nasser's economic planning. The Soviets were all too happy to step in.

The definitive break with the West came seven days after Dulles's announcement. Nasser seized the British- and French-owned Suez Canal Company and declared that he would apply the canal's revenues toward the dam project. Egypt promised to pay off the stockholders, but Britain and France were not of a mind to let Cairo control the waterway, Europe's lifeline to the petroleum of the Middle East. After months of secret negotiations among Britain, France, and Israel—whose ships were barred from the canal—Israeli forces launched an attack on Egypt across the Sinai Peninsula in October 1956. Britain and France, on the pretext of securing the safety of the canal, seized it by force. Under pressure from the United States, the Soviet Union, and the United Nations, they were forced to withdraw, as was Israel. President Dwight D. Eisenhower was furious that

Britain and France, US allies, had acted without consulting him, and he denied them much-needed support. By March 1957, a peacekeeping force, the United Nations Emergency Force, was deployed on the Egyptian side of the 1948 Egyptian-Israeli armistice line.

Eisenhower's stand during the Suez crisis improved American relations with Nasser only slightly and only briefly. The crisis was a victory of sorts for Nasser. He had thumbed his nose at the West and gotten away with it. The outcome confirmed Egyptian control of the canal. In addition, when Nasser gained Soviet support for his Aswan High Dam project in 1958, he effectively sent the message to the West that he did not need to depend on it and that Western nations could not take the Arab states for granted. The Soviets soon assumed an important position in Egyptian foreign policy and became Egypt's major weapons supplier.

In 1958, Syrian rulers asked Nasser to head a union of Egypt and Syria. Nasser agreed, but only on the condition that the union be complete. Syrian political parties were abolished; Cairo became the capital of the new United Arab Republic (UAR); and a new political party, the National Union, was created. North Yemen later joined the republic in a federative manner with the UAR and Yemen and called it the United Arab States. The union fared badly, however, and was dissolved when Syrian anti-unionists seized control of the Damascus government in 1961.

The dissolution of the UAR marked the beginning of a long string of policy failures for Nasser. In 1962, he sent troops to bolster officers in the North Yemeni army who had overthrown the ruling Hamid al-Din family. With as many as eighty thousand Egyptian soldiers engaged in the fighting, the Yemeni war became a drain on the Egyptian treasury. Nasser's efforts to control the Yemeni republicans and the brutal measures Egyptian forces used against royalist villages in Yemen tarnished Egypt's image.

Meanwhile, in November 1966, Israel had destroyed a village in the West Bank (controlled by Jordan) in retaliation for Palestinian

guerrilla raids, and in April 1967, Israeli and Syrian air forces had skirmished. Nasser engaged in a series of threatening steps short of war, in part egged on by Arab leaders challenging his pan-Arab credentials. He asked the United Nations to remove some of its peacekeeping troops from the Sinai, closed the Strait of Tiran to Israeli shipping, and signed a mutual defense treaty with Jordan.

Israel launched a surprise attack on Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Iraq on the morning of June 5, 1967. During the first hours of the attack, Israel virtually destroyed the air forces of the four Arab states as they sat on the ground. Without air support, the Arab armies were devastated, and by the time a cease-fire went into effect on June 11, the Israelis had taken the eastern sector of Jerusalem and all of the West Bank from Jordan; seized the Golan Heights from Syria; and pushed the Egyptians out of Gaza and the whole of the Sinai Peninsula, all the way to the Suez Canal.

The Egyptians were again humiliated, as in 1948. Nasser publicly blamed himself for the defeat, implicitly agreeing with the verdict of history that the war had resulted from his miscalculated brinkmanship. He had provoked Israel in the belief that the United States would prevent the Jewish state from going to war and that the Soviet Union would come to his rescue if war did ensue.

The effects of the defeat reverberated. Nasser resigned as president, but a massive outpouring of support persuaded him to remain in office. He then withdrew Egyptian troops from Yemen, purged the top echelons of the army, and reorganized the government. Perhaps most important, Nasser's foreign policy objectives shifted. The quarrel with Israel was no longer only a matter of securing Palestinian rights. The return of the Sinai—approximately one-seventh of Egypt's land area—became a top Egyptian priority. Toward this end and despite opposition from many Arabs, including the Syrian government and the Palestine Liberation Organization, Nasser accepted UN Security Council Resolution 242, which, among other things, recognizes the territorial rights of all states in the area (including Israel).

Nasser died in September 1970 of a massive heart attack. Following his death, tens of thousands of Egyptians took to the streets, passionately mourning the man who, more than any other single figure in modern Egyptian history, had confirmed Egypt's preeminent position in the Arab world. He had been an authoritarian leader, intolerant of dissent from any quarter. He had failed to provide any genuine institutions of political participation. He had presided over the most disastrous military defeat in modern regional history. His economic policies had not produced prosperity. Yet Gamal Abdel Nasser had changed the life of the average Egyptian, and to this day, he retains a large measure of respect and admiration, even as the political regime he established is widely recognized as having been undemocratic and responsible for significant human rights abuses.

Sadat Moves West

Disillusioned with the Soviets, Anwar al-Sadat had grown confident enough by mid-1972 to expel thousands of Soviet military advisers and civilian technicians—though without breaking diplomatic relations with Moscow—and to offer Washington an olive branch. According to Alfred Leroy Atherton Jr., ambassador to Cairo from 1979 to 1983, the Richard M. Nixon administration was preoccupied with its reelection campaign and the Vietnam War, so it did not respond promptly or fully to Sadat's overtures. Sadat, unable to draw upon US diplomatic clout to assist in the return of the Sinai Peninsula, decided on war.

Egyptian forces, better prepared than in 1967 and this time with surprise on their side, crossed the Suez Canal on October 6, 1973, and advanced deep into the Sinai while Syrian forces attacked in the east. By the time a UN-arranged cease-fire took effect on October 22, an Israeli counterattack had retaken most of the ground, and in one area, Israel held both sides of the canal. The final position of the armies, however, was less important than Israel's initial rout.

The war had a tremendous effect on Sadat's image in Egypt. Once viewed as an uncharismatic yes-man to the towering Nasser, Sadat became Hero of the Crossing (of the canal), a sobriquet he treasured. His standing in the world was further boosted by the display of Arab solidarity during the war—when the petroleum-producing Arab states, led by King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, implemented an oil embargo against Western nations that supported Israel.

After the 1973 war, Sadat finally had Washington's attention. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger began shuttling between Jerusalem and Cairo to work on a peace settlement (an effort that later earned the name *shuttle diplomacy*). His efforts led to the first of two disengagement agreements between Egypt and Israel on January 18, 1974, that went beyond the original cease-fire. That

year, Egypt and the United States restored diplomatic relations, which Nasser had severed after the 1967 war. In addition, Nixon became the first president to visit Egypt since Franklin D. Roosevelt went there in November 1943 during World War II. US aid, cut during the Nasser years, resumed. The US Navy helped clear the Suez Canal of wartime wreckage, permitting its reopening in 1975.

Though Sadat had viewed the United States as the key to resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict, US-mediated negotiations with the Israelis bore no fruit. He then decided to go to Jerusalem to talk directly with the Israelis about settling their differences. His November 1977 trip to Jerusalem set in motion a chain of events that ultimately led to the Camp David accords. US president Jimmy Carter later prevailed upon Sadat and Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin to meet at Camp David, the presidential retreat in Maryland, for twelve days in September 1978. There, they hammered out two documents—A Framework for Peace in the Middle East and A Framework for the Conclusion of a Peace Treaty between Israel and Egypt. On March 26, 1979, they returned to the United States to sign the treaty in a White House ceremony.

The peace with Israel cost Sadat and Egypt their standing in the Arab world. Most Arab leaders and peoples saw Sadat's agreement with Israel as a betrayal. Five days after the treaty signing, the Arab League expelled Egypt and instituted an economic boycott against it. Of the twenty-one remaining league members, all but Oman, Somalia, and Sudan severed relations. In May 1979, the forty-three-member Organization of the Islamic Conference also expelled Egypt. Similarly, it was cast from the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries.

The Mubarak Era and Beyond

Hosni Mubarak, trying to steer a middle course in all matters, foreign and domestic, did not initially embrace the Egyptian “partnership” with the United States with Sadat’s fervor. He recognized the economic and military necessity of US assistance, however, and US officials generally gave him high marks for trying to keep irritants in the relationship from magnifying. By the end of Mubarak’s time in office in 2011, US Vice President Joseph Biden reflected the value American officials had come to place on Mubarak as a partner and friend when he refused to call him a dictator even as protesters amassed against the Egyptian president in Tahrir Square.

During his time in office, Mubarak continued to promote the central tenet of Sadat’s notion of peace with Israel—that the treaty meant the end of military hostilities and the establishment of a proper relationship—but its promotion often resulted in a cold peace beset by problems. Israel’s unilateral annexation of the Golan Heights in 1981 and its invasion of Lebanon in June 1982, both of which Mubarak criticized, did not help build stronger relations. Egypt was still savoring the sweetest fruit of the treaty: On April 25, 1982, Israel had returned the remaining section of the Sinai that it had occupied since the 1967 war—except for Taba, a tiny strip of beach where the Israelis had built a resort hotel. After a seven-year dispute, Israel relinquished Taba on March 15, 1989.

The Egyptian-Israeli relationship continued to be bedeviled by regional and bilateral problems throughout the 1980s and 1990s, leading Egypt to withdraw its ambassador from Israel (and later return him) several times. Although both countries at times express disappointment—Israel that Egypt has not further normalized bilateral relations, and Egypt that no more progress has been made on resolving the Israeli-Palestinian dispute—the two continue to uphold the peace and cooperate on a range of political, economic, and security issues. In 2004, Egypt and Israel expanded their economic relations with encouragement from the United States, opening a series of “qualifying industrial zones” in which goods

produced in Egypt with some Israeli inputs may be imported into the United States duty free. Fears that the Egyptian-Israeli relationship would be imperilled by the Islamist-dominated government that was elected after the Arab Spring proved unfounded, as Egypt continued its security cooperation with Israel during the Morsi presidency. Under the al-Sisi presidency, that relationship remains strong, with Israel reportedly providing clandestine military assistance to Egyptian efforts to pacify Islamist extremists in the Sinai Peninsula.¹¹⁹

Reconciliation with Arab Nations

A pivotal event on Egypt's road to reconciliation with its Arab neighbors took place in November 1987. At that time, sixteen Arab League heads of state met in the Jordanian capital of Amman and issued a surprisingly strongly worded resolution attacking Iran for its "procrastination in accepting" a cease-fire proposal in what was then its seven-year war with Iraq. Jordan's King Hussein, the conference host, used the occasion to ask the participants—in the interest of Arab unity—to drop the league's ban on formal relations between its member countries and Egypt. The Arab states agreed, feeling they needed Egypt as a counterweight to Iran and the potentially subversive Islamic radicalism that it was attempting to export.

By the end of 1989, all Arab League members had reestablished relations with Egypt, which also was readmitted to the Arab League. On May 23, 1989, after a ten-year absence, Egypt took its seat at an Arab League summit in Casablanca, where Mubarak was accorded the honor of making the opening address. Only weeks before the meeting, the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries had readmitted Egypt, which had already reentered the Organization of the Islamic Conference in 1984. To promote regional economic cooperation, Egypt, together with Iraq, Jordan, and Yemen, founded the Arab Cooperation Council in 1989. In March 1991, the Arab League transferred its headquarters back to its original location in Cairo, finalizing Egypt's return to the Arab fold.

Mubarak, meanwhile, had become a leading supporter of the PLO and its chairman, Yasir Arafat, who became a frequent visitor to Cairo. After the first Palestinian uprising broke out in 1987 and the Palestine National Council held a historic meeting endorsing creation of a state alongside Israel, Mubarak implored Arafat to satisfy the US government's conditions for holding talks with the PLO, which Arafat did in December 1988. In November 1988, the Palestine National Council met in Algiers. It formally declared Palestinian independence and implicitly recognized Israel's right to exist, but US Secretary of State George P. Shultz demanded that Arafat explicitly renounce terrorism, accept UN Security Council Resolution 242, and recognize Israel's sovereignty.

After much prodding by Mubarak and a few false starts, Arafat on December 14, 1988, uttered the precise words that Shultz wanted to hear. Within hours, the secretary of state said US talks with the PLO could begin. According to diplomatic sources in Cairo, Mubarak was one of several Arab and Western European leaders who urged Shultz and President Ronald Reagan to accept Arafat's words as genuine.

Throughout the 1990s, Egypt acted as a leading participant in the peace process, serving as a mediator and interlocutor between the PLO and Israel in the wake of the Oslo accords of 1993 and an active participant in multilateral talks between Israel and its Arab neighbors. This relationship became increasingly complex after the acrimony generated toward Arafat by the United States and Israel following the breakdown of the Camp David talks in July 2000 and Israel's employment of overwhelming military might during the second Palestinian uprising that began in September 2000.

In 2004, Egypt reengaged in efforts to bring Palestinians and Israelis back to the negotiating table and eventually agreed to support Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Gaza. After the death of PLO chairman Arafat, the Egyptian government openly supported the efforts of his successor, Mahmud Abbas, to resume peace talks and served as a mediator between Abbas's Fatah Party and the Islamic

Resistance Movement, or Hamas, which won a majority of seats in the Palestine National Council in January 2006 and now controls the Gaza Strip. To halt arms smuggling into Gaza, the Egyptian government began in 2009 to construct a steel wall along the Egypt-Gaza border. The wall, which extends more than thirty feet below ground, is intended to block the myriad tunnels that groups have used to smuggle arms, supplies, and people in and out of Gaza. The barrier has occasioned vehement protest from Egyptian opposition groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, which complain that it prevents needed humanitarian supplies from reaching Gaza and renders Egypt complicit in what they view as Israel's isolation of that territory. After Mubarak's overthrow, there was a slight easing in the restrictions on traffic between Egypt and Gaza. However, in August 2012 an attack by Islamist militants from Gaza against Egyptian soldiers in the Sinai Peninsula prompted the government of Muhammad Morsi to initiate a sweeping military campaign in the area, which included shutting down all of the tunnels to and from Gaza. Under President Sisi, Egypt continues to try to contain a perceived threat of terrorism and smuggling from Gaza, while also seeking to ease the humanitarian crisis there.

The Gulf and Iraq Wars

The Iraqi invasion and occupation of Kuwait in August 1990 created a dilemma for Mubarak and Egypt: Opposing Iraq would put Egypt on one side of an intra-Arab conflict, but failing to oppose the invasion could potentially invite further aggression by Iraqi president Saddam Hussein, poison relations with the wealthy Arab states in the Gulf, and weaken Egypt's crucial ties to the United States. Under these circumstances, Mubarak chose to lead the Arab military and diplomatic effort against the invasion.

On August 10, eight days after the invasion, Mubarak hosted a meeting of the Arab League in Cairo, out of which came a decision by the league to oppose Saddam Hussein and send troops to help defend Saudi Arabia against any possible Iraqi attack. The first Egyptian troops began to land in Saudi Arabia the next day. Egypt

ultimately sent four hundred tanks and thirty thousand troops to Saudi Arabia, the largest contingent of any Arab nation.

The opposition of some Egyptian Islamists to Egypt's participation in the anti-Iraq coalition was largely drowned out by a government campaign to win popular support by highlighting the brutality of the Iraqi occupation. Egyptian-Iraqi ties had already been strained by widespread reports of sometimes violent discrimination against Egyptians working in Iraq.

Mubarak's anti-Iraq position during the 1990 to 1991 Persian Gulf crisis and war and his success in persuading other Arab countries to participate in the multinational force earned him the gratitude of the United States and the Gulf countries. The participation of Egypt and other Arab nations undercut Saddam Hussein's claims that his invasion of Kuwait was a blow against US imperialism and advanced the Palestinian cause. Mubarak also held Egypt solidly in the coalition when it appeared that Israel might enter the war against Iraq. US leaders worried that if Israel retaliated against Iraqi missile attacks, Arab nations would withdraw from the coalition rather than fight on the same side as their old enemy. In the end, the United States prevailed on Israel not to attack. The United States rewarded Egypt by increasing military cooperation, forgiving a \$7 billion debt for arms purchased in the 1970s, and rescheduling its remaining debts. Saudi Arabia wrote off outstanding Egyptian debts of \$4 billion.

In March 1991, the Damascus Declaration was signed, providing that Egypt and Syria join Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries in a new Gulf security arrangement—GCC plus Two. Saudi Arabia's reluctance to station a non-Gulf Arab force in the area on an open-ended basis and its preference instead to rely on Western forces resulted in Mubarak's withdrawing Egyptian troops from the Gulf after the war. At the same time, the GCC countries, suffering from their own financial difficulties, cut back on their aid commitments to Egypt. Egyptian expectations for increased contracts, assistance, and cooperative ventures from the Gulf states for its efforts went

largely unfulfilled. The Damascus Declaration essentially had become a dead letter.

After the failure in 2000 of the Arab-Israeli peace process pursued throughout the 1990s and the al-Qa'ida attacks of September 11, 2001, the transformation in US policy toward the Middle East put Egypt in an awkward position. As the United States shifted toward a confrontation with Iraq and began to advocate greater human rights and democratization throughout the Arab world, the long-standing but always somewhat-fragile relations between Cairo and Washington deteriorated.

During the Iraq War initiated by the United States in March 2003, Egypt maintained its distance from US policy, in contrast with its open support of the coalition forces in 1991. Mubarak openly criticized the war on a number of occasions but quietly provided military cooperation, such as overflight permission and Suez Canal transits for coalition military forces. Egypt was the first Arab state to send an ambassador to Iraq after the 2003 invasion, but Ambassador Ihab al-Sharif was assassinated in July 2005. In 2006, Egypt and the United States inaugurated an annual strategic dialogue to discuss a wide array of controversial regional and domestic issues.

Politics of the Nile Basin

No analysis of Egypt's international and regional position would be complete without a discussion of the politics of water. Egypt is synonymous with the River Nile, which is practically its sole source of water. In fact, practically all of Egypt's population lives in a narrow strip of land along the banks of the Nile—the rest of the country is desert. But Egypt's claim on the four-thousand-mile-long river is precarious. The river is fed by three major tributaries: the White Nile, which originates in Lake Victoria, and the Blue Nile and Atabara, which both originate in Ethiopia and together account for 85 percent of the Nile's waters.¹²⁰ For much of Egypt's recorded history, the lands upstream did not make much use of the river, which meant that

Egyptians had a virtual monopoly over it. But in recent years, some of the other so-called riparian countries—Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda—have begun to assert their claims to the Nile, which has occasioned much tension with Cairo.

The usage of the Nile is governed by two international treaties, neither of which recognizes the rights of upstream states (with the exception of Sudan). The 1929 treaty of the Nile Basin, which was signed by Egypt and Britain (the latter acting on behalf of the Sudan), allocated the majority of the Nile's waters to Egypt (approximately 48 billion cubic meters, with a mere 4 billion to Sudan). The treaty gave Egypt the right to inspect and veto any proposed upstream usages of the Nile's waters. In 1959, Egypt and a newly independent Sudan came to a new agreement. By this time, the flow of the Nile was estimated at approximately 84 billion cubic meters. After allowing for the loss of 10 billion cubic meters due to evaporation, Egypt was allocated 55.5 billion cubic meters and Sudan 18.5 billion. Once again, the upstream riparian states were granted nothing.¹²¹ Sudan also promised to build, with Egypt's help, a canal in the south of Sudan that would allow the Nile to bypass the region's marshes, thus stanching a considerable source of water loss (but at the cost of destroying the way of life of the tribes that depended on the marshes for their sustenance). The project actually commenced in 1980 with World Bank funding, but fighting in southern Sudan between that country's Arab Muslim central government and Christian separatists brought the project to a halt just short of completion.¹²²

For much of the twentieth century, the political instability that has plagued the upstream riparian states meant that they were unable to press claims to a share of the Nile's waters or even credibly threaten to violate international treaties and erect dams or irrigation schemes that would diminish the flow of water to Egypt. But that is changing. Drought-stricken Ethiopia, for example, has repeatedly pressed claims to use more of the Nile. A multinational Council of Nile Basin Ministers, established in 1998 to negotiate a framework for the

sharing of the Nile waters, has so far failed to generate results as upstream countries accuse Egypt and Sudan of holding stubbornly to their claims over the river.¹²³ Egypt argues that since the upstream countries receive significant rainfall and Egypt receives none, its claim to the Nile is a matter of life and death. Upstream countries respond that Egypt wastes a great deal of the Nile's waters—for example, in 1997 it initiated the Toshka project to irrigate a portion of Egypt's southern desert (at great cost in terms of both money and water).¹²⁴

In June of 2013, reports that Ethiopia was planning to construct a grandly named “Grand Renaissance Dam” along the Blue Nile generated considerable alarm in Cairo, and then-President Muhammad Morsi convened a televised meeting of Egyptian political leaders to discuss how to deal with the potential threat to Egypt's water supply.¹²⁵ In May 2015, Morsi's successor, Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi, inked a framework agreement with the governments of Ethiopia and other riparian states that committed all states of the Nile Valley not to harm the interests of downstream states, but the details of a final agreement have yet to be worked out.¹²⁶ While the final dispensation of the Nile is in considerable doubt, what is not in doubt is that this issue will only increase in importance as all of the states along the Nile Basin seek to cope with growing populations and the imperatives of development.¹²⁷

The Post-Mubarak Period

The period after Mubarak's overthrow has seen a reconfiguration of many of Egypt's key relationships. Foremost among these is Egypt's alliance with the United States. When the Muslim Brotherhood's Morsi came to power in July 2012, there was considerable fear in Western capitals that this traditionally anti-American leader of a traditionally anti-American organization would strike a defiant pose toward Egypt's erstwhile patron.¹²⁸ The irony, however, is that the Brotherhood came to be seen as generally cooperative with the United States. For instance, Morsi earned plaudits for his role in

helping the United States to bring about a cease-fire between Israel and the Palestinian militant group Hamas in November 2012.¹²⁹ The true rupture in Egyptian-American relations has come after the Brotherhood's overthrow, as many Brotherhood opponents believe—albeit with little evidence—that the United States was supportive of the Islamists and conspired to keep them in power. On July 22, 2013, shortly after Morsi's removal, the front page of Egypt's principal state-owned newspaper, *al-Ahrām*, declared that it had “the details of the American conspiracy against Egypt and the final hours of Brotherhood rule,” and alleged that the American ambassador had made a deal with the Muslim Brotherhood's deputy leader to help Morsi establish a parallel government that would be run from one of Cairo's mosques.¹³⁰

For its part, the US administration has tried to maintain its close relationship with Egypt's leadership, ignoring calls to suspend aid to that country. However, it increasingly appears that the United States has been displaced as Egypt's principal patron by the Gulf countries, which, as we have seen, have collectively pledged more than \$30 billion to Egypt since 2013. For comparison's sake, the US aid package to Egypt clocks in at around \$2 billion per year. Egypt has also joined with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in a blockade of the Arabian Gulf emirate of Qatar (on the grounds that Qatar supports Islamic extremists) and participates in a Saudi-led antiterrorism coalition that seems aimed at combatting groups such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State while also targeting Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated groups and individuals (including Egyptian politicians who oppose the current military-backed regime). In 2017, Egypt opened a military base in the northwest part of the country that is intended to serve as a staging ground for troops from Egypt and the United Arab Emirates and their allies as they combat Islamist militias in neighboring Libya.

Although Egypt and its Gulf patrons currently experience an alignment of interests—particularly as they relate to quelling Islamist movements and militants in the region—there are likely limits to the current alliance. For instance, many domestic critics of President al-

Sisi have criticized him for seeming to subordinate Egypt to its Gulf patrons. For these critics, the most dramatic illustration of this subordination came in April of 2016, when President al-Sisi ceded sovereignty over two Red Sea islands—Tiran and Sanafir—to Saudi Arabia.¹³¹ For example, there are clear and growing divergences in Egyptian and Saudi Arabian foreign policies.¹³² Saudi Arabia wants Egyptian cooperation in confronting Iranian proxies in Yemen and Syria, whereas Egypt's approach to both countries has been to emphasize stability. Thus, where the Saudis wish to see Syria President Bashar al-Asad (an Iranian ally) overthrown, the Egyptians have not hidden their unease with any attempts to disrupt the Syrian state. It remains to be seen whether these divergences will lead the Saudis and their Gulf counterparts to withdraw support for Egypt entirely or whether Egypt will alter its foreign policy behavior in order to maintain its relationships with the countries that have done so much to stabilize the current regime.

Conclusion

Writing about Egypt is like trying to hit a moving target. Potentially momentous changes occur on a daily basis, and while one waits for the dust to settle on one set of developments, a new set of dramatic events throws everything into yet another disequilibrium. This is not the Egypt that many Egypt-watchers grew up studying and writing about. During the Mubarak era, the country's politics were so stable as to be called stagnant. After Mubarak's ouster, Egypt was suddenly vibrant and dynamic, with all of the attendant frustrations for social scientists. Today, a military ruler may be back at the helm, but the old stagnation of the Mubarak period is nowhere in evidence—although instead of vibrancy and dynamism, Egyptian politics is characterized by violence and danger.

It is hazardous to try to predict Egypt's future, but one can identify developments to watch. The first is the potential emergence of an accommodation between the Egyptian regime and the supporters of the ousted Muslim Brotherhood government. Although there seems to be little hope of such an accommodation as of this writing, it nonetheless remains a possibility, particularly as at least one of Egypt's Gulf patrons—the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia—seems interested in using the Muslim Brotherhood and its regional affiliates in Yemen and Syria as a bulwark against Iranian power.

The second development to watch for is the potential eruption of splits within the coalition undergirding the current regime. We tend to treat Egypt's military and security apparatus as a unified actor with a single set of interests, but there are reasons to believe that this analytic convenience is mistaken. We have already seen, for example, how Egypt's president has expressed unease with the conduct of the police toward protesters—suggesting that the army and the Interior Ministry may have different views over how to manage dissent. Moreover, if the experience of other countries is any guide, we should remain attuned to the potential for splits within

the military itself, as different branches of the armed forces perceive themselves to have different interests. Most importantly, if the current president seems as unable to solve Egypt's economic problems as his predecessors, it is possible that at least some segment of the military will withdraw support from him in precisely the same way that it did with Mubarak and Morsi if faced with mass protest.

Finally, Egypt's evolving relations with the rest of the world, and particularly with its American ally, demand close attention. Will the country remain in the US orbit, continuing to receive almost \$2 billion in military and economic assistance, as well as other diplomatic and security support? How will the largesse of the Gulf countries alter Egypt's foreign policy behavior? Will this assistance cause Egypt to toe a more anti-Iranian line? Finally, will Egypt deepen its relationship with Russia, which shares Egypt's preference for regional stability? And if so, can Russia serve as the kind of patron that both the United States and the Gulf have been and that Egypt so clearly needs?

This chapter began with a number of old and new testimonials to Egypt's regional centrality. At almost 100 million people, this largest of Arab countries cannot help but continue to be an important factor in a troubled region. But it is unclear exactly what role Egypt will play. Increasingly, it appears that Egypt's primary influence is as a cautionary tale—an example of what can go wrong when people rise up to overthrow settled orders. It is difficult to imagine a more depressing outcome to the protests that so captured imaginations around the world in 2011. That said, the scholar Mona El-Ghobashy, writing shortly after Mubarak's overthrow in 2011, has testified to the ways in which citizens can suddenly come together to reshape the balance of power between regime and society.¹³³ For decades—she and others have pointed out—analysts ignored the Egyptian people's potential for dissent and focused instead on the ways in which regimes seemed to have gained complete control over their populations. Today, we risk making the same mistake—seeing only regime dominance and ignoring the potential for change that bubbles below the surface. After all, if the now-thwarted revolution of 2011

taught us anything, it is that the Egyptian people can make their voices heard when one least expects it.

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11 Iran

Mehrzad Boroujerdi

On November 4, 1979, less than nine months after the victory of the Iranian Revolution, a group of Islamic militants took over the US embassy in Tehran and held fifty-two US diplomats hostage. The “Iranian hostage crisis” contributed mightily to the electoral defeat of the incumbent US president, Jimmy Carter, who saw the hostages released on January 20, 1981, just as he was handing over power to the newly elected president, Ronald Reagan. The hostage crisis echoed again when President George W. Bush, in a State of the Union address in 2002, referred to Iran as a rogue state and a member of an “axis of evil.” There is no doubt that the 1979 Revolution has given Iran a uniquely strained and precarious relationship with its former ally, the United States.¹

The 1979 Revolution was a watershed event that heralded the return of religious revolution to the annals of modern history. The rapid collapse of a strong autocratic regime, the use of religion as the primary instrument of political mobilization, the tremendous level of animosity displayed against the West, and the establishment of a “theocracy”² in the later decades of the twentieth century offered serious and difficult questions for students of politics. And the revolution helped inaugurate a wave of religious political activism in the Muslim world that has been referred to as Islamic fundamentalism, Islamic militancy, or Islamic radicalism.

Iran also provides us with a rather novel, ingenious experiment in political statecraft. Its government is unique among contemporary political systems as a theocracy infused with democratic elements. As the world’s only theocratic republic, Iran’s political system is organized around the principle that Shi’i clergy have a divine right to govern because they are the qualified interpreters of God’s will. The

country is led by a chief cleric who has the title of “Supreme Leader” and enjoys rather extensive powers.

Iran’s political system also has strong democratic elements, as the constitution recognizes the principles of popular sovereignty and separation of powers; makes frequent reference to individual rights; and grants the electorate the right to elect the president, members of parliament, and members of the Assembly of Experts, as well as municipal councils.³ This blending of theocratic and democratic features in the constitution has led to tension. The Islamic Republic’s legitimacy rests in part on popular sovereignty and in part on its conformity to a revealed body of religious law. The people elect most policymakers, but they are overseen by clerics who are not accountable to anything except their own religious conscience and one another. The Islamic Republic thus has a split in its bases of legitimation.

History of State Formation and Political Change

Iran, a country with a history spanning more than three millennia, has one of the richest artistic, literary, and scholarly lineages of the Middle East. This tradition is due to the accumulated contributions of Persia's gifted craftsmen, gnostic and hedonist poets, and learned scholars in philosophy, science, and religion. Iran's rather complex political culture and self-identity are heavily influenced by a pre-Islamic notion of Iranian identity centered on nationalism, intellectual loans acquired in the course of encounters with Western modernity, and attachment to the minority branch of Islam known as Shi'ism. Each of these currents has served as a breeding ground for the formation of different types of political sentiments ranging from anti-Arab nationalism to secular humanism and finally to radical Shi'ism.

Key Facts on Iran

AREA 636,372 square miles (1,648,195 square kilometers)

CAPITAL Tehran

POPULATION 81,640,764 (2018)

PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION UNDER 25 38.84 (2017)

RELIGIOUS GROUPS (PERCENTAGE) Shi'i Muslim, 90; Sunni Muslim, 9; Jews, Bahá'ís, Zoroastrians, and Christians, 0.3

ETHNIC GROUPS (PERCENTAGE) Persian, 61; Azeri, 16; Kurd, 10; Lur, 6; Baluch, 2; Arab, 2; Turkmen and Turkic tribes, 2; other, 1

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE Persian, 53 percent; Azeri Turkic and Turkic dialects, 18 percent; Kurdish, 10 percent; Gilaki and Mazandarani, 7 percent; Luri, 6 percent; Baluchi, 2 percent; Arabic, 2 percent; other, 2 percent

TYPE OF GOVERNMENT Theocratic republic

DATE OF INDEPENDENCE April 1, 1979 (Islamic Republic of Iran proclaimed); December 12, 1925 (modern Iran established under the Pahlavi Dynasty)

GDP (PPP) \$1.7 trillion; \$20,949 per capita (2017)

GDP (NOMINAL) \$439,514 billion, \$5,417 per capita (2017)

PERCENTAGE OF GDP BY SECTOR Agriculture, 6.5; industry and mining, 23; services, 49
TOTAL RENTS (PERCENTAGE OF GDP) FROM OIL 22.1
FERTILITY RATE 1.97 children born/woman

Sources: Central Bank of Iran; US Central Intelligence Agency, *CIA World Factbook, 2018*; Statistical Center of Iran; World Bank, "International Comparison Program database," <http://www.indexmundi.com/facts/indicators/>.

In the sixth century BCE, Cyrus the Great established the first Persian empire. His grandson Darius then extended it to the Nile Valley and almost to Asia Minor through his conquest of Babylon and Egypt. The empire gradually shrank because of Greek and Roman conquests and internal decay. By the seventh century CE, it was beset by Arab invaders, who brought with them Islam and foreign rule.

The Safavid dynasty declared Shi'ism as the state religion. During the period of their reign (1501–1736), the Safavids managed to create the first modern Iranian nation-state. They were finally overthrown in 1722 by a group of Afghan tribes. The eighteenth century witnessed the rise and fall of a number of other dynasties in Persia before the Qajar dynasty was established in 1794. The reign of this latter dynasty, which lasted until 1925, was marked by a feebleness of the state at a time when colonialism was at its height. Several ill-advised conflicts with neighboring states such as Russia led to embarrassing territorial concessions for Persia.

The Pahlavis

It was against this background that in 1921 a military officer named Reza Khan seized power and four years later abolished the Qajar dynasty and declared himself the king (or shah) of a new Pahlavi dynasty. Reza Shah managed to create a centralized bureaucratic state by modernizing the economy and secularizing political life. He modeled his reforms after Ataturk in Turkey and in 1935 changed the name of the country from Persia to Iran. He was forced to abdicate his throne in 1941, however, because of his pro-German sympathies during World War II. The Allied forces recognized his son Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi as the new monarch when he was only twenty-two years old.

Mohammad Reza Shah continued his father's policy of authoritarian modernization while being extremely pro-Western in his foreign policy. Disagreement with his prime minister, Mohammad Mossadeq, who was attempting to nationalize Iran's oil industry, forced the shah to leave the country in 1953. A few months later, the shah, with the help of British and US intelligence services, overthrew Mossadeq and returned to power.⁴ The 1953 coup, by putting an end to legal organized political opposition (most importantly the Communist Tudeh Party), inadvertently transferred the locus of opposition from factories to educational centers and mosques. This development was only natural since the government could outlaw political parties and threaten striking workers with termination of employment but not storm the mosques, outlaw prayers, or close the universities indefinitely.

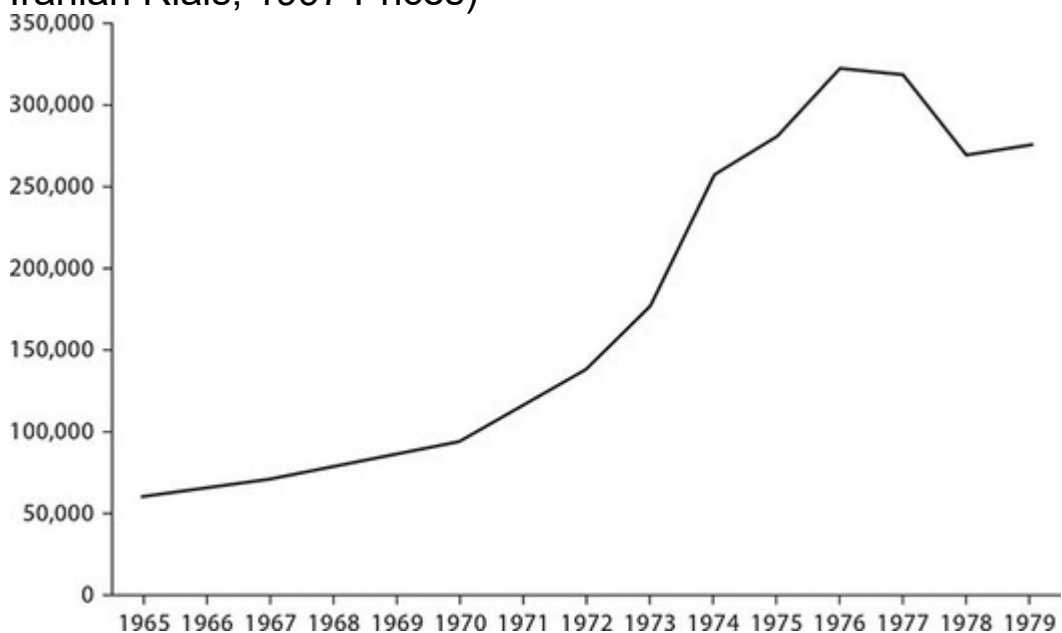
Map 11.1 Iran



The shah's government saw its revenue from oil increase from \$555 million in 1963–1964 to more than \$20 billion in 1975–1976.⁵ Oil revenue as a percentage of total government revenue jumped from 11 percent in 1948 to 84 percent in 1975. By this time, oil revenue made up 45 percent of Iran's gross domestic product (GDP) and 89 percent of its foreign export receipts. Furthermore, thanks to accumulating oil revenue, Iran's gross national product (GNP) grew at an annual rate of 8 percent from 1962 to 1970, 14 percent from 1972 to 1973, and 30 percent from 1973 to 1974. Between 1972 and 1978, Iran's GNP grew from \$17 billion to an estimated \$54 billion, giving it one of the highest GNP growth rates in the developing world (see [Figure 11.1](#)).

The income from oil made Iran into the textbook example of a rentier state, a state that derives a substantial portion of its revenue on a regular basis from payments by foreign concerns in the form of rent. Thanks to the massive infusion of new wealth, the state no longer had to rely on agricultural surplus for capital accumulation. It embarked instead on a fast-paced modernization process, the result of which was the transformation of the economy from one based on agriculture and commerce to a one-product economy, based on oil.

Figure 11.1 Gross Domestic Product of Iran, 1965–1979 (Billion Iranian Rials, 1997 Prices)



Source: Annual National Accounts, Central Bank of Iran, www.cbi.ir/simplelist/5796.aspx.

While the shah and his lieutenants embarked on rapid modernization of Iran's socioeconomic infrastructure, there was a half-hearted attempt to create an open political system. The shah founded the Rastakhiz (Resurgence) Party in 1975 as an inclusive party, and he encouraged all Iranians to join. In fact, all legal channels of participation were actually closed to the opposition, and the shah's call to participation was in fact only rhetorical. He failed to realize

that, even among the rising moneyed class, rapid modernization could foster a sense of deprivation in terms of political participation, collective decision-making, and national independence. And more important for the lower classes, concerns about wealth distribution, conspicuous consumption, and moral decadence would prove to generate strong antistate emotions.

Hence, Iran's rentier economy and the shah's actual policies caused the gradual erosion of the bonds linking the state and civil society. Although the shah's state was viewed by most Iranian and Western observers as modernizing, secular, and stable, its claims of legitimacy proved tenuous and its hold on power fragile.

The 1979 Revolution

The 1979 Revolution was a peculiar revolution on at least three accounts: It was the first revolution in which the dominant ideology, forms of organization, and leadership cadres were religious in form and aspiration; the first contemporary revolution that has led to the establishment of a theocracy; and the only modern social revolution in which peasants and rural guerrillas played a marginal role.

The Iranian Revolution was second only to the Chinese Revolution in the number of participants mobilized. The revolution came out of conditions created by the shah post 1953. Determined to make Iran into a Middle Eastern version of Japan, the shah embarked on a massive program of modernization. The so-called White Revolution (1963–1978) was made up of a dozen administrative, economic, and social reform initiatives, including the enfranchisement of women. The centerpiece of the reform package, however, was a land reform that dealt with some peasant grievances but also transferred capital and the regime's support base from rural landowners to the urban bourgeoisie. A modern economic sector emerged alongside more traditional ways of life. Aiming to undercut the public importance of Islam, the shah cultivated both a Western image that many conservative Iranians found offensive and pre-Islamic versions of Iranian identity that centered on nationalism rather than religion. By intervening in all significant decisions and demanding absolute loyalty, he managed to establish a patron-client relationship with the citizenry courtesy of huge oil revenues. All these measures deepened the economic and cultural chasm in the country.

Two factors contributed to the emergence of a revolutionary crisis. First, a 10 percent decline in oil prices in the late 1970s plus a 20 percent rise in consumer prices dented previously strong rates of economic growth, leading to widespread discontent. This cause invokes the *J*-curve theory of revolutions, in which a crisis occurs when a period of improvement and rising expectations suddenly gives way to disappointment. Second, the Carter administration's new emphasis on human rights, coupled with criticism from Western

media and human rights organizations, led to US pressure on the shah to lift restraints on political opposition.

A broad revolutionary coalition began to crystallize. It consisted of the urban poor, the moderate-middle classes concerned with political freedoms, the leftist opposition, the bazaar (traditional) merchants, and the clergy. Compared with the other groups, the clergy had a set of advantages: a solid centralized internal structure, strong communication networks, capable orators, wide mobilizing networks, populist slogans, and financial independence from the state.

Demonstrations and strikes snowballed through late 1978 and into early 1979. The shah was finished when his conscript-based armed forces declared that they were now “neutral” and would not defend the regime. The first government headed by Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan was overwhelmingly made up of lay liberal-minded Muslim nationalists. Then, as occurred in the French Revolution, the broad moderate coalition of the early stages gave way to progressively more ideological and radical factions. The lack of ideological consensus among the revolutionaries forced Bazargan’s provisional government to resign in November 1979, fewer than nine months after it came to office. Through a series of maneuvers over the course of two years, the liberal-minded bloc was forced out by the clergy who set up a state with theocratic forms.

Institutions and Governance

In addition to the institutions inherited from the *ancien regime*, the Islamic Republic created a plethora of assemblies, committees, councils, courts, and foundations to exert its control. In many cases, the new leaders chose to create parallel revolutionary organizations because they could not entirely trust the institutions they had inherited. For example, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) was formed in addition to the regular army. Over time, as these organizations became arenas for factional infighting, overlapping responsibilities, and conflicting policies, the government decided to consolidate several of them into more established bureaucratic agencies. In other cases, the ideology of the new ruling elites compelled them to establish completely new institutions. The Guardian Council, Expediency Assembly, Assembly of Experts, and Special Court for Clergy are just a few examples. The appropriation of the inherited institutions and the invented new organs made the state even more byzantine and muscular.

Iran has a large and inefficient public sector. In the early years of its rule, the state ensured effective control over the civil service by purging, denying employment, and forcing into early retirement those whom it viewed as undesirables. Thereafter, a group of lay technocrats who have been culturally orthodox and have maintained close ties with the clergy have staffed the higher echelons of the bureaucracy. These individuals, who gained education and upward mobility under the Islamic Republic, come mainly from humble backgrounds.

Iran's ruling clergy after the revolution could be classified as an ideological elite who subjugated politics and public policy to religious convictions and made practical material issues take a backseat to a comprehensive vision of society. Generally, the promarket forces favoring a rapprochement with the outside world are connected with more modern business interests. The upper clergy have close,

personal ties to conservative bazaar merchants. The base of the radical clergy is predominantly in the lower-middle class.

Policymaking at present involves the elected legislature, the clerical overseers, and the bureaucracy. The latter plays a crucial mediating role between the clergy and the public. Concerted reforms are difficult because of the fragmentation of power. Views on economic and cultural changes are cross-cutting. The liberal-technocratic camp on economic issues does not necessarily favor political liberalization. The intense factionalism has more often than not caused gridlock in policymaking.

Branches of Government

Many features of the Iranian political system are similar to other modern polities and, thus, are unremarkable. There is a president and a unicameral legislature, both elected directly by voters. Before 1989, the system was loosely parliamentary, with a prime minister and a weak president. A number of constitutional changes took place in 1989: One constitutional amendment led to the abolishment of the office of prime minister and strengthened the office of the presidency to take its place. Iran's president is elected under universal suffrage, and election requires an absolute majority of votes. The term of office is four years and subject to a term limit of no more than eight consecutive years. The president chooses cabinet members, presents legislation to the parliament, and is entrusted to uphold the constitution and coordinate government decisions; however, the president is not strong enough to dominate thoroughly both the government and the legislature due to the executive power being divided between the president and the supreme leader (see [Figure 11.2](#)).

Iran is a semipresidential system in which the legislative branch is much less powerful than the executive branch, and executive power is bifurcated between the president and the supreme leader. The supreme leader is the country's most powerful political figure. In the name of upholding the Islamic state, he has the authority to overrule or dismiss the president, appoint the head of the judiciary and half of the members of the Guardian Council, and appoint the top echelons of the military. Initially, the supreme leader was required to be one of the highest-ranking Shi'i clerics and would be elected and periodically reconfirmed by the Assembly of Experts. While Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini was alive, he was the undisputed supreme leader.⁶ Upon Khomeini's death in 1989, another key amendment was introduced. In a triumph of political convenience over doctrinal coherence, the qualification for the supreme leader was downgraded from needing to be the highest-ranking cleric to being an established member of the clergy with a solid political-revolutionary pedigree. As

such, the Assembly of Experts chose Ali Khamenei, a long-time lieutenant of Ayatollah Khomeini, as the new supreme leader. This smooth transition of power had none of the hallmarks of the succession crises besetting other revolutionary states.

Over the course of the last thirty years, Khamenei has amassed a disproportionate amount of power through bureaucratic aggrandizement and use of informal politics. Thanks to “institutional assets” and “informal leverage” at his disposal, he has been able to bypass democratic rules enshrined in the constitution; emasculate such bodies as the Assembly of Experts, the Guardian Council, and the parliament; and subdue the religious seminaries. These institutions have not demonstrated any serious proclivity to be independent from the supreme leader. Today, neither the press nor the proper governmental bodies can in reality investigate any of the organs under the supreme leader, nor can anyone overrule him.

The Guardian Council is a twelve-member council that, jointly with the supreme leader, has veto power over any legislation passed by the parliament that is deemed to be at odds with the basic tenets of Islam. In a sense, the Guardian Council operates like the upper house of parliament. Another important power granted to this council is the right to determine who can run in presidential, parliamentary, and Assembly of Experts elections. The council is made up of six clerical members who are appointed by the supreme leader and six lay members (lawyers) who are recommended by the head of the judiciary, subject to the approval of the parliament. While the six lawyers vote mainly on the question of the constitutionality of legislation, the clerical members consider the conformity of legislation to Islamic principles. The members of the Guardian Council are supposed to serve six-year terms. However, halfway through their term three clerical members and three lay legal jurists will change, based on a lottery system to create staggered terms.

The Assembly of Experts is an eighty-eight-member assembly charged with evaluating the performance of the supreme leader. The Assembly is itself popularly elected, but it consists almost entirely of

clerics because candidates must pass an examination on religious knowledge to be eligible.

The parliament is made up of 290 deputies who are elected by direct and secret ballot for four-year terms. The Iranian parliament is not a rubber-stamp institution. Thanks to the constant state of factional infighting among the elite, the parliament has been a rather boisterous arena where acrimonious debates (even fistfights) take place. The government is often obliged to lobby strongly to move legislation through the chamber. The regularity of elections has helped to institutionalize the place of parliament in political life, and the parliamentary elections can serve as a barometer of electoral sentiment. This barometer seems to show that anticlericalism is on the rise, as demonstrated by the fact that the percentage of clerics in the parliament has dropped 46 percent between 1980 and 2018.

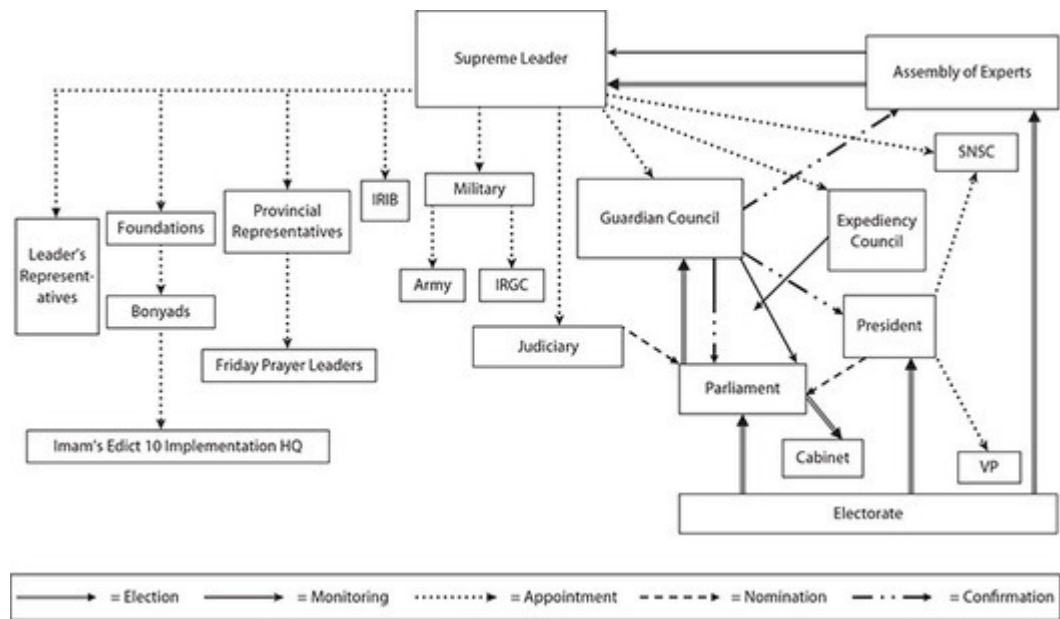
Faced with frequent and serious policy disputes between the Guardian Council and the parliament, the ruling elite decided in 1988 to create yet another council, the Expediency Assembly (formally known as the Expediency Discernment Assembly of the State). Composed of some three dozen leading political personalities, this body is entrusted with the task of resolving any policy disputes in a way that serves the interest of the entire system. It also advises national leaders on matters of grave national importance. The council is made up of juristic members (clerical jurists of the Guardian Council, heads of the three branches of government, and cabinet ministers and parliament committee chairs) and natural members specifically named by the supreme leader. The current term is five years.

The judiciary, along with the supreme leader and the Guardian Council, is the third pillar of clerical political power. It is the most controversial of the three branches of government due to the fact that the supreme leader appoints the head of the judiciary who, by definition, must be a cleric.⁷ According to the constitution (Article 156), the court system is supposedly independent, but its political role in practice reflects the ideological composition of judges who are

quite uniformly conservative clerics either wholly opposed to or, rather, suspicious of allowing legal reform. They fear that removing brakes on dissent and personal behavior will allow liberal opponents to hijack the public sphere and eventually the state. The Supreme Court can prosecute the president but not the supreme leader. In a clear violation of their parliamentary immunity, the judiciary has on occasion summoned MPs regarding statements they made during parliamentary debates. The Revolutionary Courts are broadly responsible for judging certain offenses such as crimes against national security; insulting the founder of the Islamic Republic or the supreme leader; terrorism, espionage, conspiracy, or armed rebellion against the state; and trafficking in narcotic drugs.

Meanwhile, Article 90 of the constitution gives the parliament the right to investigate complaints concerning the work of the executive and judicial branches. The judiciary is constrained by such factors as the state-centered nature of the economy, an excessive volume of legal and penal cases, a shortage of judges, budgetary constraints, a burgeoning prison population, a rampant drug culture, and the large number of crime categories (1,500 to 1,600 categories of crimes, of which 70 percent to 80 percent warrant a prison sentence). The judiciary has been criticized by a wide variety of international human rights organizations for right abuses. Furthermore, according to Amnesty International, Iran executes more people (including juvenile offenders) than any other country besides China. The court system also enforces censorship laws to curtail public debates.

Figure 11.2 Structure of Power in Iran



Source: Mehrzad Boroujerdi and Kouroush Rahimkhani, *Postrevolutionary Iran: A Political Handbook* (Syracuse University Press, 2018), 37. Reprinted with permission.

Constitution

After the 1979 revolution, shari'a, supplemented by laws to address modern conditions, was restored as the core of the legal system. A constitution ratified in December 1979 codified "Islamic law" as "state law," and it became the foundation of Iran's social order, but the constitution is full of latent and manifest contradictions. Thanks to its ideological character, the constitution was riddled with oddities and paradoxes as it simultaneously affirmed both religious and secular principles, democratic and antidemocratic tendencies, and populist and elitist predilections. The antiquity and the private character of shari'a law made it rather ill-equipped to deal with the legal and public needs of a modern, stratified polity. To deal with the anachronisms, complications, and inconsistencies resulting from the gap between text and practice, leaders increasingly resorted to the "exigency of the state" argument to circumvent the letter as well as the spirit of shari'a.

Hence, while the constitution helped to codify a theocracy, the eclectic qualities of society were such that secular agents, aspirations, ideas, institutions, language, and motifs continued to survive and—more important—manifested their significance in private and public space. These paradoxes gave rise to numerous debates concerning the politics of legal arrangements. For example, according to the constitution the president has to be from the Shi'i sect and be a "well-known political personality." The sectarian qualification automatically disenfranchises Sunni Muslims, Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, Bahá'ís, and other religious minorities. Furthermore, the vaguely worded "well-known political personality" clause has so far been interpreted to mean that it applies only to men, thereby allowing the Guardian Council to bar those women who wish to stand for election as president. Above and beyond restrictions on political behavior, critics complain of many other inequities in how shari'a handles women's rights and family law. Although some controversial practices are due more to traditional and patriarchal social conditions than to shari'a, still there

are rigidities in shari'a that cannot adequately be overcome through revisions, given the understanding of its sources.

In the age-old tradition of political tokenism, the constitution mandates that small "recognized" religious minorities—Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians—have a total of 5 seats reserved to them in the parliament. This qualification also means that unrecognized religious minorities like the Bahá'ís cannot be represented in parliament.

Military Forces

The military establishment is made up of the regular army and the IRGC. The relationship between the IRGC and the clerical establishment during the past three decades has been both fluid and multifaceted. During the first decade of the revolution (1979–1989), the IRGC was a political factor but not a major political player independent of the clerical establishment. This was to a large extent due to two main factors: Ayatollah Khomeini's formal stricture forbidding military personnel from becoming involved in partisan politics and the preoccupation of the military with the Iran-Iraq War. Mindful of the crucial role the IRGC was playing in the war, the clerical leadership allowed a short-lived (1982–1989) ministerial post for the IRGC. In 1989, with the conclusion of the Iran-Iraq War and the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, the civilian leadership tried to emasculate the IRGC by taking away its ministerial post and attempting to unite the IRGC and the regular army into a unified command structure. The latter effort failed, and each was allowed to keep a separate organizational structure and ground, air, and naval forces. This convoluted arrangement was made even more byzantine by the fact that the IRGC has two other forces as well: the Quds Force and the Basij Resistance Force. The Quds Force (Jerusalem Brigade) serves as the IRGC's overseas fighting force and advises foreign allied forces; the paramilitary Basij Resistance Force played an important role in the war against Iraq and was later used for internal security roles.

When President Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani came to office in 1989, he embarked on a project to reconstruct the war-torn economy. The IRGC became involved in numerous economic activities, thanks to its political ties, its technological know-how, and the government's desire to provide the IRGC with financial autonomy in return for the services the corps had rendered in the course of the eight-year war. The IRGC set up numerous financial and economic enterprises that would then receive no-bid contracts. The IRGC also set up front organizations and quasi-state firms that were able to secure lucrative

oil and gas contracts. Despite President Rafsanjani's willingness to strengthen the private sector, certain factors forced him and his successors to grant large projects to the engineering subsidiary of the IRGC. These factors included work in sensitive areas (including military and nuclear); security considerations in restive provinces; the need to meet quick deadlines; and requirements for a readily available workforce that could undertake large-scale projects like constructing tunnels, ports, dams, bridges, and oil and gas pipelines.

Box 11.1 The Iran-Iraq War, 1980–1988

In the early 1970s, Iran's relations with its neighbor Iraq were often strained. The ruling Ba'th Party in Iraq was secular and Sunni, while the majority of Iraqis are Shi'a with established links in Iran. Senior clerics from both countries studied together in the 1950s and 1960s at the religious centers in Najaf, Iraq, and Qom, Iran. Not only did this often promote a common ideology, but it also encouraged the migration of clerics from one country to the other. In 1969, Tehran was implicated in an attempted coup against the newly established Ba'thist government in Baghdad. The following years were tense, but good relations returned when both countries signed the Algiers Agreement in 1975, with Iran agreeing to stop supporting the Kurdish rebellion in return for territorial concessions from Iraq. After the Islamic revolution, however, Iraq again viewed Iran with suspicion, fearing another Shi'i revolt against the Ba'thist government in Baghdad. Border confrontations ensued, and Iraq retaliated with a bombing campaign in September 1980, beginning a long and bloody eight-year war.

The war against Iraq prolonged the revolutionary spirit in Iran, providing the backdrop for the government to further institutionalize the more radical elements of the Islamic Republic. Hundreds of thousands were mobilized by ideology and volunteered their own lives to challenge the military superiority of the Iraqis. In the end, thousands of young men were killed. Portraits of martyrs were painted on signs and buildings throughout cities, and streets were also renamed after the fallen. Various foundations were set up to take care of the families of the war wounded and martyred, creating new social networks of privilege. Both sides experienced dramatic losses during the course of the war, with official Iranian reports putting the number of those killed at 159,000 and many more thousands wounded. By the time the war ended in 1988 with

a United Nations–brokered cease-fire, many Iranians questioned the legitimacy of the war and continue to bear its scars.

The prevalence of regional conflicts (including the Iran-Iraq War, the Arab-Israeli dispute, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria) combined with the tapestry of real and perceived domestic and international insecurities of the state have paved the way for the IRGC to enter the inner sanctums of power. Commensurate with its increasing economic power, the IRGC began to flex its muscles in the political domain as well. In July 1999, twenty-four high-level IRGC commanders published a threatening letter of ultimatum to reformist President Mohammad Khatami about dealing with student protests.

Meanwhile, numerous other IRGC members have exchanged their military uniforms for civilian careers as cabinet ministers, members of parliament, provincial governors, ambassadors, cultural attachés, journalists and newspaper editors, university administrators, directors of think tanks and foundations, business leaders, and chiefs of industrial companies. They have also become candidates in presidential elections.

The IRGC is entrusted with maintaining internal security while the army safeguards the borders. Unlike many other countries in the region with long histories of military coups, Iran's military has so far not played an interventionist role in the country's politics, and the top brass has remained extremely loyal to the supreme leader. Through all the political turmoil of the postrevolutionary period, the military has respected the orderly transfer of power. The veterans of the IRGC (and the Iran-Iraq War) have increasingly permeated the bureaucracy, economy, and government and will retain influence for the foreseeable future. Being in charge of the hydra-headed military-security institutions and championing the initial élan of the revolution, this constituency by and large shares the security outlook of the supreme leader and has augmented its agenda-setting power. Yet it does not have the requisite cultural capital or street credibility to appeal to the broad urban public as political actors.

Elites, Public Opinion, Parties, and Elections

The intellectual rifts within the ranks of the officialdom have led to an ongoing tug of war between reformers and conservatives. This has produced not only a contentious domestic scene but also a fundamental change in the political culture and discourse of the country. Over the last four decades, the public has been involved in an internal conversation regarding the merits (or lack thereof) of the political systems of theocracy, democracy infused with religious sensibilities, and the nature of relations with the West. Opposition to today's regime has a range of content. Most people in what we might call the "loyal opposition" aim to reform the system but retain the basic principle of an Islamic state. Some see changing the Islamic Republic as part of a larger effort to revitalize Islam for modern conditions. An influential group of critics, including the remnants of the pre-1979 upper and middle classes, seek a more radical break with clerical rule and a return to secularism. The political opposition across all of these differences remains fragmented and thus weak. Neither has any branch of the opposition, loyal Islamic or radical secular, made many inroads into crucial groups such as the clergy and the military. Against this background, the divisions within the state and across political subcultures continue to deepen. Iran continues to be in the throes of an "integrative revolution" (i.e., an explosion of political mobilization and participation).

While the establishment of a theocratic state improved the social standing and economic well-being of a good number of clerics, it also came to hurt many others. The corruption and unseemly luxurious lifestyle of those clergymen who could skim off revenue from state and semiofficial foundations called clerical legitimacy into question. As religion became tainted with the impurities and utilitarian compromises of politics and as clerics became civil servants, many citizens began to view them as overly traditionalist,

ill-informed, corrupt, power hungry, and opportunistic. Iranians managed to undermine or at least dilute the severity of the clergy's pronouncements by resorting to adroit humor, conspiracy theories, cynicism, dissimulation, symbolic discourse, and outright dissent.

One of the ironies of Iranian politics is the fact that citizens have not so far benefited from the presence of recognized, legitimate, or effective political parties. The most important political party, the Islamic Republic Party (established in 1979), was dissolved in 1987 on the order of Ayatollah Khomeini because of factional infighting in its ranks. For the next decade, there was a ban on any party formation. Political parties were finally legalized again in 1998, but they are still at an early stage of development and policy formation, and party discipline remains embryonic. Today, there are more than 240 registered "parties," but a great majority of them resemble professional groupings engaged in political ventures rather than full-fledged groups of full-time activists. The largest party representing the reformist camp, the Islamic Iran Participation Front, was officially formed in 1999 and banned in 2009. Other established political entities also function more or less as political parties. The Assembly of Combatant Clerics, the Assembly of Imam's Line Forces, and Organization of Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution of Iran represent the reformists, while the Society of Combatant Clergy, the Party of Confederated Islamic Congregations, and Alliance of Veterans of the Islamic Revolution represent the conservatives.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has managed to institutionalize elections. During its first thirty-nine years in power, the Islamic Republic has had a remarkable number (thirty-six as of 2018) of parliamentary, presidential, Assembly of Experts, and municipal council elections. Because of Iran's record of almost one election per year, one can say that electoral politics is now an ingrained part of the polity. Elections reflect the influence of various power centers, and they have also become a way of integrating various social groups into the political system. These functions should be understood against the background of the country's dramatic demographic transformation. Thanks to a population boom, the total

number of eligible voters has increased from 20 million people in 1979 to more than 56 million in 2017.

Elections are generally competitive, usually with high voter turnout (despite the high frequency of elections), and show a candidate-to-seat ratio of better than 10 to 1. Both the contestation and participation dimensions of democracy are present, unlike in nearly all of the Arab Middle East. Yet elections are not synonymous with democratic governance. Not unlike elections under communist rule, voters have to choose from a set of hand-picked candidates. Candidates for office must be approved by the Guardian Council, an approval based on their familiarity with Islamic doctrine, revolutionary credentials, and broad acceptance of the principles of the revolution and theocratic state. This leads to prior disqualification of many presidential and legislative candidates in each election without the need for the Guardian Council to even provide an explanation for its actions.

Civil Society

As the new regime consolidated its authority, it showed no restraint in its willingness to encroach on individual and civil rights or dismantle civil initiatives and institutions all in the name of “safeguarding the welfare of the community.” Yet the civil society managed to wage a tenacious fight. Many factors explain the logic behind this resistance. Chief among them is the demographic transformation as the citizenry becomes increasingly urbanized and educated. Moreover, the growing distance from the experience of the shah’s rule and the revolution has made many youths reject as moribund the values promoted by the Islamic regime. Westernized sectors of the population retain interests in modern entertainment and global liberal ideology. The clergy’s efforts to restrict what it believes to be contamination influences of satellite television and the Internet have proved fruitless.⁸ In their “home territory,” many members of Iran’s middle and upper classes treat Western popular culture as an invisible guest. In other words, modern cultural traditions and icons may have been driven underground, but their presence can still be felt.

Another paradox is the fact that the citizenry has come to enjoy an era of intellectual prosperity while living under a politically repressive state. The past four decades have seen an explosion of publications, a booming translation industry, and a thriving world-class cinema. These forums have ensured that Iran has a fairly lively public sphere. The boundaries of press freedom are clear on certain issues and blurred on others: There can be no criticism of Islamic doctrine or its revered personalities. No criticisms of Ayatollah Khomeini and Ayatollah Khamenei and their cult of personalities are permitted. Discussing sensitive issues of national security is frowned upon by the state. Although poking fun at or denigrating officials and revolutionary organizations is punishable by law, no such guarantees are reserved for attacking opposition groups and individuals.

Notwithstanding this war against intellectual dissent and the pernicious brands of state and self-imposed censorship, Iranians enjoy an interesting print media. In addition to the government-owned and opposition newspapers are several hundred general and professional journals dealing with sports, economics, cinema, linguistics, health care, technology, the fine arts, and other subjects. Many of these journals manage to articulate a nonpolitical yet subtle criticism of the regime in their respective areas of expertise. In the region, the Iranian press is relatively free to criticize the government's domestic and foreign policies. Exposing the country's social ills or the government's managerial ineptitude, economic blunders, and foreign policy flip-flops is considered a legitimate journalistic practice.

Political Socialization

Political socialization in Iran during the second half of the twentieth century and the first two decades of the twenty-first century can best be described as fragmented. Huge gaps existed between the values of different social groups. Western influence under the shah extended through members of the upper and middle classes who embraced liberal and technocratic values and showed some willingness to repress opponents for the sake of orderly modernization. Much Western influence came through Iranians who studied abroad (fifty-one thousand were studying in the United States in 1979). The postrevolutionary state has had to deal with the candid calls by a critical mass of prosecular technocrats, professionals, and industrialists for the liberalization of the educational system, relaxation of artistic and cultural restraints, abandonment of cultural xenophobia toward the West, and legal moderation.

Millions participated in the demonstrations that brought down the shah's government, and millions more have taken part in three dozen postrevolutionary elections. In this environment, students and youth in general have gained enormous political weight as elementary, secondary, and (as of 2016–2017) university students have come to make up 21.3 percent of Iran's total population. A number of restrictions on individuals draw criticism. Many feminists object to the regulations on women's rights, including attire derived from an Islamic framework. Many people object to the regulated flow of information in the old and new media, as the state blocks more than five million Internet sites to keep out "cultural pollution." However, a range of tolerated opposition viewpoints from the Islamic Left to the religious-nationalist Right is still represented. The ownership structure of the media also allows some sustained pluralism. Finally, the orthodox Islamic character of the state politically marginalizes religious minorities.

Social Changes and Challenges

In the decades before the revolution, Iran's population was rapidly urbanizing. Although the country began the twentieth century as an agricultural society, by 1979 there were more Iranians living in cities than in rural areas. Crowded cities created new social pressures. Today, there are more than a dozen different ethnic minorities, including Turkic-speaking Azeris in the northwest, Gilakis and Mazandarani in the north, Kurds in the northwest, Baluchis in the southeast, and Arabs along the southwest coast. In this patchwork of identities, the cleavages of ethnicity, language, and religion often cut across one another rather than overlap.

Each of the country's social classes has fared differently. The peasantry and urban, lower-middle class, the strong bases of religious orthodoxy, benefited somewhat from the patronage of revolutionary organizations and the state bureaucracy that provided them with some amenities like electricity and paved roads or outright subsidies. They have their own discontents, however, because of the overall poor performance of the country's economy and water scarcity.

Resistance to clerical rule by fiat has been most evident among Iran's stoic, and predominantly secular, middle class. As the middle class's economic capital has drastically shrunk, they hang on more than ever to their most precious badge of honor: cultural capital—the general cultural background, knowledge, disposition, and skills that are passed from one generation to the next. The middle class is irreconcilably lukewarm toward the clergy. Along with the upper, they are the strongest source of opposition to the regime. Other important social groups that have been politically relevant are women and youth.

In the decades before 1979, the shah's regime changed a number of legal and social practices in an effort to align gender relations with a

modern, secular model. Family and divorce laws were changed, for example, and Western attire and mixed gatherings in public became normal custom for the upper and middle classes. Since the revolution, the Islamic Republic has sought to address women's concerns within the framework of Islamic law and gender complementarity—"equality-with-difference." Many of the shah's reforms were nullified. Divorce and custody laws now follow Islamic standards, and many see the restrictions on women's attire as repressive. It should be appreciated, of course, that these new regulations were mainly a restoration of traditional practices that the more conservative lower and middle classes had never fully abandoned. There are legal restrictions on women's ability to leave the country without the consent of male relatives. Husband-killings and suicides by women are frequent because of the difficulties that women face in initiating divorce or gaining custody of their children under Islamic law. The legal system enforces sexual restraint in principle. The number of runaway girls has increased, and prostitution is reportedly widespread.

In a society where women's rights have been trampled, women continue to make important strides into the educational, cultural, and employment domains, thereby increasing awareness of women's rights and issues at the social level. Women's participation in public life has also increased. As the size of the nuclear family has decreased, women's demands for greater educational and employment opportunities as well as social participation have risen. School enrollment rates for boys and girls are now close to parity. Women's opportunities for education and professional advancement have expanded in many ways. The majority of college students are now female, and women constitute more than one-third of medical students. These factors can contribute to the further democratization of family life and institutionalization of political democracy.

Yet gender disparity still exists. According to Statistical Center of Iran, women labor force participation is 17.9 percent, which is more than where they were (13.8 percent) in 1976. Furthermore, on average, women make up 3.3 percent of the national legislature, and

over the last four decades, there was only one female government minister, who served as health minister for 39 months. The limits on political participation remain blurry, however, because some debate lingers over whether a woman can constitutionally be elected president. Tensions remain unresolved between women who subscribe to the Islamic and the secular versions of feminism.

Young people also present a major social challenge for Iran's leaders. Because 55 percent of today's population is younger than thirty, the majority of Iranians are too young to remember the revolution. Furthermore, a sagging, non-oil economy has produced high levels of youth unemployment (28.4 percent for 15- to 24-year-olds as of 2018), even though the majority of this population is well educated.

Religion and Politics

Although Islam was introduced into Iran in the seventh century, Shi'ism was not officially recognized as the state religion until the beginning of the sixteenth century. Ironically enough, this took place around the time when Martin Luther's movement led to the emergence of a schism in Christianity that eventually led to the secularization of political life in Europe. Soon after coming to power in 1501, the Safavid dynasty declared Shi'ism as the state religion as a way of distinguishing themselves from the rulers of the Sunni-dominated, neighboring Ottoman Empire who considered themselves the sole Islamic caliphs. The clerical class came to enjoy the patronage of the Safavid kings.

The clerical polity in today's Iran differ in important ways with Islamist movements elsewhere. Most of the differences relate in some way to its Shi'i character, as opposed to the Sunni movements that predominate elsewhere. The greater importance of the clergy in Shi'i Islam is reflected in the semitheocratic form of the state. Islamist movements in other locations rest on a pious but lay stratum of intellectuals and lower-middle-class activists. Given the collaboration of much of the Sunni clergy with secular authoritarian states, such resistance has often been quite suspicious of clerics. Sunni Islam has tended to be quite austere and rigidly defined by a vision of shari'a law. The clergy, both historically and in its current political role, has shown itself more disposed to innovate. Although the Shi'i clerical leadership has claimed to protect tradition, it has had to amend and break numerous age-old religious protocols for the sake of state expediency. The esoteric tradition, in which the Shi'i clergy saw itself as having access to sophisticated hidden meanings within Islam, undoubtedly has something to do with this flexibility. Also important are the highly unstructured nature of clerical oligarchy and the permissive character of Shi'i theological reasoning.

The central theoretical principle of the Islamic Republic of Iran is the theory of *velayat-e faqih* (jurist's guardianship) developed by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. During his fifteen years of exile in Iraq, he articulated an innovative system of political thought, which was a minority position among the highest-ranking Shi'i theologians. Breaking from the pattern of withdrawal from politics as a realm of injustice, Khomeini argued that the clergy must take a leading role in a modern Islamic state. Shi'i clergy who are familiar with Islamic theology and law should oversee such a state. Khomeini's thinking was influenced by Plato's ideal of the philosopher-kings, specially educated elite who would rule justly within a hierarchical social order. His charisma, imbued with all sorts of revolutionary credentials and religious mythology, led to the formation of a personality cult that has outlived him.

The state embraced and then attempted to disseminate Khomeini's views on Iran's identity, public affairs, and political socialization. This caused a number of major disagreements within the polity. One bone of contention between the clerically dominated state and its secular opponents was the question of nationalism and pre-Islamic Iranian identity. The Islamic regime initially had a troublesome relationship with ancient Persian lineage, customs, traditions, artifacts, and festivals. In their attempt to properly "Islamicize" the cultural reference point of citizens, they felt that they had to simultaneously fight Western cultural influences while deprogramming Iranians from any attachment to their notions of pre-Islamic values. They reluctantly realized that diluting the richness of Iranian culture was not an easy task and that they had no choice but to coexist with pre-Islamic Iranian culture, symbols, practices, and identity since the people were not going to abandon them. The clerics also had to digest a speedy ideological rapprochement with Iranian nationalism as the war with Iraq broke out in 1980. Those who had lamented nationalism as an insidious ideology for Muslims now had to wrap themselves in its mantle, embrace its iconography, and partake of its passionate discourse. While the war with Iraq enabled the members of the clergy to consolidate their power and subdue their opponents,

the hostilities also bolstered Iranians' sense of self-confidence and national pride.

Khomeini's theocratic vision for Iran did not just alienate the secular nationalists, religious minorities and those Shi'i Muslims who were not fastidiously religious. Even some of the lay religious intellectuals found themselves objecting to the ideas and ideals of Khomeini and his lieutenants. Some objected to the use of state power to administer religious principles, while others rejected the clerics' claim that they have the conclusive grasp of Islam. For example, the philosopher Abdolkarim Soroush argued that the Shi'i clergy as a class is intellectually stagnant. He charged that instead of being contemporaneous, the clerics are mired in the past, and as such, their ideas and actions are incompatible with the complicated reality of the modern world. Furthermore, he maintained that part of the Iranian Shi'i establishment has become afflicted with the same type of disease as their Sunni counterparts—that is, they have become dependent on state handouts. Soroush argued that mixing religion and state power is not in the interest of religion because it will force the religious seminaries to speak the language of power and not that of logic, and it turns clerics into ideologues.

Political Economy

When the clergy consolidated its political power in the early 1980s, it found itself in a predicament. It was a religious elite that had expanded its role horizontally, so to speak, to become a political elite as well. Yet it lacked any practical experience with the demands of governing. During its long history of eschewing involvement with secular authority, the Shi'i clergy had never held pure political power. It thus had few resources on which to draw when fulfilling the largely economic responsibilities of a modern state. Added to this inexperience were several pressures that worsened Iran's economic situation in the early 1980s: the nationalization of many large firms, massive emigration of skilled professionals, a decline in foreign investment, a drop in oil prices on the international market, and restructuring for the war effort and the burdens of the eight-year war with Iraq. All were complex pressures that cut across the domestic and international spheres.

Coupled with these circumstances was an intense ideological debate among factions of the clergy. The economic implications and agenda of the revolution had not been defined at the outset. Hence different factions could claim to speak for the revolution while upholding different views and agendas. The three major currents are usually identified as pragmatists, radicals, and conservatives. Pragmatists saw economic recovery as Iran's highest priority. They favored liberal economic policies such as restoration of foreign trade, removal of state controls, facilitation of foreign direct investment, and privatization of state-owned companies and banks. Radicals, with their base among younger and more militant clerics, called for measures to enhance social justice through traditional state intervention, price controls, and wealth redistribution. In the radicals' eyes, the revolution belonged to Iran's poorer strata. Land redistribution and assertion of national economic independence—with the accompanying suspicion of economic ties to the West—figured among their demands.

Box 11.2 Understanding Shi'ism

The Shi'i-Sunni split occurred during the mid-seventh century over the question of who was eligible to succeed Prophet Muhammad (d. 632) as the new caliph (loosely analogous to the Catholic papacy). Sunni Muslims held that succession should flow to the ablest leader of the Islamic community, whereas Shi'a (today, some 15 percent of Muslims worldwide) maintained that legitimate rulership of the entire Islamic community could descend only through the heirs of the Prophet Muhammad. Shi'a accordingly consider Ali, a cousin of Muhammad who also married Muhammad's daughter, to have been the Prophet's rightful successor. In 661 CE, rivals assassinated Ali. His supporters, calling themselves Shi'at Ali, or the partisans of Ali, revolted against the Sunnis but were defeated in 680 at Karbala in present-day Iraq. Their leader, Hussein, Ali's youngest son, was killed. Large numbers of Shi'a fled to Persia.

Of the several Shi'i sects that were eventually formed, Twelver Shi'ism dominates in Iran. Their principal belief is that spiritual and temporal leadership of the Muslim community, in the person of the imam,^a passed from the Prophet Muhammad to Ali, the first imam, and continued on to eleven of his direct male descendants. The twelfth and final imam is believed to have gone into hiding in the year 874 because of Sunni persecution and will reappear as the Mahdi, or messiah, on the day of divine judgment. Since then, Shi'a have held on to the messianic belief that the "hidden Imam" will return at the end of time and restore a just order. Shi'i political thinkers historically have held, based on these doctrines, that in the interim all secular authority is ultimately illegitimate.

Hence, compared with Sunni Islam, Shi'ism has remained more critical of monarchs and less fully reconciled with political order. At best, the *Shi'i ulema* (religious authorities) would extend a provisional legitimacy to rulers who let Islamic institutions flourish unmolested. The *ulema* itself came to stand in collectively for the hidden Imam in his absence.^b Over the centuries, they functioned as the conscience of the Shi'i community and thus occupied a role similar to that of the Christian priesthood in premodern Europe or the Confucian mandarins in premodern China.

Certain distinct features of religion-state relations bear noting, however. Compared with the Confucian mandarins, the Shi'i *ulema* were far more hostile to power holders and enjoyed more independence. Their religious functions were separate from the state and were usually

unaffected by it. They also enjoyed a strong institutional base. They were self-organized in informal hierarchies that rested only on the esteem in which religious scholars held one another. They also had secure income from the voluntary religious taxes paid by the believers as well as by mosques and charitable endowments inviolable under Islamic law.

Compared with the Christian priests, Shi'i *ulema* often refused to make peace with secular authorities based on the customary dividing line between church and state. Islamic doctrine has held that religion and politics flow into one another, as aspects of a comprehensive Islamic society. Rule by monarchs other than the hidden Imam was always viewed, therefore, as an unnatural condition—even if inevitable at the time. The Shi'i *ulema*'s withdrawal from political life before modern times reflected a desire to be untainted by the prevailing injustice, not a sense that some spheres of life lay outside the scope of religion. Hence, the religion-state relationship has always been problematic.

[a](#) In addition to being a political leader, the imam must also be a spiritual leader who can interpret the Qur'an and shari'a (the canonical law of Islam).

[b](#) The *ulema* have played a prominent role in the development of Shi'i scholarly and legal traditions. The highest religious authority is vested in *mujtahids*, scholars who, through their religious studies and virtuous lives, act as leaders of the Shi'i community and interpret the faith as it applies to daily life. Prominent Shi'i clerics are accorded the title of *ayatollah* which means "sign of God."

The higher-ranking conservative clerics, many of whom had personal ties to the bazaaris and rural landowners, reacted strongly against the radicals' vision. They affirmed sanctity of private property under Islamic law. Tensions among these factions persisted after the revolution, driven by the intersection between ideology and social base. This debate over economic priorities and justice is a good case of the "social question" that comes to the fore in any revolution.

A Rentier State

The 1979 revolution somewhat diminished Iran's status as a rentier state, as oil (including crude oil, gas and petrochemicals) came to account for 67 percent of Iran's export commodities and 35 percent of government revenue. The country's economic woes have included disruption caused by the revolution; the devastation caused by the eight-year war with Iraq; legal ambiguities in the meting out of revolutionary justice; political and ideological infighting among the ruling elite; low labor productivity; shortages of investment capital, raw materials, and spare parts; a brain drain and flight of capital; peasant migration to the cities; and fluctuations in the global price of oil. Iran's most formidable economic problems, however, have been unemployment and deleterious effects of sanctions. Iran suffers from high unemployment (officially put at 12 percent) because of the youth bulge, and the country has a high and unstable rate of inflation (officially put at 16 percent in 2016). The cumulative impact of these economic ills has been a dramatic rise in the number of unhappy and unemployed people, falling incomes, rising debts, and unrelenting job insecurity.

President Rafsanjani's era (1989–1997) saw a shift toward market-oriented pragmatism. Large numbers of technocrats—less concerned with ideology than with economic performance—were appointed to policymaking posts. Foreign trade expanded, especially with a range of developed countries in Europe and East Asia. Yet the economy remained under severe pressure throughout the 1990s, and a rising foreign debt required frequent rescheduling. Its finances squeezed by plunging oil prices, the government had to adopt an austerity budget while meeting its high external debt-repayment obligations.

Thanks to the cushion provided by the constant flow of petrodollars, there have been no economic catastrophes, but the government needs to undertake a Herculean effort to invigorate its economy. To revitalize the economy, the government needs to lower inflation,

increase foreign exchange reserves, improve domestic productivity, create job opportunities, expand foreign and domestic investment, boost non-oil exports, strengthen the national currency, increase people's purchasing power, streamline the bureaucracy, and reduce government expenditures. Accomplishing even a few of these goals is a tall order, particularly in light of such impediments as the relegation of the private sector to small-scale economic activities, the agricultural sector's dwindling significance, the operation of inefficient firms and foundations, subsidies for various essential commodities, sanctions, and the non-negligible costs of military expenditures inside and outside the country (particularly in Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria). Rising oil prices generates moderate growth, but reliance on one primary export creates long-term vulnerabilities. When oil prices plunge, the government faces severe cash shortages, fluctuations in social spending, and other financial shortfalls. Many economic experts recommend cultivating warmer ties with foreign investors. This debate reflects a broader contest between economic agendas. The radical social-justice faction that prevailed in the early years of the revolution and reemerged under President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad advocated economic self-sufficiency as a goal. When Hasan Rouhani assumed the presidency in 2013, he decided to resolve the nuclear issue and the lifting of sanctions as a prelude to attract foreign trade and uplift Iran's economy. His administration was convinced that Iran was attractive to foreign investors, thanks to its massive oil and gas reserves, impressive human capital, technology infrastructure, and being the Middle East's largest potential market.

Iran clearly has a state-dominated and highly politicized economic system where power is concentrated in the hands of the public sector. The informal economy is no less politicized. The bazaar merchants have been historically central to the economy and society as they have constituted the backbone of economic flows throughout the country. Faced by the challenge posed by the more modern sectors of the economy under the shah and the fact that they did not enjoy political representation equal to their economic weight, the bazaar merchants allied themselves with the clergy against the shah

and financed many of the revolutionary activities. After the revolution, they came to enjoy a great deal of political and economic power. However, their fortunes have also been negatively impacted over the course of the past four decades, owing to economic regulations, sanctions, and the broader restructuring of trade patterns that have taken on a more modern and impersonal coloring. The cumulative effect of these changes has been to loosen the bazaaris' networks and mutual trust and reduce their political mobilizing capacity.

Any discussion of Iran's informal economy should make mention of the role of the myriad quasi-private foundations and religious endowments called *bonyads* that manage state-owned enterprises. These large conglomerates have a substantial grip on Iran's economy through their monopolistic and rent-seeking transactions. Vast amounts of property expropriated from the shah's family and other members of the old elite passed to state-run foundations and *bonyads*. These foundations became a key patronage mechanism, locking in the clergy's leverage over large sectors of the economy.

Public Policy

Social welfare in Iran, as elsewhere in the Islamic world, was traditionally a matter of private charity and funding from *waqf* endowments. The 1979 revolution affected indexes of social well-being in a number of ways. The Islamic Republic made social welfare a high priority, viewing it as a precondition for spiritual well-being.⁹ The social justice legacy of the revolution has been manifested especially in four decades of massive effort in education and health. According to the United Nations Development Programme, “between 1980 and 2013, Iran’s life expectancy at birth increased by 19.9 years, [and] mean years of schooling increased by 5.7 years.”¹⁰ Educational opportunities, including for women, have greatly expanded. Although many female doctors have received training, the plan to create two parallel health systems segregated by gender, in accordance with Islamic principles, has not advanced (except in the case of the fields of obstetrics and gynecology). Yet despite the improvements, in 2000 Iran’s health care system was still ranked 93 out of 190 by the World Health Organization. The country faces major problems, including a large subculture of drug users (estimated at more than two million). According to the Ministry of Health, in 2017 there were also sixty-six thousand cases of AIDS.

One area of public policy where the government has been impressively successful has been in bringing down the birthrate. Births surged in a pronatalist campaign in the early 1980s. Eventually, however, this policy caused demographic pressure from a youth bulge. Faced with the challenges of high unemployment (three to four million) and the political discontent of a fast-growing workforce (more than 27.3 million in 2018), the clergy approved policies to lower the birthrate and reduce long-term burdens from overpopulation. By 1986, the population growth rate, which was 2.7 percent in 1976, had risen to 3.9 percent. The government decided to reverse course and discouraged having large families. Thanks to a series of initiatives and social trends, such as mandatory sex education classes for couples getting married, a rise in the marriage

age, and the greater educational and professional opportunities open to women, the government managed to bring the population growth rate down to 1.25 percent by 2017. Environmental protection efforts during the latter years of the Pahlavi regime focused on conservation, including wildlife preservation and the founding of national parks. The Islamic Republic has paid lip service to ecological concerns, but they were pushed to the margins by the 1980s war and prolonged economic hardship. The country suffers from deforestation, desertification, and water contamination and scarcity. Especially serious is the drying up of river basins and urban air pollution. Given Iran's abundance of oil and gas resources, the state subsidizes many kinds of energy consumption and thus gives little incentive to increase efficiency or develop renewable energy sources. Iran did not sign the Kyoto Treaty, although it has received some international aid for environmental purposes through the World Bank.

In the meantime, the 1979 revolution caused a wave of emigration by large parts of Iran's professional class who were either linked to the shah's regime or apprehensive of the new religious climate. This was the continuation of a trend started in the 1960s and 1970s when many skilled professionals left Iran to study abroad, creating one of the largest educated diasporas in the world. Estimates by the government put the number of expatriate Iranians in 2018 between five and six million (equivalent to 7 percent of the country's total population).¹¹ Cognizant of the fact that their know-how, capital, and foreign networks can influence domestic politics, the government has attempted to court them, but so far, it has been largely unsuccessful. The diaspora Iranians make demands like general political amnesty, greater personal freedoms, and relaxation of rules of contact with the West, which the government does not seem to be able to provide at this time, given its ongoing ideological rifts and factionalism.

Meanwhile, thanks to the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the subsequent turmoil in that country, as well as the Iran-Iraq War and the tragedies besetting Iraq's population over the last four

decades, Iran plays host to almost one million refugees from Afghanistan and Iraq.

Conflict

Postrevolutionary Iran has had its fair share of conflict and violence. The jockeying for power by various political actors gave rise to numerous conflicts. Some of the most serious early conflicts were instigated by ethnic grievances, considering that 40 percent of the population is composed of minorities. In a multiethnic polity like Iran, the historically dominant definition of what constitutes a nation has been ethno-linguistic. Ironically, even though Persian emerged as the language of the political and literary elite, it never completely supplanted the local languages. The campaign to define *Persian* as the pillar of Iranian nationalism did not sit well with Arabs, Azeris, Baluchis, and Kurds. These minorities predominately live in some of the least-developed provinces of Iran, marked by lower rates of urbanization and literacy and higher rates of unemployment and poverty.

In March and April of 1979, simultaneous ethnic uprisings began. The bloodiest conflict started when the Kurds, led by the Kurdistan Democratic Party, started demanding autonomy. The Turkmen and the Arab population also started similar ethnic, civil-based uprisings. In all these instances, the government managed to put down the uprisings by resorting to force.

Meanwhile, the takeover of the American Embassy in November 1979 led to the resignation of Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan and his cabinet. Any liberal politician not sufficiently supportive of the crackdown on ethnic movements or the taking of US hostages was denounced or sidelined. By April of 1980, as part of their campaign to consolidate their hold on power and instil orthodoxy into public life, the clergy turned their attention to university campuses that had become the main centers of opposition to the ruling clerics and launched a campaign of “cultural revolution.” The universities were closed for thirty months, and liberal and leftist professors and staff were purged and eventually replaced with those more loyal to the

new regime. The education system at all levels was revamped to impress the values of the Islamic state on students.

June 20, 1981, marked a turning point in the relationship between the regime and its main opposition. The People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI) declared a campaign of armed struggle against the state. A week later, a powerful bomb in the headquarters of the conservative Islamic Republic Party killed more than seventy of its members. Among those killed was Ayatollah Seyyed Mohammad Beheshti, considered the second-most influential cleric after Khomeini and the chief rival to the French-educated President Bani Sadr. A month after the bomb attack, fearful of their lives, Bani Sadr and the leader of the PMOI, Mas'ud Rajavi, fled together and received political asylum in France. On August 30, Mohammad-Ali Raja'i who had replaced Bani Sadr as president only four weeks earlier, was killed (along with his prime minister) in yet another bomb explosion attributed to PMOI. The government's response to these attacks was swift. Not only PMOI sympathizers but also those affiliated with other militant opposition groups were rounded up and many of them executed. Iran's human rights record was particularly appalling during the 1980s as the regime used the pretext of the war with Iraq to put down any internal dissent from ethnic, leftist, and monarchist forces. In the summer of 1988, PMOI fighters attacked Iran from their basis in neighboring Iraq and were crushed. Ayatollah Khomeini, however, decided to punish those political prisoners loyal to opposition groups languishing in jails. Some 2,800 to 5,000 of them were executed that summer. The executions became so egregious that Ayatollah Hoseyn-Ali Montazeri, deputy supreme leader, publically denounced them and was subsequently dismissed as heir apparent by Ayatollah Khomeini in March 1989. Moreover, Iranian agents carried out assassinations of more than one hundred opposition figures living in exile. To this day, there are still numerous and continued human rights violations, including the use of the death penalty, the use of torture in prisons, and a culture of impunity for vigilantes who commit abuses against state opponents and ordinary citizens who do not conform to strict Islamic codes of conduct.

In 1999, 2009, and 2017, Iran witnessed three more cases of political upheaval. In all instances, the regime dispatched its security forces and ruffians to crush demonstrators who were objecting to censorship, vote rigging, and economic conditions. While the regime's political capital suffered both domestically and internationally, it managed to survive these protests. Nowadays, the state does not seem to face any ethnic uprising or robust internal opposition that poses a grave threat to political stability. Yet while the omnipotence of the state has forced Iran's civil society into retreat, it has not caused it to entirely wither away.

Meanwhile, the state's regional power has been boosted, thanks to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq that eliminated two of Iran's long-standing enemies (the Taliban and Saddam Hussein). Yet Iran has also suffered setbacks in its regional policy. In addition to its antagonistic relations with Israel, Iran has also found itself in an intense war of words with Saudi Arabia over the course of events in Bahrain, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen. Furthermore, the forces of the Islamic State (ISIS) attacked the Iranian Parliament and the mausoleum of Ayatollah Khomeini in June 2017 and seriously challenged the security of two of Iran's closest allies (post-Saddam Iraq and Syria) before being subdued. Once the Syrian civil war intensified, Hamas severed its ties with the Assad regime while Hizbullah and Iran had to intensify their support for him.

International Relations

After 1979, Iran adopted a worldview of Islamic internationalism and was motivated by ideological vision. It extended aid to Shi'i movements in Lebanon and elsewhere, through its overambitiously named Office of Global Revolution. Other factors, such as Iranians' sense of national pride, historic sense of grievance, and desire to remain the dominant power in the Persian Gulf, led them to embrace a basically revisionist view of the world order that wished to transform rather than preserve international power dynamics. Still, the new state faced an inherent tension in its foreign policy. On the one hand, its ideology suggested a pan-Islamic universalism, and on the other hand, the clerical regime had to work within the confine of the nation-state system.

The war with Iraq, while partly over territorial matters, also had an ideological coloring: the Islamic Republic versus the secular authoritarianism of the Ba'ath Party. Over the long term, however, the logic of national interest has tended to win out over ideological fervor. After Khomeini's death, the government took a more pragmatic turn due to the pressures of the nation-state system, geopolitics, and economics. Today, Iran maintains strong alliances with Syria as well as with Iraq since the 2003 US-led invasion that deposed Saddam Hussein. It also has robust ties to Hizbullah in Lebanon, Hamas in the Gaza Strip, and the Houthis in Yemen. However, Iran's relations with Bahrain, Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates remain problematical. The deterioration of relations with Saudi Arabia is particularly concerning as it has deepened the Sunni-Shi'i cleavage in the region. While the Iranians point to Saudi's complicity in putting down the Bahraini opposition, their invasion of Yemen and the hostile policies toward Iran adopted by Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, the Saudis accuse Iran of having caused much mischief in Bahrain, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen.

After Iraq, the civil war in Syria, which began in 2011, posed the most serious challenge to Iran's regional policy. Iranian leadership decided to do everything it could to keep Bashar al-Asad in power. In addition to sending military personnel to fight alongside Asad's forces, Iran also collaborated closely with Russia to defeat ISIS forces. Naturally, Iran's intervention in Syria did not sit well with all those in the Arab world who detested Asad.

More importantly, Iran's nuclear policy caused it its most formidable dispute, as it endured twelve years (2003–2015) of sanctions over its nuclear program. Upon coming to power in 2013, President Rouhani's administration engaged in marathon negotiations with six world powers and the European Union, which finally led to the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in July 2015. Rouhani realized that a nuclear deal was necessary if Iran was to receive foreign loans, credits, and investment; revitalize the dormant tourism industry; and join more global institutions like the World Trade Organization. The deal revolved around Iran curbing its uranium enriching in return for sanctions relief. President Donald Trump, however, jeopardized the JCPOA as he announced in May 2018 that the United States was withdrawing from the deal since the agreement did not address Iran's missile technology and regional activities. Subsequently, Iranian currency reached record-breaking lows against the dollar in the summer of 2018.

Conclusion

The term *competitive authoritarianism* refers to a category of governmental systems that combine democratic rules with authoritarian governance and have carved a space between full democracies and full authoritarian regimes. Iran can be characterized as such a state because it has many of the accoutrements: an ideologically divided elite, parallel institutions, public criticism of government policies, incessant squabbling between factions that have viable organizational assets at their disposal, and limited yet fierce electoral competition. The literature on transition to democracy suggests that competitive authoritarian regimes are more likely to metamorphose than hegemonic single-party authoritarian regimes. However, there is no guarantee that they will always transform into pluralistic systems. Iran seems to be vacillating between these two incongruous poles, as represented recently in the era of political liberalization under President Khatami (1997–2005), then the administration of hardliners under President Ahmadinejad (2005–2013), and later the moderate administration of President Rouhani (2013–present).

Iran poses other theoretical puzzles. Scholars of authoritarianism often categorize these states into three types: personal, single-party, and military. The Iranian state borrows certain features from each type of state, but it does not fit in nicely with any of them. While the reign of the charismatic Ayatollah Khomeini (1979–1989) corresponded to the personal type of statecraft, the same cannot be said about his successor. Neither can the political system be captured with the sole explanation of clerical rule because the clerics constitute less than 30 percent of the pool of ruling elites. Furthermore, this is a regime that officially recognizes 240 political parties and associations and yet does not have a single, designated ruling party that can mobilize popular support for the governing autocrats or serve as a patronage machine. Nor can the Iranian system be characterized as military authoritarianism. The military

has been under clear civilian leadership so far. And it is remarkable that, despite bearing the brunt of a bloody eight-year war with Iraq and the absence of an external patron that could constrain the behavior of the military, there have been no major coup attempts since the revolution.

Thus, forty years after the revolution that drove the Shah from his throne, the Islamic Republic continues to survive, defying predictions that its government would collapse under domestic and foreign pressures. The state still faces the enormous task of reinvigorating its struggling economy and overcoming its lingering international isolation. As one looks into Iran's political future, the continuity scenario where the supreme leader maintains the status quo, controls factional infighting, and keeps in check the power of any potential rival looks the most probable. After all, serious alteration to the existing institutional arrangement is very costly due to path dependency, bureaucratic inertia, and the opposition of frontline bureaucrats. In this scenario, the possibility of domestic political reconciliation or accommodation between competing political blocs becomes less likely, and the power of nonelected institutions will be further boosted.

Photo 11.1 Female voters supporting oppositional candidate Mir Hussein Moussavi, summer 2009, Tehran.



Courtesy of Mehrzad Boroujerdi

The balance sheet of the postrevolutionary period is interestingly bewildering—unprecedented progress juxtaposed with regressive change. The negative traits of this era include human rights abuses, extremism, economic hardship, and political violence, while the more positive developments include the development of a diversified economy with a large consumer base, greater self-sufficiencies, and the emergence of a self-defining, vibrant, and critical public discourse. The intellectual effervescence in today's Iran cannot be contested.

As described in this chapter, a set of rather complex undercurrents is changing the political scene. Iranians are now being prevented by their theocratic rulers from trying to establish democratic rule. Indeed, the major challenge facing the country is whether it is possible to reconcile a theocracy with a democracy as the citizenry makes louder demands for accountability, civil rights, democracy, a limited state, social justice, and tolerance and questions such long-standing features of Iranian political life as authoritarianism, censorship, cult of personality, statism, influence peddling, and violence.

In the economic domain, the greatest pressures were caused respectively by the demography and sanctions. Population growth has put a burden on public services and has created a large pool of surplus labor. Meanwhile, the nuclear-related sanctions imposed on Iran worsened the economic situation in the country by causing the plummeting of the currency, eroding the industrial base, and forcing the economy to contract. The torturous relationship between Iran and the Western world has and will continue to leave its indelible mark on Iran's economy.

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12 Iraq

Julia Choucair-Vizoso

Iraq's modern history has been tumultuous. Since formal independence in 1932, Iraqis have been ruled by two foreign powers and have cycled through every form of nondemocratic governance. Iraq has the unfortunate distinction of hosting the first coup d'état in the Arab world (in 1936), and most of its leaders have come to power through unconstitutional means. Since 1974, Iraqis have experienced almost continuous war of different kinds: an insurgency by Kurdish nationalists in the north, a conventional interstate war with Iran (1980–1988), US bombing campaigns during the First Gulf War (1991), a wave of popular violent uprisings (1991), the Second Gulf War (2003), an Anglo-American military occupation (2003–2011), multifaceted domestic armed conflict, and a transnational insurgency (2014–2018). Iraq has also been the site of destructive international experiments, including the longest and harshest sanctions ever enforced on a state (the UN sanctions regime, 1990–2003) and one of the most controversial foreign military interventions in recent history.

The conventional wisdom about this trajectory is that Iraq was doomed from the start by its diverse social fabric. But studying Iraq in historical-comparative perspective guards against seeing political outcomes as inevitable and turns our gaze elsewhere: to the historically contingent methods of power contestation and social control that have characterized the contemporary state.

History of State-Building: The Making of the Contemporary State

The founding moment of the modern Iraqi state is often associated with an image common to other postcolonial origin stories: that of Europeans delineating arbitrary lines on a map. Yet in reality, the making of the Iraqi state was contentious, violent, and carried out in stages, with different borders demarcated at different times.¹ Moreover, although Britain and France played a central role, so too did local elites—those who controlled the economic, coercive, and symbolic resources in their societies. As they witnessed the demise of the Ottoman Empire—the system that had ordered the life of so many for centuries—they too sought to be protagonists in the nascent order.

To become successful modern state-builders, elites would need to map the terrains and populations living within new administrative boundaries in ways that facilitated the basic functions of a state, including taxation, conscription, and prevention of rebellion.² Crucially, they would have to pool their resources to create strong central institutions that could undertake these functions on a mass scale. Based on what we know from successful state-building experiments elsewhere, elites would have to follow one of two paths: either they could cooperate, or alternatively, some would expropriate or eliminate others' resources. At the turn of the twentieth century, Iraq was not poised to follow either of these paths. Elites had disparate preferences, lacked incentives to cooperate, and possessed sufficient independent resources to resist forceful incorporation—all in the shadow of colonial rule.

The first ruler of the Iraqi state, King Faisal—installed by Britain through a rigged plebiscite in 1921—articulated two main state-building aspirations: to establish a conscript army and centralize taxation. Most local elites were, at best, skeptical of Faisal's agenda

and resented how he had arrived to his position. Faisal was the son of the Grand Sharif of Mecca Hussein ibn Ali, custodian of the holy shrines in Mecca and Medina and patriarch of the Hashemis (who traced their lineage to the Prophet). Sharif Hussein had long yearned to break free from under the Ottomans and found his opportunity when Turkey made the fateful decision to ally with Germany against the Allied Forces. After trying to procure Britain's and France's support for an independent Arab state, Hussein and other Arab elites proclaimed the independence of Iraq and Syria (including Lebanon, Palestine, and Transjordan) as constitutional monarchies under Sharif Hussein's sons, Abdallah and Faisal, respectively. This decision, reached during a meeting in Damascus in March 1920, reflected a historical understanding in the Arabic-speaking world of Iraq and Syria as geographical areas loosely centered on Baghdad and Damascus. Since at least the eighth century, Arab geographers had used the term *al-Iraq* to refer to the land between the Tigris and Euphrates (known in Europe as Mesopotamia). Ottoman maps from the turn of the nineteenth century also referred to *al-'Iraq al-'Arabi* (Arab Iraq) to designate an area that corresponded roughly to the Ottoman provinces of Basra and Baghdad (although this denomination was never used for administrative purposes). The Iraq articulated in the Damascus proclamation encompassed a much larger area than these earlier renditions—one significantly larger than the three Ottoman provinces that would end up in contemporary Iraq: Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul.³ In response, Britain and France hastily convened a conference for European powers a month later in San Remo, Italy, where they accorded that Iraq, Palestine, and Transjordan would become British mandates, while Syria and Lebanon went to the French. Borders would be discussed at a later date. French troops in Damascus ended Faisal's brief reign, and Britain offered him the throne of Iraq in the hope he would legitimize their mandate while preserving their core interests.⁴

Urban nationalists in the new Iraq resented monarchic rule on principle—especially one installed by a colonial power. Shi'i clergy resisted losing their autonomy to a Hashemi dynasty and were unimpressed by Faisal's evocation of his family's Zaydi (Shi'i) links.

Tribal leaders, also accustomed to a degree of autonomy, understood that Faisal's centralizing institutions would undermine their power. Ethnic minority leaders opposed the Arab identity of the new state, and some demanded an independent state of their own.

Disparate elite preferences do not foreclose successful state-building; other cases around the world have shown that certain conditions can compel elites to cooperate or to be coerced into the project. But Iraq's early political landscape lacked these conditions. For one, elites did not perceive the mass-based threats to their benefits, such as class conflict or widespread communal conflict, that could have cowed them into working together to preserve their dominance.⁵ When elites in the new state did cooperate, it was to demand independence not to respond to threats from below.⁶ Even then, demands to the British were articulated independently and not by all, as some viewed Britain as protector. A second condition that has been tied to successful state-building was missing: the necessity of waging external war. According to a popular argument, "war makes the state" because waging it necessitates the centralization of resources.⁷ Although the delineation of the new state's borders with its neighbors was conflictive, even the fiercest disputes were settled by Britain's unrivaled airpower, which rendered obsolete the need to build strong Iraqi institutions.⁸ Third, those elites who opposed centralization had the capacity to resist it. Some had military capabilities, such as the Assyrian leaders whom Britain had organized into exclusively Assyrian forces linked to its Royal Air Force (known as the *Assyrian levies*) and who demanded autonomy on the basis of their Ottoman *millet* status. Others had the benefit of a geography conducive to evasion. Yazidis, who had neither previous *millet* status nor significant military resources, could avoid conscription by hiding in the Sinjar Mountains on the northwestern border with Syria or by crossing the border.⁹ Many could count on protection from the British, who opposed universal conscription, gave tribal leaders tax exemptions and legal autonomy from Baghdad, and controlled what could have been a valuable weapon in Faisal's state-building arsenal—oil revenue.¹⁰

Map 12.1 Iraq



As a result of the environment surrounding elite power struggles in this period, Iraq's first state institutions included only a small segment of the array of political forces in the territory. The army was first established in 1921 out of six hundred former Istanbul-trained Ottoman officers of Iraqi origin, drawn almost exclusively from lower-middle-class Sunni Arab families. By the time conscription passed in 1934, these exclusionary origins were consolidated.¹¹ Many of these early conditions would change. Yet as we know from cases of state formation across the world, origins, timing, and sequencing shape long-term trajectories. Foundational periods are crucial, and Iraq's was not propitious for elites cooperating toward, or being coerced into, a strong state.

Social Change

Ethnic and Religious Cleavages

In 1920, Iraq was home to 2,849,000 people, belonging to diverse and overlapping social categories: linguistic origin, religious denomination, occupation, social class, and regional and tribal affiliation. An estimated 75 percent spoke Arabic and most of the rest Kurdish, although there were also speakers of Armenian, Assyrian (referred to as Syriac in the constitution), South Azeri (referred to as Turkmen), and others. Linguistic minorities lived primarily in the rugged mountain terrain in the north and east (and the foothills that adjoin it), as well as in the cities of Baghdad and Basra. They had linguistic and cultural ties to residents of Syria, Turkey, and Iran. By religion, an estimated 92 percent were Muslim, 3 percent Christian, 2.5 percent Jewish, and the rest Yazidi and Sabeen/Mandean. Aside from Yazidis, who were concentrated in the north, non-Muslim populations were mostly urban. No Iraqi census has ever recorded intra-Muslim distinctions; a 1932 British census put the number of Shi'a at 56 percent and Sunnis at 36 percent.¹²

Key Facts on Iraq

AREA 169,235 square miles (438,317 square kilometers)

CAPITAL Baghdad

POPULATION 40,194,216 (2018 est.)

PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION UNDER 25 58.43

RELIGIOUS GROUPS (PERCENTAGE) Muslim, 95–98 (Shi'i 64–69, Sunni 29–34); Christian, 1 (includes Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Assyrian Church of the East); other, 1–4 (2015 est.)

ETHNIC GROUPS (PERCENTAGE) Arab, 75–80; Kurdish, 15–20; Turkmen, Assyrian, or other, 5

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE Arabic, Kurdish (official in Kurdish regions); Syriac and Turkmen are recognized in the constitution as “regional languages”

TYPE OF GOVERNMENT Parliamentary

DATE OF INDEPENDENCE October 3, 1932 (from League of Nations mandate under British administration)

GDP \$192.06 billion; \$5,018 per capita (2017)

PERCENTAGE OF GDP BY SECTOR Agriculture, 4.8; industry, 43; services, 52.2
TOTAL RENTS (PERCENTAGE OF GDP) FROM NATURAL RESOURCES 38
FERTILITY RATE 4.309 children born/woman

Source: Central Intelligence Agency, *CIA World Factbook, 2018*, and World Bank (2017).

Religious and ethnic (linguistic) identities in Iraq are cross cutting. The vast majority of Kurds are Sunni, but there is a sizable Shi'i minority that was based in central Iraq (known as Faili Kurds). Turkmen are more evenly divided between sects. According to the British census, 5 percent of Shi'a in the territory were of Persian origin. Ethnic and religious identities also cut across social class.

Iraq's linguistic diversity has been the source of one of its most persistent political divisions. Despite the diversity of the territory, British officials and King Faisal's supporters regularly referred to Iraq as an "Arab state."¹³ Moreover, Iraq's first constitution (1925) stipulated that Arabic would be the sole official language, and the first school textbooks advocated the unification of Arab states (an ideology known as pan-Arabism).¹⁴ The interaction between the Arabic-Kurdish linguistic cleavage and the exclusionary foundation of the state has been a contributing factor to armed conflict throughout Iraq's history (see Domestic Armed Conflict section) and is still the source of great tension today (see Political Regimes and Governance section). One of the most heated debates during the drafting of the current constitution in 2005 involved the state's descriptor, with some insisting on including "Arab state." The final document describes Iraq as a "country of many nationalities, religions and sects," but includes compromise wording about its commitment to the Arab League. It lists Arabic and Kurdish as the two official languages and guarantees "the right of Iraqis to educate their children in their mother tongue."¹⁵

Religious identities at independence did not endow individuals with a sense of community, with the exception of non-Muslims who had

enjoyed a degree of self-rule and special status as religious minorities under the Ottoman *millet* system. Even then, however, multiple communities existed within each minority category, organized by geography. Shi'ism and Sunnism were not strongly instituted collective identities, and mass conversions between them were occurring as late as the turn of the twentieth century. It was then when Shi'ism became a majority religion in Iraq, as a result of the rapidly declining nomadic economy.¹⁶ As Sunni nomadic populations began to settle in southern cities, Shi'i clergy in the recently emergent strongholds of Shi'ism, Najaf, and Karbala worked to convert new arrivals.¹⁷ The nonuniform patterns of migration and conversion meant that many tribes came to include Shi'i and Sunni members—a cross-cutting cleavage that persists.

As in all Arab states, religious identities in Iraq are the basis for laws governing “personal status” matters: birth, marriage, divorce, inheritance, and death. Non-Muslims have always adjudicated these matters in religious courts independent from the regular court system. Since 1959, Muslims have adjudicated them in the secular court system, where judges rule on the basis of codified law (based on Islamic law) that applies uniformly to Sunnis and Shi'a, rather than on their interpretation of religious sources.¹⁸ Issued by decree by a left-leaning revolutionary government, the code of 1959 generally selected interpretations of Islamic law most favorable to women and is still considered a symbol of Iraq's progressivism on women's rights. Reform of this law was a very controversial issue in the drafting of the current constitution.¹⁹

Iraq is less diverse today than it was at independence. Economic and forced migrations have altered the demographic distribution. The population of non-Muslims has decreased from 8 percent to 1 percent. Multiple insurgencies and practices of collective targeting along ethnic and religious identity have also segmented the country, with millions of Iraqis being displaced internally to areas where their sectarian and ethnic identity would put them in the majority.²⁰ The 2006 to 2007 wave of killings throughout Baghdad forced families to flee neighborhoods in which their religious identity was not in the

majority, thereby drastically changing the demography and geography of the capital city.

Class Cleavages

Iraq's class structure has been defined by four main, interconnected processes: sedentarization, land reform, urbanization, and war. At the turn of the twentieth century, Iraq still had a sizable nomadic population, but it was decreasing precipitously with the reduced demand for overland trade (due to developments in international transport and communication). Between 1867 and 1930, it decreased from 35 percent to 7 percent (from 50 percent to 8 percent in the south). As Iraq's inhabitants became almost exclusively sedentary, large-scale land privatization elevated tribal leaders to a new class of landlords. By the republican coup of 1958, Iraq had some of the largest private estates in the Middle East; about 1 percent of all landowners owned over 55 percent of all land.²¹ Simultaneously, the failed feudal land tenure system was driving large numbers of impoverished peasants to cities.²² This migration intensified despite the best intentions of the new republican leaders and their laws to dismantle large estates and reform the agrarian system.²³ By 1963, Iraq had become a food-importing country. By 1979, the state reverted course to reprivatizing agriculture.²⁴ By 1985, Iraq's urban population had doubled since 1950; many settled into the ever-expanding Baghdad public housing to absorb rural migrants.²⁵

The scale of rural-to-urban migration undermined existing social structures and created new class distinctions as rural Shi'i migrants settled in public housing such as the famous Madinat al-Thawra (Revolution City), later renamed Madinat Saddam, and currently named Madinat al-Sadr. The partial integration of migrants into urban life created new, sharp class distinctions between Baghdadi urbanites and new Shi'i migrants and between those who migrated and those who stayed behind. These distinctions would become violently salient in post-2003 Iraq, emblemized by the rise of the militant Mahdi Army, a militia organized by the son of the late Ayatollah Sadiq al-Sadr, Muqtada al-Sadr, who repurposed his

father's welfare distribution networks in Madinat al-Sadr to challenge traditional Shi'i leadership in the south—eventually rising to the top of Iraqi politics as the leader of the largest coalition in the 2018 elections. The Mahdi Army also played a central role in the Baghdad violence of 2006 to 2007, which some analysts refer to as “class struggle” in addition to its more common descriptor “sectarian strife.”

Another salient change in Iraq's social structure over time has been the rise and fall of the professional middle class. Aided by increasing oil revenue beginning in the late 1950s, but especially in the 1970s, governments invested in public institutions to support an educated, professional, urban middle class. The sanctions regime and the violence since 2003 gutted this class, along with many sectors, especially health care and education. It is estimated that Iraq has seen the largest flight of doctors and other medical personnel from one single country in recent history.²⁶ The number of physicians per one thousand inhabitants was 0.85 in 2014 (the last year of available data), which is low in comparison to other countries in the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA; for example, 3.4 in Jordan, 2.38 in Lebanon, 1.55 in Syria).²⁷ Since 2014, around 50 percent of specialized health care staff have left Anbar, Diyala, Ninawa, and Salahaddin.²⁸ In some ways, the flight of the middle class reflects a common migration pattern in conflict zones: the poorest and hardest hit are unable to leave, whereas those with some resources can fund their travel and try to pass restrictive entry tests in neighboring states. But another tragic dynamic has been at play in Iraq: Since 2003, schoolteachers, university professors, scientists, and physicians have been targeted for assassination and kidnappings precisely because of their occupation.

Political Regimes and Governance

Iraqis have been ruled by various regimes: a colonial power (1921–1932), monarchs (1921–1958), military officers (1958–1968), a ruling party (1968–1979), a personalist dictator (1979–2003), a foreign military occupation (2003–2004), and, currently, by an elected parliament that does not safeguard political, civil, or economic rights. These apparent ruptures in Iraq’s political history raise two questions: Why have participatory and accountable forms of governance proved elusive? And how do we explain the origins and consequences of different nondemocratic regimes in Iraq?

On the first question, based on what we know about the determinants of democracy, its absence in Iraq, while not inevitable, is not puzzling. In terms of social-structural foundations, there was no strong middle class, the peasantry had not been destroyed, and agrarian elites were entrenched within the state apparatus.²⁹ Economic conditions—low levels of development, low income equality, low capital mobility, and reliance on oil—also did not bode well for democratization.³⁰

On the second question, Iraq’s variation across nondemocratic regime type over time illustrates that rulers select different governing structures in response to elite conflict, with consequential effects on their ability to survive in power. To balance discordant elite interests, King Faisal’s parliamentary monarchy was characterized by very limited powers for parliament and low elite turnover. Parliament could bring down a cabinet, but the king had the right to confirm all laws, call for general elections, and prorogue the assembly. Political disagreements often led to cabinet portfolio reshuffles but very low membership turnover; the same 59 men rotated seats.³¹ This exclusionary bargain was very restive; urban protests and tribal revolts were common, and the army was frequently called upon to suppress them.

Frustrated by the political elite's inability to control the country, army officers led a coup in 1936 to force a new arrangement, one that preserved the monarchy but transferred de facto power to the military. This split arrangement was very unstable, and eventually some officers lost confidence the monarchy would ever be able to settle conflict.³² They particularly resented the monarchy's unwillingness to directly challenge the economic interests of the large landowning class to guide successful economic development. Inspired by Egypt's 1952 Free Officer Revolution, a group of fifteen top officers overthrew the monarchy in 1958. The murder of the royal family eliminated any possibility of a Hashemi restoration.

The new military rulers chose to fully merge military and government. Officers held the posts of president, prime minister, minister of defense, director general of security, and director of military intelligence, as well as various ministerial posts.³³ As in most military regimes, officers-turned-presidents were primarily concerned with preventing coups. Former coconspirators turned their gaze on each other, as struggles for power intermingled with emerging ideological differences over the central regional question of the time: pan-Arab unity. The 1958 to 1968 decade was marred by unstable military rule under three different leaders, all of whom ascended to power through coups.

Ultimately, these internecine battles resulted in the rise of a new regime in 1968, led by members of the Ba'ath ("revival") party, which had been founded in Syria in the 1940s by middle-class intellectuals of diverse religious backgrounds who espoused pan-Arab nationalism.³⁴ Although they too were unsuccessful in stabilizing elite or mass politics, Ba'athists were able to survive in power by reducing the power of military officers. Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr, the army general who assumed the presidency, and his younger kinsman Saddam Hussein, whom he appointed vice chairman of the ruling Revolutionary Command Council (RCC, the highest legislative and executive body), purged military officers and established alternative security institutions, a network of intelligence agencies, a large bureaucracy, and an expansive ruling party. They were aided

by unprecedented access to revenue after they nationalized the oil industry in 1972.³⁵

Saddam Hussein used the security establishment to gradually concentrate power in his own hands. In July 1979, he pushed President al-Bakr aside and assumed personal control over the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government. Although real discussion and consultation took place within the RCC, members did not oppose Hussein's initiatives. The regime also progressively narrowed membership in security institutions to regional and family networks, and it increasingly came to rely on four clans from in and around Hussein's hometown of Tikrit, which created tensions with other members of the regime. Although often mislabeled as a *Sunni regime*, a more accurate characterization of Hussein's rule is that positions of coercive power had a narrow regional and familial basis. Multiple failed coup attempts from within the Republican Guard and other security institutions rocked the regime in the 1990s—all of which were organized by Sunnis.

The concentration of decision-making power in Hussein's hands and his cult of personality can risk fostering the illusion that the regime was omnipotent. The reality was more akin to that of large bureaucracies worldwide, which always allow for ambiguities and autonomous spaces.³⁶ Hussein's power was undoubtedly unrivaled; he had placed himself at the top of each of the state's pillars as the broker of relations between them, and all channels of information passed through the Office of the President. Yet firewalls between organizations often backfired, causing inefficiencies in intelligence gathering.³⁷ Despite its pretensions to hegemony, the regime was never able to preempt either elite or mass dissent, which varied in magnitude across space and time, reflecting the lumpiness in the regime's intelligence gathering.³⁸ When the US invasion began in March 2003, the regime rapidly collapsed, armed forces deserted, and many bureaucrats looted their own workplace.

The US invasion launched a period of institutional engineering characterized by confusion, opaque decision-making, and severe

human rights abuses.³⁹ What was at first supposed to be a short-lived occupation—focused on locating weapons of mass destruction, keeping the bureaucracy in place, and organizing elections as soon as possible—abruptly changed to an extended occupation in which Iraqi forces would regain control over security when the US military deemed them “ready,” and a US administrator of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) would have full executive, legislative, and judicial authority, as well as the power to dispose of all Iraqi state assets and direct all Iraqi government officials.⁴⁰ This surprising shift in policy left those Iraqis cooperating with the United States feeling deceived.⁴¹ Moreover, the CPA’s mandate did not clarify how Iraqi leaders or the CPA itself would engage with the 98 percent of American personnel who were not under CPA command. The surfacing of systematic abuse and torture of Iraqi prisoners by US military units in the notorious Abu Ghraib prison as well as the unlawful detention of over ten thousand Iraqis in US-run prisons undermined remaining trust in the process.⁴²

Forged in the midst of a violent and chaotic occupation, Iraq’s current political regime is characterized by four related features. First, ethnosectarian identity is institutionalized as the basis of political representation; since 2004, political offices have been reserved for specific ethnosectarian communities based on their assumed demographic weight.⁴³ Many Iraqis blame this quota system—which they call *muhāsasa*—for the spread of party-based patronage and corruption networks throughout the public sector and for the absence of autonomous institutions. Power sharing along ethnosectarian demographic breakdown also guided the choice of a proportional representation electoral system, which renders Iraq, like other countries with this system, prone to deadlock over government formation as rival blocs try to organize coalitional majorities. In 2010, Iraq broke the world record for the country that has gone the longest between holding a parliamentary election and forming a government: 289 days.

Second, current governance reflects fierce disagreement over foundational questions: the parameters of federalism, the

relationship between local and central government, the distribution of oil revenues, and the future of “disputed territories”—mixed-population areas between the Kurdish region and the rest of Iraq (the most famous of which is oil-rich Kirkuk). A full fifty-three articles of the new constitution were left to be resolved at some point in the future.⁴⁴ The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and federal government in Baghdad have repeatedly clashed over their conflicting interpretations (see Domestic Armed Conflict section), culminating in the KRG unilaterally holding a referendum on Kurdish independence in September 2017.⁴⁵ To a lesser extent, southern politicians have also made efforts to form an autonomous region in the far south.

Third, Iraqi governance is framed by a vast and ever-growing security architecture outside the official state apparatus. The US decision to disband the Iraqi army in May 2003 created a security vacuum that was quickly filled by paramilitary units, armed militias, and private guards, whose influence has only grown in the past fifteen years as central security institutions have struggled to stem severe threats to territorial integrity. In addition to becoming formidable autonomous security forces that recruit widely among the youth, they also enjoy broad popularity among segments of the population and have capitalized on their battle victories to run successful electoral bids. Some have even established their own service provision institutions in direct competition with political parties.⁴⁶

Finally, Iraq’s current system is minimally democratic. Although there are regular elections, there are no checks and balances among different powers, and purportedly independent institutions and oversight agencies—including the theoretically independent electoral commission—are beholden to political parties. Increasingly, the electoral commission is perceived as beholden to partisan interests; campaign rules, including party finance rules, are lax and rarely applied, and individuals convicted of corruption have been allowed to participate in elections. Judicial independence is guaranteed by the constitution, but judges come under extraordinary pressure and have

been unable to pursue cases involving organized crime, corruption, and militia activity. Citizens perceive official law enforcement as corrupt or ineffective, and they routinely turn to actors outside the judicial system to arbitrate disputes. Arbitrary arrest and detention are common in security-related cases, and there are credible reports of torture—both in Baghdad and in Iraqi Kurdistan.^{[47](#)}

Political Participation

For most of Iraq's history, citizens have had to express their demands outside formal institutional channels such as political parties and elections.

Political Parties

Political parties have played very different roles among themselves and over time—demonstrating that what institutions do is more important than what they are called.

In the monarchic era, most political parties were collectives of urban notables rather than mass-based institutions. The exception was the Iraqi Communist Party, which formed in 1934 around a platform of social justice and antisectarian politics that quickly gained popular support among citizens of diverse religious and sectarian affiliations. Given that elections were rigged, opposition parties focused on street protest and labor mobilization. The government did not hesitate to suppress any opposition by declaring martial law. It was particularly harsh with the Communist Party, which still managed to become the largest and best-organized party in the country by 1958, with structures among peasants in the south as well as in the northern Kurdish region.

Under Iraq's military regimes, political parties made a fateful decision that undermined the development of political participation: Instead of insisting that military regimes preserve and develop parliamentary procedures and electoral politics, they chose to invest in extra-legal alliances with rival military factions as a path to political ambition. Military rulers in turn did not hesitate to suppress independent party activity.

The Ba'ath introduced unprecedented levels of physical coercion against all independent political participation. The Communist Party in particular was targeted for a systematic campaign of arrests and torture. Any non-Ba'athist political activity by members of the armed forces (i.e., the majority of the adult male population, given universal conscription) was made a capital offense. The Ba'ath party itself meanwhile became a formidable organization of political and social control. As with most nondemocratic ruling parties, the Ba'ath was not a decision-making or power-sharing institution, but rather an

instrument of selective co-optation and repression at both the elite and mass levels.⁴⁸ On the elite side, the party's hierarchical apparatus differentially allocated benefits and services based on the membership level, thus incentivizing its members to buy into the structure early on in return for increasing benefits.⁴⁹ On the mass level, the party was involved in almost every aspect of an individual's life. It determined who would be included and excluded from access to state benefits (including public employment, educational opportunities, and welfare), its structure ran parallel to all state institutions, and it gathered its own intelligence on the citizenry, often in parallel with security organizations. The system of positive and negative selective benefits extended the actions of citizens to their families, which encouraged intrafamily self-policing.

The fall of the regime in 2003 marked a turning point for political party life, as a plethora of parties formed or regrouped to contest competitive elections. The most salient feature of Iraqi party politics today is the influence of individual leaders, as opposed to collective decision-making bodies, internal governing procedures, or coherent ideologies and policies. For the most part, political parties operate as loose coalitions of convenience coalesced around prominent individuals who derive their authority from familial history or religious credentials. As a result, parties grow or fragment in election cycles, their "members" often do not act in unison in legislative politics, and election cycles feature new and surprising alliances.

Given this landscape, the nature of political divisions between parties is ever-changing. Nevertheless, we can identify some broad contours that persist across electoral cycles. One is the division between "exiles"—prominent figures who had fled Iraq when their parties were decimated by the Ba'th regime—and "insiders"—those still residing in Iraq on the eve of the US invasion. Until the 2018 parliamentary elections, exiles dominated executive and legislative politics.⁵⁰ Critics believe exiles' disproportionate role is a direct result of the US-led process of institutional engineering and particularly of the CPA's highly controversial de-Ba'thification Law (later replaced by the Justice and Accountability Law), which allowed for members

of the Ba‘th to be disqualified from running in elections based on the flawed assumption that all members of the top four ranks of the party were ideologically committed to Ba‘thism or had committed acts that violated international human rights standards.⁵¹ This law has been used repeatedly to disqualify candidates, often without the disclosure of the specific rationale, leading many to believe it has been thoroughly politicized by its implementers with an eye to securing electoral victories.⁵² Critics also believe the United States explicitly favored exiles as partners in the transitional process; many did in fact work with US officials in the lead-up to the invasion, and five main political groups received support under the 1998 US Iraq Liberation Act.

A second way to interpret the party landscape is through the interplay between intra- and interethnosectarian divisions. Given the institutionalization of ethnosectarian quotas since 2004, the categories Kurdish, Arab Sunni, and Shi‘i serve as the lens through which many politicians perceive their constituencies. At the same time, the fragmentation within each category and the existence of cross-sectarian parties demonstrate the limits of these identities as cohesive, mobilizing platforms. To give some examples, the largest parties have emerged within the framework of Shi‘i Islamism, the most prominent of which are the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), the Muqtada al-Sadr movement, and the Da‘wa party, which are divided among other things by their disagreements over Iran’s role in Iraqi politics. One of the peculiar expressions of this fragmentation is that all prime ministers have come from the weakest of these three, Da‘wa, as a compromise between the stronger two. In the KRG, two main Kurdish nationalist parties have dominated for decades, the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and the Popular Union of Kurdistan (PUK)—both of which are organized around prominent families and currently act as co-ruling parties. Their dominance is increasingly challenged by smaller opposition parties.

Elections

Considered one of the most obvious formal outlets for political participation (even in nondemocratic regimes), elections occupied a peripheral space in Iraq until 2005. Electoral institutions were not intended to channel citizens' concerns or to make policy, but rather to distribute patronage among a narrow political elite and manage elite competition. The monarchy held ten elections for the lower house of parliament between 1925 and 1958 but manipulated results and did not extend the suffrage to women.⁵³ No general elections were held between 1954 and 1980; that year, the Ba'ath established a National Assembly that had no legislative powers.

Since 2005, parliamentary elections are held every four years under a unicameral proportional representation system, with variations in the number of seats, whether party lists are closed or open, and the size of the electoral districts. Elections between 2005 and 2014 were considered by electoral observers to have been free and fair, despite being marred by violence and minor infractions. They were also marked by relatively high voter turnout: 58 percent in January 2005, 77 percent in December 2005, and 62 percent in 2010 and 2014 (although they varied widely in the distribution of participation across provinces and voting patterns). The 2018 election, however, was markedly different: It was characterized by widespread allegations of fraud (which forced a partial recount), as well as the lowest turnout yet, 44.5 percent despite a good security environment (not a single attack was reported that day).

The nature of coalitional politics and electoral results have varied widely across elections, with high MP (member of parliament) turnover. The January 2005 election for a transitional parliament and provincial council members was defined by predominantly ethnosectarian coalition formation and voting patterns. Almost all Shi'a political parties ran under a single list, as did Kurdish Parties. Around 75 percent of Arab Sunni voters vetoed—some because they saw the US occupation and the political process as illegitimate and

others out of fear of reprisals by insurgent groups who had actively called for a boycott.⁵⁴ Realizing that the political process would simply pass them by if they continued to boycott, Arab Sunni leaders participated in the December 2005 elections for the first democratic full-term parliament.⁵⁵ Campaigning and voting patterns further entrenched the logic of electoral politics as an identity referendum. The coalition of Shi'i Islamists won 47 percent of the seats, Kurdish nationalist parties 19 percent, and a coalition running on an Arab Sunni identity, 16 percent.

The 2010 election results were vastly different. This time, the *Iraqiyya* list, the only political alliance to attract both Shi'i and Sunni voters and to campaign on an expressly nonsectarian platform, drew the largest vote share (26 percent compared to 8 percent in December 2005). Its victory reflected three changes. First, Arab Sunni public opinion had shifted over the best way to ensure a voice; rather than mobilize around a "Sunni identity," the intention was to reject the ethnosectarian basis of the system and emphasize broad political participation. Second, many citizens were exhausted by the violence and believed the limited capacity of the state was a direct result of sectarian politics. Third, the Shi'i Islamist grand coalition was fragmenting. The 2014 election witnessed a return to ethnosectarian campaigning and voting.

The most recent elections in May 2018 featured surprising coalitions and victories that suggest a rebuke to establishment politics. Campaigning on a platform calling for institutional reform, condemning corruption, and opposing foreign intervention, the *Sa'irun* ("On the Move") coalition brought together Muqtada al-Sadr's movement with the Communist Party of Iraq and other leftist and secular parties and won the largest overall number of seats (54 of 329). Almost 65 percent of the elected MPs were new to parliamentary politics. Notably, this marked the first time that Iraqi leaders who are not former exiles have won an election.⁵⁶

Tribe

The institution of *tribe* has also meant very different things over time with consequential effects on the parameters of participation. Before the Ottoman Tanzimat reforms (1839–1876), tribes operated as sociopolitical institutions of collective protection against threats to property and as interest groups to secure fertile lands and trade routes. Their internal social and economic organization varied, making it difficult to speak of a homogenous category of tribe beyond that of an institution of protection.⁵⁷ Their members defined themselves by their common patrilineal descent, more often fictive than biological. The authority of a tribal leader (*shaykh*, plural *shuyukh*) derived from two sources: professed lineage to historically prestigious pre-Islamic tribes or to the Prophet and his ability to “serve the community’s interests by upholding the tribe’s reputation through rituals of honor, generosity, and (in some cases) combat, while mitigating disputes and violence through negotiation skills and marital strategies.”⁵⁸

Beginning with the Tanzimat’s Land Law, which introduced private property in agricultural land, tribes were gradually transformed into patronage institutions. Shuyukh became landlords who increasingly looked to the center to empower them vis-à-vis their constituents, exchanging acquiescence for tax exemptions, land rights, and autonomy to govern in their areas. They thus no longer derived authority from their conflict resolution skills, but rather from their wealth and translocal political alliances.⁵⁹ Many joined parliamentary politics, becoming urbanized elite and absentee landlords—but later lost significant power with the 1958 revolutionary land reform and the closure of parliamentary life.

Saddam Hussein altered traditional lines of authority even further by creating a directorate of tribal affairs that appointed shuyukh directly from the state, selecting less popular power-hungry individuals (whom Iraqis derogatorily refer to as “Shuyukh made in Taiwan”).⁶⁰ When American troops arrived in Iraq, they were “confused by the

proliferation of self-proclaimed shuyukh volunteering their services, each one of them boasting 'hundreds of thousands' of supporters."⁶¹ Today, the institution of *tribe* is fully incorporated into the political system as a main form of clientelistic politics. The Iraqi parliament has a tribal affairs committee through which candidates dole out benefits in exchange for support in their security-related and electoral undertakings.

Associations

Associational activity has ebbed and flowed since 1920. In monarchic Iraq, there was a rise in associational activity as urban Iraqis formed professional associations (lawyers, physicians, engineers, and teachers), organizations for women and students, and labor unions. The development of oil and increased trade brought many strikes for better wages and working conditions, especially in the port city of Basra. Associational life was increasingly incorporated into the state—first through Qasim who made sure to try to control their activities and later (and much more comprehensively) through Ba‘thist rule. Following the 2003 US invasion, it is estimated that somewhere between eight thousand and twelve thousand civil society organizations were registered with the state. The majority are social welfare organizations linked either to political parties or religious institutions and target narrow constituencies. Many professional associations are factionalized by political party affiliations.⁶² Trade unions, however, have been very successful at mobilizing public opinion and creating political coalitions—most notably against the Oil and Gas Law (2006–2009) that would have disempowered parliament in relation to decisions around oil contracts.

Citizenship Rights

Iraqis not only had very limited institutional channels for *voice* before 2003, but they also often could not exercise the choice to *exit*.⁶³ Freedom of movement was severely curtailed in the 1980s. Citizens were unable to leave the country of their own free will; legal exit was viewed as a privilege to be granted by the government rather than a right to be exercised.⁶⁴ Following the Gulf War, the regime generally refused to issue passports to women under forty-five unless they would be traveling with a male guardian (in an effort to gain support among tribes).

For many Iraqis, however, exit was actually enforced upon them through the ultimate act of disenfranchisement—revocation of citizenship. This was meted out not as punishment for noncompliance, but through indiscriminate targeting based on religious identity. As in other countries, forcible removal of categories of populations was a by-product of international relations.⁶⁵ In the 1940s and 1950s, thousands of Iraqi Jews were stripped of their citizenship and property and forced to leave the country as political parties exploited Israel's founding and the ensuing Arab defeat in the Arab-Israeli war of 1948 to 1949 in their political tug of war.⁶⁶ Almost no one was left from Iraq's long-established Jewish community, which was around 117,000 (2.6 percent of the population) in 1947.

On the eve of the Iran-Iraq war in 1980, as underground Shi'i Islamist movements were emboldened in their dissent, the regime waged a campaign to expel Iraqis of "Iranian origins" (*taba'iyya iraniyya*), or Shi'i Arabs and Kurds whose family line held Persian nationality under the Ottomans. Their properties were confiscated and auctioned off to other Shi'a in an attempt to make these complicit in the dispossession and thereby undermine potential co-religionist solidarity. In 1981, the regime provided financial incentives for men to divorce their "Iranian wives" (those connected to families who had been expelled or were marked for expulsion).⁶⁷ By some

estimates, two hundred thousand people were expelled during the eight-year war.^{[68](#)}

Protest

Under the Ba‘thist regime, given the restrictions on participation through institutional channels, many Iraqis resorted to alternative forms of noncompliance, ranging from direct confrontation to subversive, hidden action: street demonstrations, participation in violent activity (insurgency, targeting of civilians), defection from the army, not joining the ruling party, spreading rumors about the regime, and other “everyday forms of resistance.”⁶⁹ Formulating a full picture of these activities to explain why citizens partook in them is difficult, given the opaqueness of information in nondemocratic and violent settings and the fact that most of Iraq’s archives remain in the possession of the US government, with a few exceptions. The evidence we have thus far suggests an interaction between the type of noncompliance citizens engaged in and the selectivity with which the regime doled out repression.⁷⁰

Since 2005, Iraq has seen progressively larger waves of demonstrations to protest the government’s corruption and its inability to deliver essential services and infrastructure (see Political Economy section). Protests have become an annual occurrence during the scorching summer heat when electricity consumption far exceeds supply. Many have originated in the southern city of Basra, which though home to most of the country’s oil field suffers from persistent state neglect. Over time, protests have transformed in scope, intensity, and character. Most notably, whereas protests during and immediately following the US occupation were organized by prominent national-level politicians or major civil society organizations, the most recent ones in summer 2018 were mostly spontaneous or organized by local figures (such as tribal leaders, clerics, schoolteachers, or engineers) operating at the neighborhood level through social media platforms. Moreover, the prominent role of Iraqis under the age of 30 in the protests (coupled with the fact that they overwhelmingly stayed home on Election Day) reveal an emerging generational divide between Iraqi youth—who have only known a post-Ba‘th Iraq—and older generations.⁷¹ Protesters

targeted the full spectrum of elites and set fire to government buildings and political party offices. Government response has varied, from promises to curb political corruption to announcing the creation of additional public sector jobs to shutting down the Internet and other telecommunications to prevent protest coordination—even to deploying special forces, which on some occasions have fired on demonstrators.⁷² Armed groups linked to political parties have also attacked protesters.

Regional and International Relations

Iraq's relations with other states have tracked its rise and fall as one of the region's major powers. This trajectory has encompassed five stages.

Pan-Arabism (1930s–1960s)

Iraq's first leaders sought alliances across borders to get the upper hand in domestic struggles. In many cases, these alliances entailed ceding sovereignty through "unity projects," or voluntary agreements to unify with other Arab states. King Faisal never gave up aspirations to one day re-create the pan-Arab state his family had fought for against the Ottomans. Military rulers also sought regional allies against their own domestic opponents. In this, they were no different from many Arab leaders in the 1950s and 1960s—a period famously dubbed "the Arab cold war."⁷³ These projects were not an automatic expression of pan-Arab sentiment; their intermittent nature and their timing suggests that leaders chose to tap into these sentiments primarily as a policy instrument to deal with domestic power struggles.⁷⁴

Militarization (1970s)

Flush with revenue from the 1972 nationalization of oil, Iraq became one of the world's leading arms importers (mainly from the United States and the Soviet Union). It was a central participant in the Persian Gulf's arms race; between 1975 and 1979, Iraq, Iran, and Saudi Arabia accounted for almost one-quarter of all global arms purchases.⁷⁵ By the decade's end, two transformative regional events would offer Iraq the opportunity to employ its military investments in a play for regional leadership. In 1979, Egypt, the most populous Arab state, lost its undisputed leadership status after its peace agreement with Israel. That same year in Iraq's eastern neighbor, Iran, a mass-based revolution brought to power Shi'i clerics intent on establishing an "Islamic republic."

Belligerence (1980s–1991)

From the Iraqi government's perspective, the transitional moment in Iran was a chance to force territorial concessions on long-standing territorial disputes. Moreover, Iran's new Islamist regime explicitly challenged the Ba'th's secular brand of anti-imperialism, and its new leader Ayatollah Khomeini appealed to Iraqi Shi'a to topple their government. Assassination attempts of top Iraqi state officials in 1979 and 1980 gave credence to Saddam Hussein's accusations of Iranian interference in Iraqi affairs, and he ordered the invasion of Iran in September 1980. Confident in a speedy victory, Hussein had not prepared for the war that ensued: an eight-year trench war that became one of the deadliest interstate wars of the century, killing between 250,000 to 500,000 Iraqis and one million Iranians. One year before the war ended, 1.7 million Iraqi men were in arms, or 65 percent of all men ages eighteen to forty-five.⁷⁶ By the UN ceasefire resolution on July 18, 1988, Iraq had gained no new territory.

Far from consolidating Iraq's regional leadership, the Iran war devastated the economy, making it dependent on foreign aid, particularly from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. When they refused Iraq's appeal to forgive its debts and restrict oil production quotas to raise prices, Hussein interpreted their rejection as an attempt to undermine his regime. Believing he was under threat and that the international community would see the invasion as his attempt to hasten a negotiated settlement, he ordered the invasion of Kuwait on August 2, 1990, and declared Kuwait Iraq's nineteenth province.⁷⁷ Like the Iran war, this invasion stemmed from Hussein's belief that military victory would assuage his regime's vulnerability and that the target was weak and isolated.⁷⁸ Once again, he miscalculated. International condemnation was immediate; UN Security Council resolutions called for Iraq's unconditional withdrawal, imposed an embargo, and authorized war against Iraq. Beginning on January 16, 1991, a US-led coalition of twenty-eight countries waged a forty-two-

day land and air invasion that dwarfed anything Iraqis had experienced in the Iran war.[79](#)

Pariah (1991–2003)

The 1991 Gulf War tracked a shift in US strategy in the Middle East. Although its interests were unchanged with the end of the cold war—preventing any country from dominating oil flow and pricing—the United States was increasingly willing to use military means to protect energy resources. In the Persian Gulf, this entailed a strategic shift from “offshore balancing” to “dual containment.” Before 1990, it balanced Iraq and Iran against one another. It supported the Shah’s regime in Iran but sold weapons to both states, then switched support to Iraq after Iran’s revolution. During the Iran-Iraq war, the US first supplied weapons, funding, and intelligence to both sides; later, it became an active participant against Iran, taking and inflicting casualties.⁸⁰ Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, however, had disrupted the status quo and threatened US relations with its regional clients. The aim would now be to isolate both countries economically, encourage regime change in Iraq, and support Saudi Arabia and the smaller Gulf monarchies. Such a strategy necessarily entailed a much more direct, unilateral role for the United States.

From the United States’ perspective, the biggest threat to its energy interests stemmed from Iraq acquiring nuclear weapons. Such a scenario would effectively eliminate its vulnerability to US military action. UN Resolution 687, passed in April 1991, made Iraq’s economic recovery dependent on the control of its military capabilities. Under its terms, international inspectors were to be allowed unlimited access to facilities housing weapons, including offices of the security services and presidential palaces. For the rest of the decade, Saddam Hussein resisted full transparency about Iraq’s weapons’ programs; in retrospect, it seems his strategic ambiguity was geared not toward the United States but toward those the regime saw as its primary enemies: Iran and its Iraqi allies.⁸¹ In March 2003, in opposition to the United Nations Security Council, an Anglo-American invasion began.⁸² Two months later, the Security

Council formally recognized but did not endorse the United States and the United Kingdom as occupying powers.⁸³

The full logic of the US decision to invade is still debated. Some argue it was a case of rational preventive war. Given that it could not confirm Saddam Hussein's plans, the United States opted for militarily engaging a nonnuclear Iraq now rather than risking a nuclear Iraq later. Even though preventive war was unnecessary in retrospect—Iraq did not have weapons of mass destruction—and the costs of war were much higher than expected, this line of reasoning holds that war was still a rational decision because the United States could not know these things ahead of time. In terms of the timing, this view cites US decision-makers' increased discomfort with uncertainty after the attacks of September 11, 2001.⁸⁴ An alternative argument is that war was driven not by a strategic rationale but by the Bush administration's irrational belief that Saddam Hussein was immune to deterrence by other means.⁸⁵ Seen in this light, the war would not have happened under a US administration with a different perception of Saddam Hussein.⁸⁶ It would have also been avoided by an administration with a different perception of the costs of war.⁸⁷ Others argue it was the logical conclusion of US oil policy and the militarization of the region.⁸⁸

Battleground (2003–Present)

The 2003 invasion transformed Iraq from one of the region's major players to its battleground. The full dismantling of the Iraqi state altered the balance of power in the Middle East, pitting the two remaining hegemonies in the Persian Gulf, Iran and Saudi Arabia, against one another. The weakening of many Arab states since the 2011 uprisings has launched a dynamic reminiscent of the 1950s through the 1960s era: a contest for influence that plays out not through direct military confrontation, but in the domestic political systems of weak states.⁸⁹ This conflict has an identity component—hegemonies and domestic allies often match on sect—but is not driven by it.

Iran and Saudi Arabia have sponsored a set of armed and nonarmed actors in Iraq, but Iran has been overwhelmingly more successful. Saudi Arabia's support of the secular Iraqiyya party in the 2005 and 2010 elections did not pay off, as the party was unable to form a winning coalition after its electoral triumph. Iran is undoubtedly the most influential player in Iraqi politics: It has close relations with governments, sponsors a number of Shi'i militias, and cooperates with the Kurdish Regional Government. Many of the political parties winning elections had established themselves in Iran for more than twenty years and maintain personal, financial, and ideological ties. Opposition against Iran's intervention, however, has increased in recent years and was one of the campaign slogans of the coalition that won the most seats in 2018.

Domestic Armed Conflict

Armed conflict and counterinsurgency have been central to Iraq's history. Symbolically, the event that convinced (some) Iraqi elites to institute universal conscription was a domestic, not foreign, threat.⁹⁰ Why has domestic political conflict taken the form of armed combat so often in Iraq's history? And why has it varied in the duration and intensity of violence?

A popular answer is that violent conflict reflects society's "master cleavages," which in Iraq are most often conceptualized as ethnicity (Arab vs. Kurd) and sect (Shi'i vs. Sunni). Yet the dynamics of Iraq's military confrontations reveal the limits of this "ethnic war" framework. First, violent conflict is never simply the outcome of long-standing intractable cleavages. Even though it can be tempting to use salient, visible categories as a way to make sense of violence—especially given the poor quality of information about perpetrators and victims—many different incentives are usually involved.⁹¹ Second, violence itself often unleashes new fault lines.

A better way to conceptualize violent conflict is through its "technologies of rebellion," or the joint military technologies of the parties engaged in armed conflict. Scholars of civil war distinguish between three technologies:

Conventional civil war takes place when the military technologies of states and rebels are matched at a high level; irregular civil war emerges when the military technologies of the rebels lag vis-à-vis those of the state; and SNC [symmetric non-conventional] war is observed when the military technologies of states and rebels are matched at a low level.⁹²

Each type has a different implication for the way violence is organized and sustained.

Iraqis have waged two types of war against each other—all but conventional war, which has been used instead in wars against other states. The persistent conflict between Kurdish nationalists and successive Iraqi regimes before 2003 was the archetype of irregular war. Kurdish nationalists had advocated for autonomy since before Iraq's independence and by 1960 had coalesced into one main organization: the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), founded by Mullah Mustafa Barzani in the 1940s after he was exiled by the monarchy to Iran. The Ba'th took an early seemingly conciliatory approach, signing an agreement with the KDP in 1970 that allowed Kurds the use of their language in schools and government institutions, some form of representation in national politics, limited autonomy, and the appointment of Kurdish administrators in Kurdish-majority areas. In those areas where majorities were in question, a census would determine whether they fell under Kurdish rule. Instead of planning a census, the Ba'th embarked on changing the demographic balance of contested areas, particularly that of oil-rich Kirkuk. By 1974, the KDP had launched an insurgency.

Kurdish rebels had the military capabilities to harass and challenge the central state, but they could not confront it in a direct and frontal way. Their ability to sustain the conflict stemmed from northern Iraq's rugged terrain and the material and logistical support from Iran, Israel, and the United States. As a neighboring state, Iran's support—and its willingness to keep open borders—was particularly crucial. When Iran's shah withdrew his support and closed the borders with Kurdish regions (in exchange for Iraqi concessions in the 1975 Algiers Agreement), the insurgency quickly collapsed. That year, the KDP also lost its monopoly on representation; young cadres, led by Jalal Talabani, challenged Barzani's leadership and established the Popular Union of Kurdistan (PUK). The split had generational, demographic, and linguistic roots.

The Ba'th was never able to establish as extensive an apparatus in the Kurdish areas as in the rest of the country. The regime had serious problems finding members who wanted to work in those areas and who could speak Kurdish, even though it offered

additional “hardship” incentives. It was able to cobble together local militias (usually organized around Kurdish tribes), which helped policing the lowlands but were less effective in mountainous terrains. It employed policies of population redistribution and demographic engineering, destroying thousands of villages and forcibly moving their inhabitants (mostly Kurds and Turkmen).⁹³

The Iran war launched a new, much more violent phase in the conflict. After 1982, Iranian troops increasingly drew support from Kurdish and other opposition parties of the North and were starting to push into Iraqi territory.⁹⁴ For the Ba’th, the conflict now became about controlling insurgent territories in the midst of a war they feared losing.⁹⁵ The regime decided to “alter the physical and human landscape of Iraqi Kurdistan” to eliminate any topographic and human barriers to state control.⁹⁶ In essence, this entailed the introduction of a policy of ethnic cleansing that included the use of chemical weapons, an economic siege, and a scorched earth policy.⁹⁷ In 1987, Saddam Hussein appointed his cousin, Ali Hassan al-Majid, giving him broad powers to deploy the security apparatus. Within three weeks of his appointment, al-Majid ordered the use of poison gas (which earned him the moniker “Chemical Ali”) and began razing Kurdish villages that the Peshmerga relied on for food and shelter. Villages that could not be razed due to inaccessibility were attacked by air almost daily. During six months in 1988, tens of thousands of Kurds, the vast majority civilians, died during the operation codenamed *Anfal*. Human Rights Watch, which has carried out the only comprehensive investigation, estimates casualties to have been between fifty thousand and one hundred thousand.⁹⁸

In 1991, in the wake of uprisings in Iraq’s southern cities and the army’s chaotic retreat from Kuwait under the international coalition’s bombs, militants from a coalition of Kurdish parties took over the major cities, including Kirkuk. The international coalition chose not to intervene militarily at the behest of Turkey, which had always worried about the prospect of an independent Iraqi Kurdistan. The regime quickly reestablished its hold over the rebellious areas. However, as Kurdish refugees continued to pour into Turkey, the allied forces

imposed a no-fly zone over the thirty-sixth parallel. This cease-fire line roughly matched the boundaries discussed in the 1974 KDP-Ba'th agreement, thereby creating a de-facto autonomous Kurdish zone in Iraq's three northern provinces. By 1993, the KDP and PUK were engaged in violent conflict over territorial jurisdiction, the distribution of international economic aid, and the revenues of oil smuggling across the Iranian and Turkish borders. The KDP requested military assistance from Baghdad, greatly boosting Saddam Hussein's prestige, and demonstrating how quickly new fault lines could smooth out old ones. The factions eventually reconciled and formed an autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

Seeing this conflict as an example of irregular warfare accounts for crucial dynamics that do not conform to the logic of "ethnic war," such as the collaboration between Kurdish tribes and the Ba'th, the PUK-KDP infighting, and the KDP-Ba'th reconciliation.

The dynamics of the 1991 uprisings in the south are also better captured by the irregular warfare framework than the often-used sectarian lens. The *Intifada*, as the Iraqis call the uprising, began as a series of spontaneous revolts in southern cities instigated by bedraggled Iraqi soldiers returning from Kuwait. In three days, the rebellion spread to all the provinces south of Baghdad (and later to the Kurdish north).⁹⁹ Although the Damascus-based Iraqi opposition insisted the uprising was not sectarian, both the regime and Shi'i Islamist parties presented it in sectarian terms. Yet archival records of reports from party cadres in the provinces paint a more complex picture: Rebels' slogans and identities varied by locality; participants included returning prisoners of war, army deserters, former communists, and members of opposition parties who had been residing in Iran.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, the revolt spread to Sunni-majority cities such as Zubair, south of Basra, and did not uniformly spread to majority-Shi'i governorates (such as Wasit). Wary of an Iranian-style regime in Iraq, the United States and Saudi Arabia did not intervene when the Iraqi regime, and in particular the Republican Guard, launched a brutal counterinsurgency campaign, retaking the

southern cities in fewer than ten days. As in the north, the regime tried to reengineer the physical landscape of terrains it deemed to be strategic liabilities, in this case the southern marshlands. It killed and forcibly removed the *Ma'dan* population, or so-called Marsh Arabs, from their ancestral homeland, reducing the area's population from 250,000 in 1991 to 20,000 in 2003.¹⁰¹ The state also used hydrological infrastructure to divert water from the wetlands, permanently draining them, and causing an environmental disaster.¹⁰² The only official casualties' figure of the 1991 uprisings is the 714 party members whom the regime honored as "martyrs," but most scholars and human rights observers believe that tens of thousands of unarmed civilians were killed by indiscriminate fire and summary executions.¹⁰³ Together, the counterinsurgency campaigns in the north and south resulted in the disappearance of between 250,000 and 290,000 people.¹⁰⁴

Since 2003, most of Iraq's multiple armed conflicts have also been irregular. The post-2003 landscape was an aggregation of multiple, highly fragmented conflicts, often occurring simultaneously. We can categorize these into at least seven fault lines over time: (1) an insurgency against US forces in the western (mostly Sunni Arab) provinces; (2) strife between Shi'i and Sunni militias centered primarily in and around Baghdad; (3) conflict among rival Shi'i militias in the south; (4) a local (mostly Sunni) insurrection against al-Qa'ida in the western provinces; (5) territorial conflict between Arabs and Kurds in northern Iraq; (6) clashes among criminal mafias and smuggling networks; and (7) a transnational revolutionary insurgency (organized by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) that sought to govern in the areas it captured.

These multiple conflicts reveal the shortcomings of the ethnosectarian, master-cleavage framework. For one, many actions were driven by economic incentives. For example, attacks against individuals and facilities employed in the oil industry were first interpreted by US policymakers as Sunni grievances against the occupation. Yet these attacks had specific economic incentives: The rehabilitation of pipelines threatened a large alternative economy

that had developed around the transportation of oil by tanker trucks during the 1990s embargo.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, the violent dissolution of the Iraqi state unleashed new fault lines. Emblematic of this was the rise of the Mahdi Army, an organization of young Shi'i urban militants with a power base in the shantytowns and slums of a previous generation's rural-urban migration. They faced off not only against US troops but against conservative coalitions comprising the Shi'i traditional clergy, its tribal following, formerly exiled Islamist parties, and the urbanized elite.

Armed conflict was also driven by crucial intrasect splits. In 2007, US forces began to vet and fund armed nonstate actors to encourage resistance to insurgents from local communities in western Iraq that were increasingly opposed to the insurgents' disruption of the local economy, social mores, and political hierarchies. By the end of 2007, an estimated 75,000 to 85,000 men, largely Sunnis, had joined what was dubbed the Sons of Iraq militia, expanding from Anbar to Babil, Nineveh, Salah al-Din, Tamim, Diyala, and Baghdad. Within eight months, al-Qa'ida had been largely eliminated in al-Anbar province.

A new phase of the conflict began in 2014, through the dramatic ascent of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS), which originated as a splinter faction from al-Qa'ida in Mesopotamia and rapidly captured much of northern Iraq—and aimed for Baghdad. Like previous coalitions of militants in the western provinces, ISIS included networks of former Ba'thist security personnel, Sunni Islamist militants, and foreign fighters. Yet its goal of revolutionary political and social change was novel. ISIS proclaimed itself a caliphate, a form of government associated with early Islam and with the successive Islamic empires that dominated the Muslim world until the early 1920s. While other Islamist groups view the caliphate as an ideal form of government that ought to be reinstated, they have not tried to establish it in the modern international system. More importantly, ISIS also sought to *govern* the territories under its military control, asserting control over the flow of water and oil resources, extracting taxes on goods and services, and taking charge of education and culture.

ISIS's territorial conquests followed the pattern of a symmetric nonconventional war: ISIS could engage the Iraqi army, Shi'i paramilitaries, and Kurdish Peshmerga directly, but given the absence of US troops (withdrawn from Iraq in 2011), all military technologies were matched at a low level. Moreover, unlike previous irregular conflict, this new phase displayed clear, if changing, frontlines. The army and police's disintegration in the face of a few thousand ISIS militants in the summer of 2014 revealed the corruption of security forces. According to the new prime minister appointed in the wake of the crisis, the army's payroll included fifty thousand "ghost soldiers" who received salaries without working. The United States resumed operations in Iraq in June 2014 as a result of the inability of Iraqi security forces to contain the movement. By 2017, Iraqi state security forces accompanied by Shi'i militias and aided by US air raids had recaptured the areas.

An estimated 180,000 to 200,000 civilians were killed between March 2003 and mid-2018.¹⁰⁶ Around 260,000 Iraqis are currently registered as refugees with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), but the total number of refugees is believed to be much higher.¹⁰⁷ The most recent wave of displacement began in early 2014, with more than 5.4 million Iraqis forcibly displaced between 2014 and 2017.¹⁰⁸

Religion and Politics

Religion and politics intersect in Iraq in multiple and fluid ways. Leaders have used different elements of religion as sources of claim making to legitimize their authority—sometimes articulating platforms grounded in different interpretations of religious *text*, other times highlighting their personal abidance by religious *practice*, and often injecting political symbolism into religious *ritual*. Even Ba‘thists, who some see as the paragon of secular nationalism, promoted an idiosyncratic, Arab nationalist interpretation of Islam and used religious symbolism to undermine opposition movements, from the (Sunni) Muslim Brotherhood to Shi‘i Islamist mobilization in the south.¹⁰⁹ Religion as *collective identity* has also served as a source for bottom-up community building to demand collective rights—first, through religiously based social movements, militias, and diaspora groups and, since 2003, through political parties involved in electoral politics.

Scholars disagree on whether religion has unique effects on politics. While some argue its effects are no different from other forms of collective identification—such as class, ethnicity, language, or tribe—others posit religion is inherently unique due to doctrinal differences derived from sacred texts and the sheer magnitude of the stakes (i.e., eternal reward and punishment).¹¹⁰ Iraq’s experience suggests a third alternative: Religion can indeed play a unique role, but one that is rooted in the processes of state-building and breakdown rather than in doctrinal divisions.¹¹¹

This dynamic is most apparent in Iraq’s experience with the main division within Islam—that between Sunni and Shi‘i Muslims.¹¹² As the site of the holiest shrines in Shi‘i Islam and of prestigious religious seminaries in and around the shrine city of Najaf—known collectively as the “scientific place of learning” (*al-hawza al-‘ilmiyya*)—Iraq holds unrivaled symbolism for Shi‘a worldwide.¹¹³ This unique place in transnational Shi‘ism has endowed the Iraqi Shi‘i clerical

establishment with an independent source of power from Baghdad, encouraging it to make forays into politics that have challenged every central government. Clerics have not always enjoyed success in mobilizing large numbers of Iraqi Shi'a for political ends. Between the 1930s and 1970s, many urban middle, lower-middle, and working-class Shi'a, particularly in southern cities, actively supported the Iraqi Communist Party. The Ba'th's Arab nationalism also attracted many middle-class Shi'a in the 1960s, who joined the ranks at every level in the party hierarchy. The tide began to turn in favor of Shi'i Islamism in the late 1970s as a result of a confluence of factors: the Ba'th's violent crackdown on the communists (and its banning of all parties); the increasingly narrow regional base of the Ba'th's higher echelons (networks in northcentral Iraq); and a regional trend of Islamist parties challenging secular movements' failures to deliver on socioeconomic development and political liberation. In sum, the appeal of Shi'i Islamism increased with the closure of alternative avenues for Shi'a to participate in the opposition or in the regime.

Iraq also occupies a second unique position with respect to Sunni-Shi'i identities in the Middle East. As the eastern frontier between the Ottoman Empire and its archenemy Persia and later between the Arab world and Iran, Iraq navigates religious identities through geopolitical channels. The Ottomans excluded Shi'a from military and bureaucratic positions because they feared them to be a potential Persian fifth column and enacted a law prohibiting marriage between Ottoman and Iranian citizens.¹¹⁴ The consequences of this conflation between "Shi'i" and "Persian" would take more violent forms in modern Iraq, when the new state's demographic distribution injected an additional source of tension: Iraqi Shi'a have outnumbered Sunnis since 1920 (56–65 percent versus 32–37 percent).

The Iranian Revolution in 1979 marked a turning point. Not only did it bring to power Shi'i Islamists who proclaimed they would export their revolution—an event that shook the entire region—but it did so right next door. Before 1979, regimes' attempts to erode Shi'i clergy's independent power were those applied to all clergy: tight control of

seminaries, rituals, processions; the appointment of government-approved clerics; and the sponsorship of those who were willing to disavow politics. To discourage its citizens from identifying with Iran, the regime launched a discursive campaign to distinguish “Arab Shi’ism” from “Persian Shi’ism.” After 1979, the regime dealt harshly with Shi’i clergy who called for the establishment of an Islamic government, sentencing prominent clerics to death.¹¹⁵ During the Iran-Iraq war, although most Iraqi Shi’a were fighting as conscripts in the Iraqi army, some Shi’i Islamist opposition parties fought alongside the Iranian army.

The post-2003 political process has fundamentally changed how Sunni and Shi’i identities interact with politics. It is hard to overstate the role that Shi’i diasporic returnees have had on the politicization of sectarian identity in Iraq. Along with Kurdish parties, Shi’i exiles portrayed their suffering under dictatorship almost exclusively as one of communal victimhood and enacted an ethnosectarian power-sharing system that was meant to right past injustices. From this perspective, the Ba’th had solely victimized Kurds and Shi’a, and by extension, all Sunni Arabs were either complicit or had suffered less and thus were less deserving of a voice.

This narrative treated Sunni Arabs as a uniform, homogenous community, despite the fact that they are spread over provinces that encompass several confessional and ethnic groups (except for Anbar) and exhibit urban-rural divides. Although Arab Sunnis were overrepresented in state institutions since the Ottoman era, they did not see themselves as a differentiated group. Instead, Sunni identity was the “taken-for granted underpinning of an Islamic identity and in some cases the assumed marker of national identity . . . it required neither representation nor validation.”¹¹⁶ In response to the post-2003 feeling of disenfranchisement, multiple agendas emerged among Sunni Arabs, one of which has taken an extreme form of Islamism. Salafism has proved to be a useful mobilizing ideology: It attracts foreign fighters and financial assistance through global networks, and it combines very different foreign and domestic

enemies (the United States, Iran, Shi'i parties, former exiles) into a single enemy category of "infidels."¹¹⁷

Aided by the country's demographic breakdown, the new ethnosectarian system, and their dominant narrative of victimhood, parties and movements that mobilize explicitly around a Shi'i Islamist identity are today the primary power brokers in Iraq. Yet they are deeply divided along religious and political lines: between following the religious authority (*marja'iyya*) of Iraqi Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani or that of Iranian Grand Ayatollah Ali Hosseini Khamenei; between supporting the political process to date (e.g., Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq) or engaging in anti-establishment politics (e.g., Sadrist movement); and between advocating for Iran's interventionism in Iraqi politics or seeking to reduce Iranian influence.

Political Economy of Development

Iraq's economic development has tracked three main dynamics over time: the production and transportation of oil, domestic and international armed conflict, and political corruption.

Oil

Iraq's economic development is inextricably linked with oil production; the country possesses the world's fifth-largest crude oil reserves.¹¹⁸ Crude oil accounts for nearly half of GDP,¹¹⁹ 90 percent of government revenue, and 80 percent of foreign exchange earnings.¹²⁰ The effects of natural resource abundance on political-economic outcomes are disputed. Resource curse theory claims that oil causes economic stagnation through the decline in other sectors' competitiveness and the volatility to state revenues. It also holds that oil increases the likelihood of authoritarianism by reducing accountability to citizens, facilitating repression, or increasing the costs of leaving office. Rentier state theory claims that oil causes weak and predatory state institutions. Yet cross-national empirical evidence challenges these theories; oil has no effect when other variables associated with these outcomes are considered and may, at best, have a conditional effect.

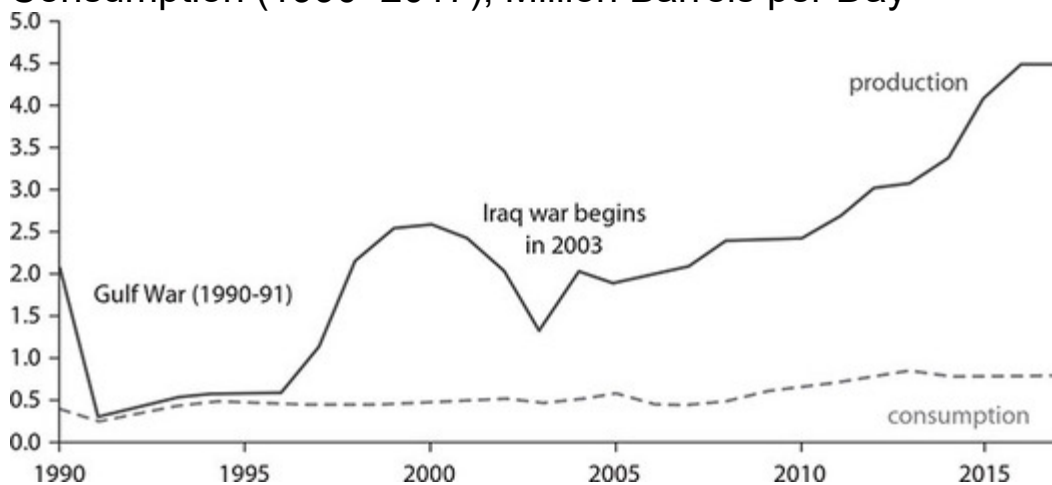
Iraq's experience corroborates these findings. For one, although it has not developed other economic sectors sufficiently—the contribution of non-oil sectors is relatively small both in GDP and in exports—it is unclear that oil is the cause. Governments repeatedly tried to increase agricultural productivity—before and after the boom in fuel rents per capita—and their failures were rooted in weak institutions (see next section). Second, authoritarianism and weak institutions preceded the oil boom, and there are no indications that the country was on a path to democracy. Third, rising oil revenues between 1952 and 1980 were invested in the development of impressive health care, education, and infrastructure systems, rendering the economy one of the strongest in the Middle East.¹²¹ In the decade of the 1970s, per capita income rose from \$306 to \$3,734. Finally, although oil revenue has indeed faced dramatic volatility, the culprit was fluctuations in oil production and exports, not in prices as the resource curse theory expects. Oil production, in turn, has been shaped above all by war (see [Figure 12.1](#)).

Economies of War

Iraq's economic development was reversed by a series of wars beginning in 1980: the war with Iran, the war with Kuwait, the First Gulf War, the sanctions regime (dubbed the “invisible war”¹²²), the Second Gulf War, and post-2003 conflicts. The economic costs were direct and indirect.

The war with Iran (1980–1988) radically transformed Iraq's economy from one dependent on oil into one dependent on foreign aid. Iranian attacks heavily damaged Iraqi oil-export facilities and Syria closed Iraq's pipeline to the Mediterranean. Iraq borrowed to cushion the immediate revenue loss, emerging from the war with a foreign debt of \$50 billion to \$82 billion, the bulk of it owed to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Military expenditures constituted about 70 percent of Iraq's GDP. The vast majority of the population suffered a precipitous fall in their standard of living. Per capita GDP fell from \$4,200 in 1979 to \$1,756 in 1988. The war also drained human and financial resources away from manufacturing and agriculture. More than 20 percent of the labor force was employed in the armed forces; the vast labor shortages led to the recruitment of 1.5 million Arab (mostly Egyptian) workers to run the agricultural, industrial, and service sectors.

Figure 12.1 Iraq's Petroleum and Other Liquids Production and Consumption (1990–2017), Million Barrels per Day



Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration,
<https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=37973>.

The 1990 to 1991 Gulf War dealt a further blow to the economy, both through the destruction of infrastructure and, more persistently, through the postconflict sanctions regime. According to the terms of the sanctions, Iraq owed Kuwait reparations and would have to comply with provisions concerning the dismantling of its weapons systems. Failure to conform would extend the comprehensive international embargo that precluded Iraq from oil exports. By 1997, GDP was at one-half to two-thirds of its prewar level. Government salaries lost almost all their value as the Iraqi dinar effectively became a worthless currency. In 1996, the UN Oil-for-Food Programme allowed the government to sell a portion of its oil, but all revenues had to be spent with UN approval. By 2000, Iraq had become one of the poorest countries in the region, with high malnutrition and child mortality rates.

Infrastructure—electric, water, health, and education systems—was further damaged by the widespread looting that followed the US invasion. When US forces entered Baghdad in March 2003, they only secured the Ministry of Defense, located in Hussein’s Republican Palace, and the Ministry of Oil, allowing massive looting to occur in all other ministries. These initial three weeks of violence and theft severely damaged the state’s administrative capacity: Seventeen of Baghdad’s twenty-three ministry buildings were completely gutted. The estimated cost of the lootings is as much as \$12 billion, equal to a third of Iraq’s annual GDP.¹²³ One of the most deleterious effects of the preinvasion bombing and the subsequent looting was the damage to Iraq’s electrical grid and transmission towers. Nationwide, the average electricity supply dropped from sixteen hours to twenty-four hours per day before the invasion to four hours to eight hours per day in May 2003.¹²⁴

Another effect of the sanctions regime was the rise in smuggling networks as Iraq’s borders became increasingly porous. Some

networks were run by the state or affiliated “contractor bourgeoisie” who linked between the state and neighboring traders. Others involved small-time operators trying to make a living (which also involved cross-border connections, though these were based on kinship, not access to power). The economic structures developed by these networks have been resistant to reform, and their beneficiaries have resisted violently. The CPA’s tenure witnessed systematic attacks on the electricity grid (essential for the oil industry), over seventy attacks on oil-related infrastructure, and attacks on people working for the Ministry of Oil.¹²⁵ The attacks had clear economic incentives: to force the government to give up on transporting oil through pipelines and return to the pre-2003 tanker truck networks developed in the 1990s.¹²⁶

Public Service Provision and Political Corruption

The government's central socioeconomic challenge today is reconstructing core physical infrastructure and delivering services to Iraq's 37 million inhabitants. As the government of a middle-income country, it is severely underperforming in both. Two public sectors in particular are the source of mounting public frustration: electricity and health. Although electricity provision has been increasing, most Iraqis continue to lack a reliable source of power—a brutal situation given that temperatures can rise above 120 degrees Fahrenheit in the summer. Multiple electricity ministers have been suspended from their posts for allegations of corruption. According to the country's top finance and oil officials, \$300 billion was paid to contractors for projects that were never completed.¹²⁷ The country's health care sector cannot accommodate citizens' needs; every year, tens of thousands of Iraqis travel abroad for medical care (primarily to India, Iran, Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon). To fund international treatment, Iraqis sell belongings or are assisted by family, friends, political parties, and tribes.¹²⁸

Photo 12.1 Protesters carry national flags and a fan in Baghdad's iconic Tahrir Square on August 7, 2015, in the midst of a brutal heatwave with frequent power cuts.



AP Photo/Karim Kadim, File

The inadequate delivery of public services has its source in political corruption. Iraq's bureaucracy is thoroughly interwoven with political party interests. About one-third of total government spending goes to public wages and compensation and nearly 40 percent to the Ministries of Interior and Defense. Underlying these figures is an increasingly generous wage scale and sharp growth in public sector numbers, which are believed to include ghost employees and double dipping.¹²⁹ Ministers have used their positions as power bases for appropriating resources and developing clientelistic networks.

Conclusion

Fifteen years after the fall of the Ba'athist regime and seven years after the withdrawal of US troops, Iraqis cannot depend on their state to provide security, political and civil rights, and basic standards of living. The apportionment of the central state into personal fiefdoms and the absence of an independent judiciary to arbitrate has paralyzed the provision of essential services. Mass protests by Iraqi citizens against political corruption are greeted with promises for reform, but subsequent proposed changes seek to insulate against dissent rather than establish measures of accountability. In this environment, a revamped rebel organization was able to take over large parts of Iraq's territory, aided by previous governance experience, the state's weak security organizations, and local yearning for social order. Although the government was able to recapture territory by 2017 (heavily aided by international intervention), the underlying conditions that facilitated the rapid rise of the Islamic State persist. The unprecedented scope and intensity of the summer 2018 protests, coupled with the low turnout in the 2018 elections, suggest that many Iraqis have concluded that change will not come through elections or dysfunctional institutions.

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13 Israel

Lihi Ben Shitrit

A political system must be understood in terms of the people who live under it, their values and ideals, the resources at their disposal, the challenges that face the system, and the institutions developed to meet these challenges. Israel is a fascinating example of a complex system that has developed in a relatively short amount of time (since the 1880s) into a dynamic country undertaking colossal military, economic, and social commitments. The country has undergone tremendous domestic changes over the decades: the continued ingathering of Jews from around the world, parliamentary democracy characterized by the continuing reconstitution of coalition governments, major constitutional changes, and economic transformation. On the international scene, there have been waves of accommodation with its Arab neighbors, alongside continuing tension with Lebanon and Syria and struggles with the Palestinians over land and political rights.

History of State-Building

As discussed by Mark Tessler ([Chapter 2](#)), Israel emerged from interaction with the British mandate, the contact with the local Arabs, the reality of war in Europe, and Jews' collective memory of being a dispersed people seeking a homeland. At the time of establishment in May 1948, the new state faced many problems. The task of adapting the prestate institutions into national institutions in the fields of government, economics, welfare, internal security, and military took place in the shadow of war, economic crisis, and the challenges presented by absorbing vast numbers of new immigrants for which existing infrastructure was far from adequate.

The dominant Labor Party, Mapai, headed by David Ben-Gurion, was best positioned to take the lead during and after the 1948 war of independence as it dominated most of the prestate institutions. Two weeks into the war, the provisional government under Ben-Gurion transformed the Haganah, the main Jewish militia force in the prestate period, into the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and banned independent militias. Other militias such as Palmach, Irgun, and Lehi, affiliated with rival political parties, were integrated into the IDF as separate units. These units were later disbanded, and their fighters were incorporated into the regular army units. The disbanding of the militias did not happen without casualties. In June 1948, the IDF sank the ship *Altalena*, which was carrying weapons purchased in France for the Irgun fighters. Several Irgun members were killed in the incident. Although the event left many Irgun supporters disaffected, it successfully established a state monopoly over the legitimate means of violence.

Elections were held in January 1949. Ben-Gurion's Mapai won the largest number of seats in the Knesset (46 seats out of 120; the *Knesset* is the name for Israel's legislature) and headed the coalition government. The first government worked to consolidate various institutions affiliated with the prestate political parties into a centralized state system dominated by Mapai. By promoting centralization and holding most of the important cabinet portfolios such as foreign affairs, treasury, education, and defense as well as controlling the labor union, Mapai achieved dominance to the extent that the party and the state became almost indistinguishable.

This close association had its benefits for Israel's workers and new immigrants. The Mapai-affiliated labor union, Histadrut, became a powerful actor in the Israeli economy. The Histadrut was committed to the protection and expansion of workers' rights and benefits and to the promotion of progressive labor legislation. The Histadrut was not only the largest labor union; it was also a workers' cooperative and, in that capacity, the largest public employer in Israel. It provided an array of services for workers, including health care, educational, and cultural services. The socialist ideology shared by the ruling Mapai and by the Histadrut and the identity between the leading personalities in the two bodies enabled the passage of the 1950s progressive labor laws that were the foundation of the Israeli welfare state. The association between the Histadrut and Mapai benefited the party as well. To find employment and receive benefits such as health care, workers often had to join the Histadrut. Joining the Histadrut inevitably meant an affiliation with Mapai.

State encouragement of Jewish immigration was another cornerstone of state-building in the years after independence. Through the Jewish Agency organization, the state facilitated a renewed immigration flow of Jews from Asia, the Middle East, Central Europe, and other parts of the world. The absorption and integration of these diverse immigrants and refugees became one of the state's main tasks, but the existing economy and infrastructure were inadequate for the population boom. Many of the new immigrants were settled in deserted Arab homes, in tent camps, and in hastily constructed "transition camps" (*maabarot*). In 1951, there were 127 such camps that were home to more than two hundred thousand immigrants by 1952. Camp residents suffered from poor living conditions and unemployment. Another challenge was the mental difficulty of adjusting to camp life, which entailed the breakup of traditional social structures and intimate interaction with people of diverse cultural backgrounds.

The state responded to the challenge of population expansion by focusing its effort on the establishment of agricultural settlements in the Israeli periphery. This effort came to answer several of the challenges facing the new state. It would alleviate the plight of the unemployed new immigrants in the camps by providing them agricultural work and permanent housing. It would also strengthen Israel's hold on the territories acquired as a result of the 1948 war and prevent Arab infiltration into those areas. Finally, the expansion of the agricultural sector fulfilled the ideological and economic need for self-sufficiency. A great number of *kibbutzim* (socialist agricultural collectives) and *moshavim* (farm collectives with private ownership) were established. Nonagricultural "development towns" were also built to house the new population and to populate the Israeli periphery.

Another of Mapai's state-building projects was the construction of a unifying ethos that would provide a coherent Israeli identity to the diverse immigrant groups that made up the country's population. The state promoted seminal historical events of heroism, biblical stories, and the ideals of Zionism and pioneering as exemplifying the Israeli ethos while it devalued the periods of Jewish Diaspora. One vehicle for the creation of a unifying ethos was the education system. In the prestate years and in the first years of the state, independent school systems affiliated with various political parties took charge of the education of the nation. In 1949, the Knesset passed a law establishing mandatory education but did not end the independent school systems. Very early, Ben-Gurion began to push for a standardized state education system to replace the separate political streams. In 1953, the government terminated the political education streams and introduced a standardized state education system made up of two branches: religious and nonreligious.

Indeed, the question of religion in Israel has accompanied the period of state-building and remains a controversial one to this day. The Declaration of Independence of May 14, 1948, announced the establishment of a "Jewish state," but the specifics of what constituted the state as a Jewish one remained to be debated. To get the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community on board with the Zionist state project, in 1947 Ben-Gurion sent what became known as the "status quo letter" to its leaders in which he outlined the relationship between state and religion in the nascent state. The letter made several concessions to the ultra-Orthodox community: It guaranteed that the Sabbath would be nationally observed as the holy rest day; that personal status matters would not be divided into religious and secular codes, thus ensuring the monopoly of religious law over such matters; and that the autonomy of the ultra-Orthodox education system from state control would remain intact.

As a result of these guarantees, Agudat Israel, the leading ultra-Orthodox party, joined Ben-Gurion's coalition government after independence.

The years between 1948 and 1967 were the period of independence and state-building. The June 1967 War, in which Israel gained control over the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and with them the large Palestinian population residing in these territories, marked the start of a new era of Israel's political history. Mapai dominated the first period of state consolidation and had been impressively successful in meeting the economic, security, and social challenges facing the new state. The second period has been consumed by the dilemmas attendant on the struggle to extricate the country from the fruits of the 1967 victory, including seeking accommodation with the Palestinians. This period saw a decline in Mapai dominance and the rise of the right-wing Likud Party. It also heralded the end of the melting-pot ideology that characterized the nation-building years and the dismantling of the highly centralized welfare state.

Key Facts on Israel

AREA 8,019 square miles (20,770 square kilometers)
CAPITAL Israel declares Jerusalem its capital, but this designation is not recognized internationally. Tel Aviv is the diplomatic capital.
POPULATION 8,842,000 (includes populations of the Golan Heights and East Jerusalem, annexed by Israel after 1967); approximately 22,000 Israeli settlers live in the Golan Heights; approximately 201,000 Israeli settlers live in East Jerusalem
DATE OF INDEPENDENCE May 14, 1948 (from League of Nations Mandate under British Administration)
RELIGION/ETHNIC GROUPS (PERCENTAGE) Jewish, 74.7; Muslim, 17.7; Christian, 2; Druze, 1.6; other, 4
OFFICIAL LANGUAGE Hebrew; Arabic used officially for Arab minority; English widely spoken
TYPE OF GOVERNMENT Parliamentary democracy
GDP (PPP) \$334.7 billion, \$38,413 per capita
GDP (NOMINAL) \$350.9 billion, \$40,270 per capita
PERCENTAGE OF GDP BY SECTOR Agriculture, 2.3; industry, 26.6; services, 69.5
PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION UNDER 25 43.04
RENTS (PERCENTAGE OF GDP) FROM NATURAL RESOURCES 0.185
FERTILITY RATE 3.1 children born/woman

Sources: Central Intelligence Agency, *World Factbook 2017*; Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, *Statistical Abstract of Israel, 2018*, World Bank.

Social Transformation and Challenges

Israel today is a contemporary society populated largely by immigrants attracted by the idea of a Jewish state. In 1948, fewer than 6 percent of the world's Jews lived in Israel, and by 2018, 45 percent did. Modern Israel is largely the result of Jewish immigration in the late nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth centuries. Mass immigration of Jews to Israel continues to enjoy wide support on an abstract level from Jews in Israel and abroad, although the fact is that most Jews of the world do not live in Israel.

Map 13.1 Israel



Even though Israel has always encouraged Jewish immigration, this does not mean that conditions are equivalent for all of its Jewish residents. Most important, earlier waves of

immigrants are advantaged compared with those who came later. Jewish immigration waves in the prestate years (described in detail in [Chapter 2](#)) raised their share of conflict between members of new and older waves over religion, ideology, and leadership. It also set off conflict between the newcomers and the local Arab population. From the beginning of the first wave of Jewish immigration (Aliya) in 1882 to the end of the fifth Aliya in 1939, the number of Jews had grown from 4 percent of the population to 30 percent through immigration. The new immigrants came mainly from Russia and eastern Europe and later from central Europe. Each Aliya had its specific demographic and ideological character with nationalism, socialism, economic opportunism, and the fear of persecution in Europe and Russia animating different waves. The demographic transformation, competing Zionist and Palestinian national claims, and economic difficulties sparked resistance among the Arab population, which reacted violently with demonstrations, strikes, and attacks in the 1920s and 1930s.

With Israel's Declaration of Independence in May 1948, the Arabs again protested, this time through force of arms, with neighboring Arab states attacking the new state in an attempt to abort its birth. Many local Arabs left—some forced out by the Jewish fighting forces and some of their own initiative, thinking that this was but a temporary exodus until the fighting halted. Instead, these local Arabs became permanently displaced, and they currently form the crux of the Palestinian refugee problem that continues to fester.

In 1948, the remnants of the European Jewish society who survived the Holocaust immigrated to Israel, but soon, communities of Jews born in Asia and Africa made up the bulk of the new immigrants. The large number of these immigrants doubled the Jewish population of the country within these years and heightened the already difficult economic conditions faced by the new country. Between 1948 and 1951, seven hundred thousand immigrants were added to the 650,000 Jews already in Israel.

Waves of immigration came at a fast and furious pace. Jews came from Algeria, Bulgaria, Egypt, India, Libya, Morocco, Poland, Romania, Turkey, Yemen, and Yugoslavia and from as far away as Argentina. Nearly all of Yemen's thirty-five thousand Jews left for Israel. The highest monthly immigration rate was recorded during the first seven months of 1951, when some twenty thousand immigrants arrived in the country each month. After reaching a low annual figure of eighteen thousand immigrants between 1952 and 1954, the figure reached seventy thousand in 1957, and immigration between 1961 and 1965 reached 230,000, coming largely from Morocco and Romania. The government was hard-pressed to feed and house the new immigrants.

The Israeli economy was unprepared for the absorption of such a large number of immigrants. Israel experienced a severe balance of payment crisis, and austerity measures were introduced to curb the threat of inflation. Food and clothing were rationed, leading to long lines and shortages and creating a vibrant black market. The austerity measures also fostered rising resentment among the country's population. However, by 1953 the economy was starting to stabilize. Later, the inflow of funds from West Germany as part of its 1953 Holocaust reparation agreement with Israel as well as aid from the US government and the Jewish Diaspora slowly brought a recovery to the Israeli economy and contributed to rising living standards. Nevertheless, the absorption of this immigration wave of predominantly Middle Eastern (Mizrahi) Jews by a struggling Israeli economy, inadequate infrastructure, and a host society of largely European descent (Ashkenazi)

spelled great difficulties to the newcomers. Loss of social and economic status as well as cultural marginalization of the new immigrants fostered frustrations that would reach their height in the 1970s with mass protests and would put an end to Mapai's political dominance.

Another demographic challenge presented itself in the aftermath of the June 1967 War. The conquest of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip brought the entire Palestinian population of these territories under Israeli control. The military rule Israel had imposed in the territories meant that Israel was now to a large extent responsible for the well-being of the Palestinian community. It also entailed the entrance of many Palestinian laborers into the Israeli workforce, effectively replacing Jewish laborers in low-income jobs in some fields such as agriculture and construction. Cheap Palestinian labor meant that Mizrahi Jews could no longer compete for low-paying agricultural and construction employment; but the consequence of the June 1967 War led to a boom in the Israeli economy, and many Mizrahi Jews were able to become employers, often as contractors to mainly Palestinian laborers.

By 1967, the sources of potential Jewish immigration had changed: The eastern European and North African reservoirs were largely dried up, leaving Western countries and the Soviet Union as places where large numbers of Jews lived. Of the 250,000 Jews given exit visas from the Soviet Union in the 1970s, however, only 160,000 came to Israel. The end of the Soviet Union in 1989 saw a resurgence of Jewish immigration to Israel. Between 1989 and 2007, 1.2 million Jews came to Israel. In 1990, 184,300 Jews arrived from the former Soviet Union and in 1991, an additional 146,700. The great bulk of the Ethiopian Jewish community came as a result of an airlift, Operation Solomon, in 1991; the operation involved 14,200 immigrants.

Most of the 609,900 immigrants from the former Soviet Union between 1989 and 1995 were well educated, secular, and steeped in Western and Russian culture. They came because the Soviet Union was crumbling, the political and economic future was uncertain, and they were concerned about anti-Semitism. Most of them discovered Zionism and Judaism in Israel, not in the Soviet Union. Many had brothers, sisters, and cousins who went to the United States and other Western countries during the same period, and many of these immigrants would have joined their relatives there if they could have. The major feature of this Soviet immigrant group was their high level of education; 60 percent were professionals, compared with 28 percent for the Jewish population already in the country.

These immigrants had to adjust to the multicultural and, in their view, significantly Levantine society in Israel. They also experienced a decline in social status as appropriate jobs meeting their qualifications were not readily available. Housing was another major challenge because of the large number of immigrants. The state had to reformulate its immigrants' absorption method from the practice of housing new immigrants in temporary "absorption centers" to providing each immigrant an "absorption package" that included financial assistance for renting an apartment and for subsistence. The cheap cost of living in the highly subsidized Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank led to the settlement of a substantial number of the immigrants in these territories. To the chagrin of the Palestinians, this trend contributed to the growth of the Jewish population in the settlements.

Photo 13.1 Crowds at the Damascus Gate in Jerusalem reflect Israel's social diversity.



AHMAD GHARABLI/AFP/Getty Images

Ethiopian immigrants, who had been literally picked out of their underdeveloped African homeland overnight, faced even greater difficulties as they came to a country that was very different from the one they had left and one that had very few former immigrants like them. Tracing their Judaism back to King Solomon and Queen of Sheba, the Ethiopians brought traditions that had developed separately from the rest of the Jewish world. Accordingly, in addition to their economic status and cultural difference, many were seen as lacking in a religious sense as well. They were required to undergo Orthodox conversion and to send their children to religious schools. Their social and economic integration faced serious challenges.

Ethnic Divisions: Intra-Jewish Cleavages

Intra-Jewish ethnic divisions have been a prominent feature of Israeli politics. The subject is a complex one, but the major distinction among Jews is between Ashkenazim, who came to Israel from Europe and America, and Mizrahim (also referred to as Sephardim), who immigrated from Middle Eastern countries. The terms *Ashkenazim* and *Sephardim* have their origins in the medieval period of the various communities' sojourning in the Diaspora following different expulsions throughout history. More appropriately, three divisions should be recognized: a Mizrahi (meaning Oriental or Eastern, in Hebrew) community of Jews who never left the Middle East; the Sephardim, whose language (Ladino) and ethnic culture originated in Spain before the expulsion of 1492; and the Ashkenazim (referring to Germany), whose hybrid language was Yiddish. It is the Ashkenazi-Mizrahi division that constitutes the main ethnic cleavage among Jews in Israel. Most of the world's Jews are Ashkenazim, but only about one-quarter of them live in Israel, compared with about two-thirds of the Mizrahim. Israel's Jewish population is roughly half Mizrahi and half Ashkenazi; but as the children of mixed marriages—between Mizrahi and Ashkenazi, now approximately 20 percent of total marriages—come of age, these distinctions become difficult to maintain.¹ Moreover, despite a tumultuous history of ethnic tensions in the twentieth century that significantly impacted Israeli politics, by the beginning of the twenty-first century the Mizrahi-Ashkenazi cleavage had lost much of its salience in formal politics.

The Mizrahi-Ashkenazi nomenclature first emerged as a major theme in Israeli politics in the late 1950s. The integration of Jews from Middle Eastern countries in the 1950s and 1960s into the new Israeli state was replete with difficulties and discrimination. Many of these immigrants had to leave most of their possessions in their countries of origin and had to adjust to a lower socioeconomic status in Israel. They were sent to live in poor, peripheral "development towns" and were employed as blue-collar laborers and in agriculture although most were traders and craftsmen by profession. Many were less educated than their Ashkenazi counterparts, a factor that greatly affected their income levels compared with Ashkenazim.

In 1959, the dissatisfaction of Mizrahi immigrants over this state of affairs exploded in semispontaneous violent demonstrations and clashes with police. Known as the Wadi Salib incident, the protest began in a neighborhood of Haifa by that name and soon spread to Mizrahi towns across the country. The police successfully contained the protest, but in its aftermath, the government took some steps to alleviate the poor living conditions of the Wadi Salib residents by providing them new housing outside of the neighborhood. The government also increased budgets for addressing the economic hardships of *maabarot* residents.

Nevertheless, socioeconomic inequalities as well as discrimination and cultural marginalization continued. Although the conditions of second-generation Mizrahi Jews born in Israel improved in comparison with the conditions of their parents, they still achieved lower educational and income levels than second-generation Ashkenazim. While these gaps have been closing slowly, disparities have not yet disappeared. The cultural hegemony of Ashkenazi Jews has also deemed Mizrahi culture as "lower class" compared with the "upper class" or sophisticated European culture of the Ashkenazim.

It was in the 1970s when the Mizrahi-Ashkenazi cleavage reached its height in Israeli politics. In 1971, a group of young, second-generation Mizrahi residents of Jerusalem formed the Black Panthers movement, borrowing the name from its US counterpart. The group organized a series of mass demonstrations protesting the discrimination and marginalization of the Mizrahim. Golda Meir, Israeli prime minister at the time, refused to recognize the validity of the group's claims; her response was simply to state dismissively that the young Mizrahi organizers were "not nice." Although somewhat popular, the group failed to translate the momentum it had created into political power, and it disintegrated because of internal conflicts.

The Black Panthers protest, although unsuccessful, made the Mizrahi-Ashkenazi cleavage a central feature of Israeli politics. In 1977, the majority of Mizrahi Jews voted for the right-wing opposition Likud Party, a move that helped bring an end to the dominance of Mapai (later called the Labor Party). Mizrahi Jews identified Mapai, the ruling party since Israel's establishment, as responsible for their discrimination. Menachem Begin, the Likud leader who was himself Ashkenazi, employed ethnic-grievance rhetoric as a way to attract Mizrahi voters. Aside from its rhetoric, however, the Likud government did little to improve the socioeconomic conditions of Mizrahi Jews, and it focused its efforts on the settlements in the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967. This inattention led to a new pattern of Mizrahi political organizing in the 1980s and 1990s—the rise of sectarian Mizrahi parties.

The first such party, Tami, was established in 1981. Its leaders broke away from the National Religious Party to form an explicitly Mizrahi one. The party won 3 seats in the 1981 elections, but it failed to widen its appeal, and by 1988, it no longer existed. The next and far more successful stage of Mizrahi organizing began with the establishment of the Shas Party in 1984. Shas branded itself as an ultra-Orthodox Sephardi party with an explicit agenda of improving the socioeconomic conditions of the Mizrahi population and reclaiming the lost pride of Mizrahi traditional religious culture. Shas was not simply a political party; it was also a social movement for religious and cultural Mizrahi revival, with its own separate education system that included religious schools, kindergartens, yeshivas, and synagogues. During the 1990s, the party's influence grew with each election. In the 1992 elections, the party won 6 seats in the Knesset. In 1996, its presence grew to 10 seats, and in 1999, it reached 17 seats. In the three twenty-first-century elections, the party won 11 or 12 seats each time, but in the 2015 election, its seats decreased to 7.

Although Shas has been the most successful ethnic party, its ultra-Orthodox religious orientation and its inability to deliver on economic promises to lower-income families have limited its appeal. Secular, leftist, and other segments of the Mizrahi population still divide their votes among the mainstream parties (generally Labor and Likud). In addition, as socioeconomic and cultural divisions between Ashkenazi and Mizrahi Jews become increasingly blurred, the political appeal of sectarian Mizrahi organizing is diminishing. Culturally, however, Israel has experienced a flourishing of Mizrahi cultural activism in the last decade, with activists working on mainstreaming Mizrahi music, art, literature, and heritage. Both the Left and the Right have tried to capitalize on this trend, claiming to be more "inclusive" of Mizrahis, a testament to the success and influence of this activism.

Another party that enjoyed ethnic appeal in recent years was the Russian-immigrant-affiliated Yisrael Beiteinu Party (Israel Our Home). By the mid-1990s, Russian Jews

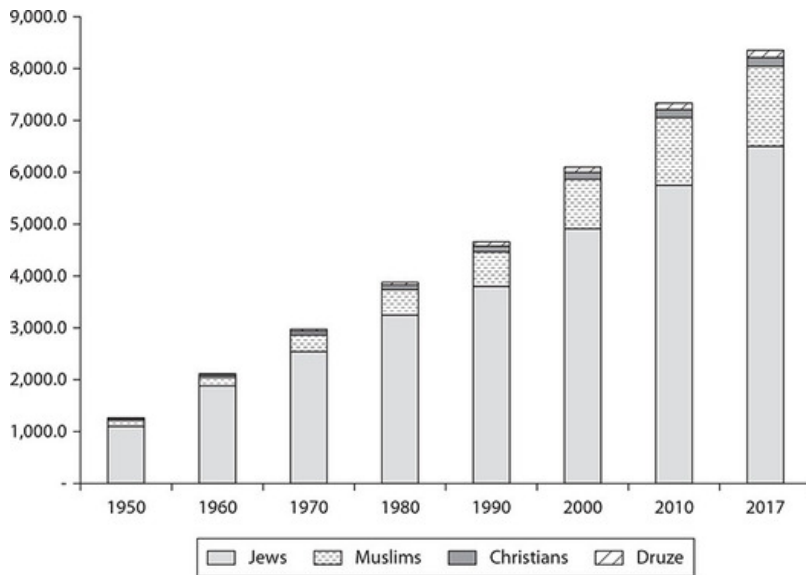
constituted 10 percent of Israel's population and began to vote increasingly along ethnic lines. In 1996, the Russian-immigrant-affiliated Yisrael Bealiya (the word *Aliya* means immigration of Jews to Israel) Party won 7 seats in the Knesset, but later dropped to 6 in 1999 and 2 in 2003. Yisrael Beiteinu, a far-right Russian-led party, won 11 seats in 2006 and 15 in 2009, as it attracted high numbers of Russian voters as well as non-Russian, right-wing voters and became the third-largest party in the Knesset in 2009. In the 2013 election, it merged with the governing Likud, but split from it in the 2015 election. A series of corruption scandals led to its poor performance in 2015, in which it won only 6 seats.

Palestinian Citizens of Israel

Before the establishment of the state of Israel, Palestinian Arabs were a large majority in mandatory Palestine: 96 percent in 1882 and 83.4 percent in 1939. With statehood in 1948, their relative weight fell to 18 percent because the new state boundaries did not include the West Bank and Gaza, and many refugees departed from areas that came under Israeli control. Jewish immigration after Israel's establishment further diminished the relative share of Arabs in the population, which reached a low of 11 percent in 1966. In 1967, following the June war, Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem increased their share to 14 percent. As of 2018, Arabs made up 20.9 percent of Israel's population, numbering 1.85 million. Of the Israeli Arabs, most are Muslim: approximately 1.56 million in 2017, comprising 17.8 percent of the population (see [Figure 13.1](#)). In addition, in 2017 there were 170,000 Christians (both Arab and non-Arab) and 141,000 Druze. Muslim children, however, made up approximately one-quarter of those under age fifteen in the country. The annual rate of growth of the Muslim population in Israel in 2017 was 2.5 percent, compared with 1.7 percent in the Jewish population.²

It is imperative to make a distinction between Palestinian Arabs who are citizens of Israel (called Arab citizens in this chapter) and those who live under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Arab citizens of Israel are those who remained after the 1948 war; they are full citizens of the country. They can organize politically, vote, and be elected to the Knesset. Both Arabic and Hebrew are official languages of the state of Israel. This, however, has not always been the case. In the aftermath of the 1948 war, Israel viewed its Arab citizens with suspicion. Since a majority of the Arabs lived in newly acquired territories along the insecure borders, they were subjected to a military rule that limited many of their democratic liberties until 1966, when Israel ended its military rule. Furthermore, in the early years of statehood, Arabs faced land confiscation by the state for security purposes, a practice that continued well into the 1970s.

Figure 13.1 Population of Israel (in Thousands) According to Religious Affiliation, 1950–2017



Source: Data compiled by author from the Israeli Statistic Bureau.

Arabs are full citizens and no longer face the egregious violations of the early years, but their relationship with the state and its Jewish population remains tense. They live in a Jewish country whose symbols, flag, and national anthem are Zionist and give little expression to their Palestinian identity and heritage. They are not called to serve in the army—one of the important rites of passage for Israeli youth and a key to upward social mobility. They comprise some 20 percent of the population but account for half of those below the poverty line. Their towns and communities receive treatment by the authorities that is inferior to what is given to comparable Jewish ones, and their schools are more crowded than Jewish schools.

Arab citizens have been, on the whole, law-abiding citizens. They have mixed feelings about the state and their place in it, and they are cross pressured by their ethnic ties to Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza and by the Israeli government. Most identify with their Arab background, with their Palestinian roots, and with their refugee cousins, but many also identify themselves as Israelis. Relations between Israel and its Arab citizens faced a very serious challenge with the killing in October 2000 of thirteen Arabs by the Israeli police during demonstrations in support of the Palestinian struggle against Israel, days after the onset of the al-Aqsa intifada in the territories.

Following the incident, a national investigation committee was appointed. Among its recommendations was the call to address the discrimination of the Arab minority and the material inequalities between Jews and Arab citizens of Israel.³ In reaction to the October events, most Arabs boycotted the 2001 elections and contributed to the electoral loss by the incumbent Labor Party and the rise of Ariel Sharon’s right-wing Likud Party.

Relations between Arab and Jewish citizens have been deteriorating further since 2000. Arabs are increasingly vocal in their opposition to Israel’s Jewish character. In 2006, the High Monitoring Committee of the Arab Citizens of Israel, a coordinating committee of the

various Arab political, administrative, and social bodies, together with the Association of Arab Municipalities published its *Future Vision for Palestinian Arabs in Israel*.⁴ The document called for full equality between Arabs and Jews and for abolishing Israel's designation as a Jewish state. For many Jewish Israelis, Arab citizens' identification with Palestinian nationalism and their opposition to a Jewish state branded them as disloyal to the state. Since 2009 under the leadership of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and now former Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman, incitement from government officials against the Arab populations has reached unprecedented levels. The most overt incident occurred in the 2015 election in which the prime minister issued a public video warning against "hordes of Arabs swarming to the polling booths" and calling on his voters to turn out in high numbers to protect his right-wing government. Under Netanyahu, right-wing lawmakers have been competing among themselves in proposing laws that disenfranchise Arab citizens in different ways. The most egregious of these is the "Basic Law: Israel as the Nation State of the Jewish People," which the Knesset passed in July 2018. The aim of the law was to establish Jewish collective supremacy in Israel by various means. Among other things, it states, "The right to exercise national self-determination in the State of Israel is unique to the Jewish people," thus denying any national collective rights to Arabs. It also established Hebrew as the only official language of the state and determines that the "state views the development of Jewish settlement as a national value and will act to encourage and promote its establishment and consolidation." The law opens up new legal ways by which Arab citizens in the country could be discriminated against.

Arab citizens have been organizing in the past decades via civil society associations as well as through formal politics. Several small Arab parties in the Knesset have represented the Arab minority, most prominent among them the socialist Hadash (*al-Jabha*), the nationalist Balad, and the Islamic Movement's United Arab List. A move to raise the minimum threshold for winning seats in the Knesset, introduced before the 2015 election in order to limit the presence of the Arab parties in the Knesset, had the unintended consequences of pushing all three Arab parties to unite. Running as the Joint List in the election, this coalition won 13 seats and became the third-largest party in the Knesset.

Religion and Politics

Israelis often say that once the conflict with the Palestinians is resolved, the secular-religious schism is bound to take center stage. Indeed, the most significant internal cleavage among Jewish Israelis is the one between the religious and secular. The relation between religion and state in Israel is a complex one, requiring significant balancing acts and careful negotiations. The Israeli Declaration of Independence states that Israel shall be a “Jewish and democratic state,” but understandings of what is meant by “Jewish” vary. Two prominent interpretations exist. The first, which is shared by most secular Israelis, is the notion that Israel is “Jewish” in the sense that it is the national expression of the self-determination of the Jewish people. Judaism is both a religion and an ethnic identity, and the majority of nonreligious Israelis believe Israel’s *Judaism* should be limited to the ethnic-national aspect of the term. On the other hand, the various strands of Orthodox religious groups in Israel, including religious Zionists and some ultra-Orthodox groups, advocate a greater role for religion in public life. As a Jewish state, they believe Israel should be ruled according to the *halacha*, or Jewish law.

The pioneer Zionists who established the state and controlled most of its institutions were secular socialists who subscribed to the ethno-national view. For them, Israel’s Judaism was to be expressed in national symbols, such as the flag and anthem that draw on a Jewish symbolic vocabulary and in national holidays that correspond to the holy days of the Jewish calendar. In addition, the 1950 Law of Return and the 1952 Law of Citizenship, which granted any Jew in the Diaspora as well as his or her relatives the right to immigrate to Israel and become a citizen, were instated to ensure that Israel would continue to be a safe haven for Jews everywhere. The secular leadership, however, had to contend with religious Jewish groups present in the prestate years, as well as with their growing power over the years of statehood. Ben-Gurion and the ruling secular elite established a “status quo” arrangement that was meant to preserve the prestate accommodation of religion after independence. This arrangement included a monopoly of the religious courts (rabbinical courts) over matters of marriage and divorce, the observance of the Sabbath as the national day of rest, and the autonomy of the religious education system.

Since independence, the three major religious parties—the ultra-Orthodox (haredi) Agudat Israel, the Orthodox National Religious Party (NRP), and later Shas—have joined ruling government coalitions and have sought to strengthen the religious character of the state. These parties represent the main divisions within the religious camp in Israel. Agudat Israel is a non-Zionist, ultra-Orthodox party whose voters are concerned with preserving the cultural autonomy of the haredi community and the place of religion in the public sphere. The NRP combines religion with Zionism and sees the establishment of the state of Israel as a part of the process of religious redemption. It generally seeks to accommodate the secular Zionist sector and considers it a partner in the redemptive process. Finally, Shas has been mainly concerned with securing budgets for its extensive network of religious and educational institutions, spreading religiosity among Israelis and strengthening the religious character of the state. Both the NRP and Shas have tended to seek control over the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Interior Ministry while in government coalitions. The first allowed them to control budgets and appointments for religious services and institutions, and the latter cemented their hold over matters of

personal status. The religious parties' insistence on the exclusion of the conservative and reform streams of Judaism, which are more progressive on many issues, from conducting marriages or conversions, has caused tensions with Jewish communities in the Diaspora, especially in the United States, where these streams are dominant.

Because religious parties, and especially Shas from the late 1980s onward, can often make or break a ruling coalition, their influence extends far beyond their moderate electoral success. Major social transformations also contribute to their power. The immigration waves of Jews from the Middle East in the 1950s raised the number of observant Jews in Israel, who currently outnumber secular Jews. In addition, the higher birthrates of the ultra-Orthodox have made this community the fastest growing in Israel. The growing influence of the religious parties caused a backlash from the secular Ashkenazi elites. In 2003, the party Shinui, which ran on a solely antireligious platform, won 15 Knesset seats and became the third-largest party. Shinui reflected the resentment felt by secular, middle-class, mainly Ashkenazi Israelis toward what they perceived as the privileges of the religious sector. The exemption of yeshiva students from military service, the extensive social welfare benefits enjoyed by poor haredi families, and the religious monopoly over marriage and divorce were among the issues Shinui sought to address. Its success, however, was short lived, and in the following election, the party disintegrated.

In the 1990s, the influx of immigrants from the former Soviet Union—the vast majority of them secular and about a third non-Jewish—seemed to have tipped the balance toward the secular camp. However, by 2009 the effect of the Russian immigrants was diluted by high birthrates in the haredi sector and an increase in religiosity. In a poll conducted by the Israel Democracy Institute in 1999, 52 percent of Israelis described themselves as secular, while 49 percent described themselves as haredi, Orthodox, or “traditional.” In a repeat poll in 2009, only 46 percent of Israelis identified themselves as secular, while 54 percent belonged to a religious or “traditional” stream.⁵ A Pew Center poll from 2015 found the numbers of Israeli Jews who identified as secular and religious/traditional to be about tied, with half of respondents identifying with the former category and the other half with the latter.⁶

Photo 13.2 Divisions between Orthodox, progressive, and secular Jews over religion and the public sphere are a main cleavage in Israeli politics. In the picture: Clashes between ultra-Orthodox and progressive Jews over prayer at the Western Wall.



Lihi Ben Shitrit

Disagreements over the place of religion in the public sphere continue to fuel conflict among Israelis. In recent years, protests by both the secular and religious communities

have erupted. Sex-segregated public buses in religious neighborhoods and attempts to exclude women from public forums, as well as many other points of contention, have brought secular Israelis to the streets in the last few years. Attempts by secular institutions like the Supreme Court to interfere with practices of the ultra-Orthodox community have caused mass protests on the haredi streets.

The future trajectory of religious-secular relations in Israel is unclear as different trends are pulling in different directions. The fast-paced growth of the religious sector, and in particular of the ultra-Orthodox community, means that the democratic weight of religious parties is bound to increase. However, there is evidence that haredi groups are beginning to open up to modern Israeli society and that they will seek greater accommodation with the secular sector than before. The religious nationalist camp has since the 1970s focused its efforts on the settlement project in the occupied Palestinian territories and has been more ready to compromise on matters of religion and state. A resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which will entail the dismantling of settlements, might cause religious nationalists to redirect their efforts toward making the state more religious. In the absence of a resolution to the conflict, however, it is likely that the historical "status quo" arrangement will persist.

Institutions and Governance

Israel does not have a written constitution, mostly because of the debate between secular and religious Jews. Secularists have insisted that Israel must have a constitution like other modern, Western, liberal states, while religious leaders claim that the Torah and its rabbinical commentaries make up the written constitution of Israel. Because it was impossible to reach agreement on a complete document, the two sides decided to put the constitution together step by step; this legislation would, taken together, form Israel's constitution. Using this rationale, basic laws were legislated covering a variety of topics. There are now eleven of them, but on the most challenging—such as the judicial system and a bill of rights—consensus has not been reached, even more than sixty years later. What exist today are compendiums of regulations such as the Basic Law: the Knesset and the Basic Law: the Government, while others are more declarative, such as the Basic Law: Jerusalem.

Government, Knesset, and Elections

Formally, the legislature generates and controls the government, but the primary fact of Israeli political life is that the government (formed by the prime minister)—not the Knesset—is the focus of the country's political power. The Knesset is the legislature that is elected by the people. The president of the state, who is elected by the Knesset every seven years, appoints a Knesset member as prime minister, usually the leader of the party that won the most Knesset seats in the election. After the government is formed, the Knesset must approve it.

Because no political party has ever won a majority of the vote in Israel's twenty elections, coalition government is inevitable. Cabinet ministers are generally leaders of the political parties in the coalition. Occasionally, ministers are appointed who are not Knesset members, but as a rule, ministers are appointed because they lead parties that have decided to join the ruling coalition and not because of their expertise in the fields controlled by their ministries. As ministers, they have the political power, prestige, patronage, and budget that are related to their ministries.

Formal and informal power rests with the government and its ministers. The government cabinet declares war and ratifies treaties. The prime minister and those close to the prime minister are at the top of the heap. Despite the prime minister's dominance, the Israeli governing system is based on the principle of collective responsibility. The essence of collective responsibility is that cabinet members may object to or vote against a decision in discussions in the cabinet, but once a decision is taken, they must support the decision unless specifically released from that obligation. Ministers are also held responsible for the voting behavior of their party members in the Knesset, and the prime minister, after notifying the Knesset, can remove them from office. This norm, while vocally praised, is applied with great flexibility, and there have been many instances of ministers voting against the government in which they served, especially on controversial issues such as the 1978 Camp David Accords and the 1993 Oslo agreements.

The Knesset, which selects and supports the prime minister and the ruling coalition, has 120 seats and is elected by a proportional representation list system in which very few procedural or technical obstacles face a group choosing to compete; in the recent past, some thirty-five party lists have competed. The Central Elections Committee, made up of representatives of the various parties in proportion to their strength in the outgoing Knesset and headed by a Supreme Court justice, is responsible for conducting the election, including the approval of lists. The law states that a list may not take part in elections for the Knesset if its goals or actions include one of the following: negation of the right of the state of Israel to exist as the state of the Jewish people; negation of the state's democratic nature; or incitement to racism.

Elections are to be "general, national, direct, equal, secret and proportional," which is expressed in Israel's single-district, proportional representational system.⁷ Before the 2006 election, the minimum threshold for election was raised to 2 percent of the vote, and before the 2015 election, it was raised again to 3.25 percent. The Knesset's term is four years unless earlier elections are called.

Supreme Court

Israel's Supreme Court has acquired, by tradition and by the abdication of other institutions, the task of major guardian of justice and civil rights in Israel. The court was initially reticent about interfering in political issues, but since the mid-1980s, it has developed into a dynamic actor in the governmental system. Judges are selected on the recommendation of a nine-member appointments committee that consists of the president of the Supreme Court and two other justices of that court, the minister of justice, one other cabinet minister chosen by the cabinet, two members of the Knesset elected by secret ballot by majority vote, and two practicing lawyers who are members of the Israel Bar Association and approved by the minister of justice. The justice minister serves as chairperson of the appointments committee. Judges serve until the age of seventy.

Beginning in the early 1980s, the judicial activism of the court intensified. In the political sphere, the court overturned the ban by the Central Elections Committee on two parties before the 1984 election, and it did the same thing in 2003 and 2009. Citing the public's right to know, the court required political parties to make public the details of coalition agreements, which became a provision in the revised Basic Law: Government. Apprehension about the court's possible decision caused the Labor Party and the Shas Party to remove a clause in a draft coalition agreement stipulating that the government would introduce legislation circumventing any Supreme Court decision that impinged on the religious status quo. In other cases, the court virtually eliminated censorship in theater productions, reduced censorship for movies, and decided that the army censor could not block publication of an article that included criticism of the head of the Mossad, Israel's national intelligence agency, unless there was a "near certainty" that the content of the article posed a danger to national security. It also backed the right of newspaper reporters not to reveal their sources.

In the religious sphere, the court ordered the registration as a Jew and the granting of new immigrant status to a woman from the United States who had undergone a Reform conversion; forced a political leader who also served as a judge in the High Rabbinical Court to relinquish his judicial position; ordered the inclusion of women in religious councils and in the electoral groups that selected candidates for religious councils; and ordered El Al, the national airline, to provide a homosexual employee's partner the same benefits it provided other married workers. The Supreme Court's reputation for liberal decisions is diminished by its restraint on security issues. It upheld the expulsion of 418 members of the Palestinian Islamic resistance movement Hamas without a prior hearing, it approved demolishing the homes of terrorists, and it did not overturn the practice of using "moderate physical force" in interrogations of Islamic fundamentalists.

A leading figure for much of the court's activity, and for the attendant blame or praise, was Aharon Barak, who was appointed in 1978 and who served as president of the court between 1995 and 2006. Barak was directly involved in the constitutional revolution that took place in the country, expanding judicial review and the right of citizens to petition the Supreme Court. Barak led in applying the test of "reasonableness," under which the court can annul a cabinet or Knesset decision if it is deemed unreasonable in the extreme. The reasonableness doctrine signifies the court's changed perception of its role in the political system as one that goes beyond adjudication to the application of substantive criteria in its

review of laws and policies. The use of the doctrine of reasonableness to invalidate legislation or administrative action, known as substantive due process in the United States, was accelerated in the 1980s when the Supreme Court overturned the government's appointment of a former Shin Bet agent as director general of the Housing Ministry; the court determined that he was not fit for public office because he had perjured himself during two security service scandals. Although the appointee had never been convicted, the High Court struck down the nomination on the ground that such an appointment was so unreasonable that it was illegal and, therefore, invalid.

Activist courts have raised active opposition from both the public and the Knesset, and the level of trust in the Court reflected in opinion polls has decreased over the years. Calls have increased for limiting the scope of the court's jurisdiction, for changing the manner of appointing justices, for making provisions for a more varied group of justices, and for limiting or preventing judicial review of legislative actions. Political opponents, especially those from religious circles and from the right of the political spectrum, accused the Supreme Court of pursuing its own liberal political agenda. Debate over the nature of the Supreme Court has intensified in the twenty-first century but has not led to changes in the court's activism.

Military and Security

Defense is the policy area that commands the most attention, the largest concentration of budget, and years of active service of most Israelis. This policy area has overshadowed all others in Israel, and it often recruits top-level individuals to serve its demands and rewards, many of whom have reached the top of its hierarchies with prominent second careers in politics, business, and administration. Placing a priority on defense has become part of the Israeli way of life; an overwhelming proportion of the population sees it as the central issue facing the nation. The defense issue penetrates the value system of the country, as symbols of military strength, self-sacrifice, and heroism are given positive recognition in the culture. In recent years—since the Lebanon war in 1982, a war that many Israelis considered avoidable—some Israelis have criticized the military and questioned its security symbols. The crisis of military effectiveness in dealing with the intifada, the wars in Lebanon and Gaza, the years of occupation, and the use of the military to remove Jewish settlers from the Gaza Strip continue to undermine the status of the military in both leftist and rightist circles.

The impact of the defense issue is seen clearly in the arrangements that have been worked out regarding national service, which provides many an important form of identification with the country; for other Israelis—the Arab citizens—it signifies rejection of or exclusion from the mainstream of Israeli life. The defense issue segregates the Jewish from the Arab population by requiring army service from Israeli Jews while exempting Israeli Arabs. Military service is still an important requisite for many positions of power and importance in Israeli life; it is also the main vehicle for upward social mobility. Non-Jews are therefore severely disadvantaged.

Most Jewish Israeli men and about half of the women complete their compulsory army service. Men often serve in reserve units into their forties; women are exempted from service after they have a child. The pervasive structure of the military enterprise ensures that most Jewish families have a connection with the army. This universality ensures a high level of salience for military matters and tends to lend implicit public support to Israel's defense policies.

Two Jewish groups are exempted from army service for political reasons. The conscription of most yeshiva students is formally deferred—in effect, they are exempted—while they are studying. This arrangement began in the early days of statehood, when Ben-Gurion agreed to the demands of the ultra-Orthodox that some four hundred of the seven thousand yeshiva students be exempted from army service; technically, they were granted extensions of their call-up dates. The number of those receiving exemptions ballooned, increasing more than a hundredfold to more than fifty thousand. Religiously observant women may also avoid active service. Both groups are regularly attacked for shirking their duty. While alternative forms of national service are often suggested for religious women and Arabs, these exist only as voluntary options.

No area of Israeli public life is immune from the impact of defense. Major economic decisions in varied fields such as industrial infrastructure, natural resource development, privatization, and urban planning take defense considerations into account. Defense also affects cultural matters ranging from religious law to the development of an army slang that

makes the army one of the most fertile areas for development of the Hebrew language. The structure of the education system is also influenced by the demands of defense. The curricula of vocational high schools are affected; Israeli university students tend to begin their studies after a number of years of army service and remain likely to be called up for reserve service, along with many of their teachers, during their years of study.

Every Israeli leader has reaffirmed the intention to maintain Israel's strategic nuclear deterrent capability, even in peacetime, and Israel boasts sophisticated and wide-ranging strategic deterrents founded upon the reach and power of its air force and its arsenal of undeclared nuclear weapons. The Dimona nuclear plant has reportedly been manufacturing plutonium for more than four decades; the quantity, deployment, and type of Israel's nuclear weapons and the doctrine regulating their use remain some of the state's deepest secrets. Israel's conventional and nuclear deterrent capabilities have convinced most of its Arab enemies of the necessity of ending their military confrontation with the Jewish state. These capabilities, in Israel's view, permit it an unprecedented degree of flexibility in recasting its territorial engagements, and they form the foundation of a strategic partnership with the United States.

Although formally subordinate to the political leadership, the defense institutions have in fact become partners in the political process. No strong autonomous civilian ministry has been set up to oversee the functioning of the military since Ben-Gurion was the civilian in charge of the IDF, and his oversight was deemed sufficient. The Ministry of Defense has become a civilian aide for the army, with all major functions of budgeting, procurement, and military strategy situated in the army itself or duplicated in the Defense Ministry. The position of the military leadership at times plays an important part in the civilian leaders' political calculus. As a result of this power balance, civil-military relations in Israel are problematic, and frequently, the sides blur.

Even in a constitutional sense, civilian control over the military is blurred. We know who the chief of staff is, but it is more difficult to determine who the commander in chief is. Collective responsibility lies with the government, and many ministers often speak out on military matters to the discomfort of the minister of defense and the prime minister. The Basic Law: Israel Defense Forces, passed in 1976 in response to the evidence of a lack of clear lines of authority during the October 1973 War, formalized the constitutional decision-making hierarchy. The army is under the authority of the government, and the defense minister acts through the government's authority in defense matters. The highest decision-making level within the army is the chief of staff, who is appointed by the government on the recommendation of the minister of defense. The chief of staff is under the authority of the prime minister and the defense minister.

Political Participation: The Left-Right Spectrum, Political Parties, and Civil Society

Much of political discourse, and the ideologies and parties associated with it, is based on the assumption that political groupings can be ordered on a continuum from left to right. But the Left and Right (or liberal and conservative, in US parlance) are multifaceted at best, elusive at worst, and divergent over time and across polities. There are a number of reasons why *left* and *right* are terms too simplistic to capture the complexity of Israeli politics. Broadly, the Left represents the socialist values of equality, social justice, and international cooperation; the Right has historically been associated with capitalist values such as freedom of opportunity, competition, restricted government activity, and nationalism.

In certain senses, this description fits Israel, but in other important senses, it is incomplete. For many years and certainly since the June 1967 War, the major Zionist parties have competed for the nationalist mantle, placing the highest value on security and on the survival of Israel as a Jewish state. The Right tends to argue that these goals can be achieved using a firm, nonconciliatory policy, while the Left favors more flexibility and concessions. Nevertheless, it was the left-leaning Alignment coalition that began the policy of settling the Palestinian territories, the right-leaning Likud that ceded the Sinai to the Egyptians, and the Likud's (later, the Kadima Party's) Ariel Sharon who accepted the principle of the unilateral withdrawal from Gaza. None of these government actions could have been anticipated via the left-right continuum alone.

In addition, in Israel the meaning of *left* and *right* may well change over time as party positions change, making the ranking provided by today's continuum somewhat different from that of earlier years. Another difficulty is that parties often employ general rhetoric in their election campaigns, which are unspecific on particular policy debates and are therefore hard to categorize as left or right. A final problem relates to how the continuum is perceived and understood by the electorate. For most people, politics is a matter of leaders and parties, whose images are no less important than ideological issues of left and right. Alternatively, some think of politics in terms of specific questions facing the polity or in terms of the ability of a party to satisfy group demands. The left-right continuum in Israel often fills a political function more than an ideological one. It is thus a simple but useful shorthand for the initiated to use to understand and order the political scene. A more in-depth look at political parties is provided in the next section.

Political Parties and Elections

The basic division of the Israeli party system is between Likud and Labor, and it is useful to conceive of them as the major building blocks of the system. Every Israeli prime minister has come from one of these parties, and one of these parties has been the linchpin of every government coalition formed in Israel. Thus far, there have been three major periods in Israeli politics: dominance by Labor until 1977, a period of competitiveness between 1981 and 1996, and flux and dealignment since 1999. In 1999, the combined size of the two parties in the Knesset was the lowest ever; between them, they controlled slightly more than one-third of the Knesset. Sectarian politics and fractionalization coincided with the introduction of the direct election of the prime minister, which was used for the elections between 1996 and 2001. After the repeal of the direct election of the prime minister, the Knesset elections again became crucial.

Parties of the Left won some 50 of the 120 seats in the Knesset in the 1949 through 1969 era and about 60 seats in 1977 and 1992, but then they fell to a miserable low of 18 seats in 2009. The Right peaked with close to 50 seats in 1981, 2003, and 2009. Center parties (Rafi, Democratic Movement for Change, Shinui, Kadima, Yesh Atid, Kulanu) did best since 2006, hovering at around 20 seats. Religious parties stayed at fewer than 20 seats through 1992, won more than 20 seats in 1996 through 2003, and then fell back below 20 seats in 2006 and 2009. Arab parties won 10 seats or fewer until 2006; then they won 11 seats in 2009 and 13 seats in 2015, winning the majority of Arab votes.

In the early years of statehood, Mapai (now the Labor Party) was especially successful among those who identified with the dominant values of that epoch—independence, immigration, socialism, building the land, and security. After the founding of the state, these undertakings were continued, sometimes within different organizational settings and institutional arrangements but with much of the same symbolism and ideological justification. As the values of the party and movement permeated the society, the distinction between party and state was often blurred; achievements of state accrued to the benefit of the party. Jews who immigrated to Israel before independence and immediately thereafter continued to support Labor heavily, but the rate of support fell off among those who immigrated after 1955 and among Israeli-born voters.

The Likud saw the problems of the country from a different ideological perspective and consequently found its support among different groups, particularly the native-born and Mizrahim. These groups tended to have lower education and income levels as well as hawkish opinions on foreign and defense policy. In opposition until 1977, Likud gave the appearance of being broadly based in its electoral support because it blended the preferences of its two major components: the right-wing, nationalistic Herut movement and the bourgeois Liberal Party. Herut appealed disproportionately to lower-class and lower-middle-class workers and to Israelis born in Middle Eastern countries, although obviously many Ashkenazim also supported it. By contrast, the middle-class and upper-middle-class merchants and businesspeople, often more educated, were drawn to the Liberals. In the 1977 elections, the Likud campaign focused on socioeconomic and ethnic grievances for which it blamed Labor and on the catastrophic failure of the incumbent leadership in the October 1973 War. It succeeded in ousting Labor for the first time since independence.

The religious parties generally received about 15 percent of the vote—although in 1996 and 2006 their total shot up to some 20 percent—and they were regular coalition partners in the majority of governments, whether headed by Labor or Likud (or Kadima in 2006). The main religious parties were the National Religious Party (NRP), which pursued a nationalist, religious Orthodox agenda; the ultra-Orthodox parties, such as Agudat Israel, which were mainly concerned with budgets for the ultra-Orthodox community and its institutions as well as with the Jewish character of the state; and Shas, which has developed since the 1980s and into the twenty-first century as the major religious party. A Mizrahi ultra-Orthodox party, Shas carried out a campaign focused on socioeconomic and Mizrahi ethnic grievances and a return to religion. It won its major support from traditionalists with lower incomes, lower levels of education, and Middle Eastern backgrounds. The NRP lost votes in 1988 to the Likud for ideological reasons and to Shas for ethnic ones. Its rebound in 1996 was the result of moderating its ideological appeal, retaining its nationalist base, and undertaking successful organizational efforts. By 2006, the NRP was suffering from major setbacks while ultra-Orthodox parties were in ascendance. In 2013, now under the name The Jewish Home, it secured 12 seats in the Knesset, a number that fell to 8 in 2015.

Occasionally, small centrist parties have emerged, but these in general have been short lived. Among these, the Kadima Party has been the most successful centrist party in Israeli history. The party was formed by Ariel Sharon before his stroke and was headed by Ehud Olmert in the 2006 elections. Kadima's leadership was made up mostly of former Likud Party ministers, and it positioned itself between the right-wing Likud and the left-wing Labor, promoting "disengagement"—a unilateral, partial Israeli withdrawal from Palestinian territories—as its alternative to the deadlock in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. In 2009, Kadima, headed by Tzipi Livni, was the biggest vote getter, but the coalition was formed by Likud's Benjamin Netanyahu, who capitalized on the strength of religious and right-wing parties. This election saw the two big parties fade in popularity. Likud won only 27 of the 120 seats in the Knesset, although Netanyahu, its leader, was able to form the government; Labor won 13 seats. Kadima won 28 seats in 2009. Labor was only the fourth-biggest party in 2009, smaller than Avigdor Lieberman's right-wing Israel Beiteinu, which won 15 seats. After the election, the Labor Party entered Netanyahu's coalition, a move that severely weakened the opposition bloc in the Knesset. However, in 2011 Labor returned to the opposition and in the 2015 election became again the largest opposition party, with 24 seats.

Until the last few elections, turnout in Israeli elections was extremely high, with average voting between 1949 and 2009 at about 78 percent. The highest rate of participation was in the first Knesset elections in 1949, in which 86.9 percent of the eligible population voted. In 2001, however, the rate fell to 62.3 percent (in an election only for prime minister); in 2006, it was only 63.5 percent—the lowest ever for Knesset elections. By 2009, it rose again to 65 percent. The steep declines in the twenty-first century reflect lower rates of participation among both Jewish and Arab voters. In 2001 (the special direct election of the prime minister), 68 percent of Jews voted, compared with only 19 percent of Arabs, bringing the overall turnout rate to 62.3 percent. The 2001 election was held shortly after the eruption of the al-Aqsa intifada and the October 2000 disturbances within Israel in which thirteen Palestinians, twelve of them Israeli citizens, were killed by the police. Arab voters blamed the government, and the disaffection of many Arab citizens was greater than ever. Arab political parties as well as civic organizations campaigned vigorously for a

boycott of the 2001 elections. In 2003, the Jewish turnout level was approximately the same as in 2001 at 69 percent, but the Arab turnout rebounded in 2003 to 62 percent, raising the overall turnout rate to 68.9 percent. In 2006, the turnout rate was 63.5 percent, including only 56.3 percent of Arabs voting. By 2009, participation rates for both Jews and Arabs increased slightly. The 2015 election marked a significant change, with an overall turnout rate of 71.8 percent and about 65 percent turnout rate among the Arab population.

Civil Society

In the first two decades of Israel's existence, the state together with the political parties dominated all areas of civic life. Each party had its own newspaper, health insurance and health care services, women's organization, and even sports association. Citizens tended to identify significantly with their political party, with which they interacted in almost all aspects of their lives. Very little political or social organizing took place outside the realm of the state and the political parties.

After the June 1967 War, changes began to appear. Most notably, independent social movements became increasingly visible and influential in the 1970s. The settlers' movement was successful in affecting government policies of settlement building in the West Bank and Gaza through actions on the ground and lobbying. The Peace Now movement gained popular momentum with demonstrations and actions aimed at the relinquishing of the occupied Palestinian territories. The Black Panthers movement demanding equality for Mizrahi Jews and the women's movement also appeared on the scene. These social movements had a tremendous impact on Israeli politics, making independent civil society organizing an effective means of influencing government policies.

The 1980s, and even more substantially the 1990s, were marked by policies of decentralization, the dismantling of the Israeli welfare state, and the privatization of public services. As a result, Israeli civil society experienced a tremendous boom in its scale and responsibilities as nongovernmental and nonprofit organizations began to provide numerous services previously offered by the state. In addition, the diminishing size and importance of the political parties opened a space for unaffiliated civil society associations and clubs. The surge in civil society activity came to address the many economic, social, and cultural problems within Israeli society; however, most of the activities and organizations focused on service provision and cultural activity rather than on political advocacy. Currently, only a small fraction of civil society organizations are political advocacy groups.

By the start of the twenty-first century, the role of social movements and their popularity seemed to have diminished as Israelis increasingly turned away from politics, many becoming disaffected with the political system and focusing on nonpolitical community work. Nevertheless, to the surprise of most observers of Israeli civil society, in the summer of 2011 mass demonstrations spread throughout the country in protest of the high cost of living. Led by youth activists and the national student union and inspired by the Arab Spring, hundreds of thousands of Israelis took to the streets chanting, "The people demand social justice!" in what became the largest mass protest ever to take place in Israel. Ahead of the Knesset election scheduled for January 2013, several of the protest leaders joined the Labor Party in an attempt to translate the movement's mass appeal into political influence. However, an outbreak of violence between Israel and Hamas in November 2012 overshadowed the protest leaders' new discourse on social justice and placed, once again, the question of security and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as the dominant issue for the 2013 and later the 2015 election campaigns. In addition, in recent years the right-wing-dominated government has taken actions aimed at limiting the freedoms of political civil society organizations. Ministers have increasingly accused human rights and anti-occupation organizations of working for the interests of foreign

countries, and they have attempted to enact laws that would limit their funding or require special tags and identifications marking them as foreign agents. The most egregious interference, however, has been the outlawing of the northern branch of the Islamic Movement in November 2015. Considered the most popular social movement among Arab citizens, this move led to the forcible shutting of numerous religious, educational, and charitable associations and organizations affiliated with the movement.

Political Economy

Israel has an advanced industrial economy, and its citizens enjoy a high standard of living on a par with western European nations: Its current gross domestic product (GDP) per capita is \$38,277 (2017), and the unemployment rate is 3.9 percent. Its economy is also unique, shaped greatly by isolation from the markets of neighboring countries, a lack of natural resources, extraordinary expenditures on defense, and large quantities of international aid.

The Israeli economy began experiencing a profound transformation in the early 1990s. Buoyed by political rapprochement with Jordan and Egypt, the beginning of an agreement with the Palestinians, and the substantial increase in population from the former Soviet Union, the Israeli economy averaged annual growth rates of 6 percent to 7 percent in the first half of the decade. Israel's economic managers have found success in reorienting the economy away from the traditional low-tech and heavy-industry sectors and toward services and the production of products for high-tech industries. Gross foreign direct investment rose from 0.7 percent of GDP in 1990 to 3.33 percent of GDP in 2003, increasing to 4.3 percent of GDP in 2005 and 9.3 percent in 2006. By 2009, the numbers dropped to only 2 percent, but they later rose to 4.1 percent by 2013.⁸ In addition, the US-Israel Free Trade Agreement contributed greatly to an expansion of bilateral trade, which jumped from \$18 billion in 2002 to \$26.6 billion in 2005. In 2013, US goods and services trade with Israel stood at \$46 billion.⁹ Israel has concluded free-trade-area agreements with four other countries, the European Free Trade Association, and the European Union (EU).

Overall, Israel's economic success is derived greatly from aid from abroad. Israel receives an annual grant of approximately \$2.4 billion from the United States—making it the single largest recipient of US foreign aid—and approximately \$500 million in grants from the world Jewish community.

Israel has invested a large portion of its national wealth in creating an arms industry, primarily to ensure a reliable supply. The expertise gained in the maintenance and expansion of a defense industry producing top-of-the-line weapons systems for the IDF has allowed Israel to join the international competition for foreign arms sales, and Israel is one of the world's leading arms exporters. Its military-industrial complex and diamond-cutting sector now dominate industrial production and export sales, a significant change from the era when citrus and agricultural products were the country's most significant earners of foreign currency and its most popular international symbols.

As rapprochement with the Arab world stalled in the mid-1990s, so too did Israel's prospects for the coming economic integration that was supposed to boost regional demand for Israeli products and services. Economic growth slowed substantially beginning in the latter part of the 1990s, and the outbreak of the al-Aqsa intifada in September 2000 and the failure of efforts to reach a final status agreement with the Palestinians and Syria severely depressed economic prospects in the early 2000s. That said, Israel remains well positioned to compete in the knowledge-intensive industries of the twenty-first century, and its economy has the potential to continue to grow at a rate of approximately 4 percent to 5

percent per year, better than the OECD average (see [Figure 13.2](#)).¹³ The proportion of scientists, engineers, and other skilled personnel in the Israeli labor force is high by international standards, and Israeli companies are rapidly developing experience in transforming technology into marketable products and services. Furthermore, the ongoing structural transformation of the economy, especially the shift from traditional to higher-value goods and services, should add to Israel's growth potential in the near future. Two of the main challenges facing the Israeli economy are income inequality and poverty rates, which are higher than the OECD average. This is due largely to low levels of workforce participation by the ultra-Orthodox and Arab citizens, given discrimination and other barriers to entry they still face. For both of these groups, poverty rates stand at around 50 percent, in comparison to 13 percent for other Israelis. Today, haredis and Arabs make up about 30 percent of the population, but they are projected to constitute over 50 percent by 2059. Integrating them fully into the workforce is therefore a pressing matter if Israel's economic health is to persist.¹⁴

Table 13.1 Selected Knesset Election Results, 1951–2015

Table 13.1 Selected Knesset Election Results, 1951–2015

Number of Knesset seats	Year	Prime minister	Party breakdown					
			Left	Mapai/Labor	Center	Herut/Likud	Religious	Right
1	1951	Ben-Gurion	23	46	7	14	16	8
7	1969	Meir	6	60	4	26	12	2
9	1977	Begin	8	32	15	45	16	0
11	1984	Shamir	10	44	7	41	12	1
13	1992	Rabin	12	44	0	32	6	11
17	2006	Sharon	15	19	36	12	12	11
18	2009	Netanyahu	13	13 ¹⁰	28	27	19	15
19	2013	Netanyahu	17	15	27	31	18	12
20	2015	Netanyahu	18	24	21 ¹¹	30	14 ¹²	13

Source: Author's records.

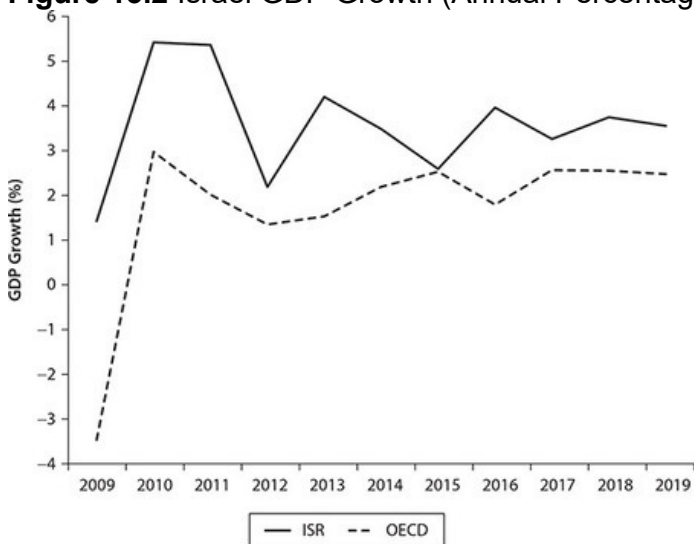
Note: Only major parties are represented in this presentation. Coalition members are underlined and in bold.

Israel's Regional and International Relations

Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Several peace treaties have been signed since 1979 between Israel and other nations, including Egypt, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and Jordan. A peace treaty has been in effect with Egypt since 1979, but it was with the signing of the mutual recognition agreements (also called the Oslo Accords) between Israel and the PLO in Washington in 1993 that peace was recognized as a policy option in the war-torn Middle East. Then, the assassination of Israel's prime minister by an Israeli radical in November 1995 stalled progress. Negotiations were not successful, with both Israeli and Palestinian political leadership reneging on commitments and the vision of coexistence; this resulted in a second intifada in 2000. A period of violence and political stalemate ensued, lasting until the end of the intifada in 2005. While the Fatah-dominated PLO had since largely abandoned an armed struggle in favor of diplomatic efforts, episodes of intense violence between Israel and Hamas, Fatah's Islamist challenger, took place in 2008, 2012, and 2014. These involved devastating attacks on the Gaza Strip by Israel and a barrage of rockets from Gaza onto Israeli cities.

Figure 13.2 Israel GDP Growth (Annual Percentage)



Source: OECD (2019), *Real GDP Forecast (Indicator)*, doi:10.1787/1f84150b-en.

The origins of the conflict are covered in [Chapter 2](#) of this textbook. This section covers more specifically the Israeli policy toward the Palestinians in the more recent past and up to the present. Israeli authorities have historically conceived of the conflict in the region as being between nation-states. Once Israel was established, the questions were if, when, and on what terms Arab states would recognize Israel. Israelis have historically rejected the notion of a Palestinian state; some, such as Golda Meir in the 1970s and Benjamin Netanyahu in the 1990s, have argued that there is no such thing as a Palestinian nation. Others on the Israeli right added that the Arabs already had twenty-plus states and that an additional one was not needed for the relatively small Palestinian population—Jordan could become the Palestinian state.

Between the 1967 war and the 1993 Oslo Accords, the policy of Israeli governments was to avoid changing the legal status of the territories, except for Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, while supporting Jewish settlements in the territories (with varying degrees of enthusiasm). The entire city of Jerusalem and much of the countryside around it were annexed by Israel soon after the 1967 war, and Israeli law was applied to the Golan Heights (which had belonged to Syria) in 1982. The prospect of returning some portion of the occupied territories in order to make peace was consistently promoted as the platform of the Labor Party, and it became the policy of the government of Israel after 1993. The Likud Party did not accept this principle, however, and the dilemma of Netanyahu's government was to remain loyal to the traditional hard-line Likud platform while conforming to international agreements based on the land-for-peace principle that previous Israeli governments had approved.

Palestinians felt a prevalent sense of creeping annexation because of the persistent policy of all Israeli governments to expropriate land in the territories for Jewish settlements. This expropriated land, added to land taken over by the Israeli authorities after the retreat of the Jordanian army in 1967 and the properties purchased by Israelis from Arab owners, brought Israel's total holding to approximately one-third of the land on the West Bank.

The Labor government headed by Levi Eshkol proceeded with a settlement campaign soon after the 1967 war, especially along the Jordan River and around Jerusalem. This policy sought to change the demographic reality on the ground by installing a Jewish population on Palestinian lands. Initial Jewish settlement in territories with a large Arab population also began under Labor in 1974 when Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres, both of Labor, were prime minister and defense minister, respectively. The big leap in settlement activity came during the Likud years between 1977 and 1992. In 1976, there were a little more than three thousand Jewish settlers in the West Bank (referred to as Judea and Samaria by Israeli nationalists). By 1988, the number had increased more than twentyfold, to about seventy thousand Jews living there. In May 1977, there were thirty-four settlements in the West Bank; by 1984, the number had climbed to 114. During the periods of the national unity governments, the pace of settlement represented a compromise between the desires of the Likud Party to go faster and the wishes of the Labor Party to proceed more cautiously, although neither of the big parties opposed continued settling. The 1984 national unity government agreement limited new settlements to five or six new settlements annually, and the agreement that established the 1988 national unity government set eight settlements a year as its target, assuming that funds were available.

The 1990 to 1992 Likud government made settlements a high priority. The government of Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir refused to halt their development in 1992 in order to receive \$10 billion in loan guarantees from the United States to absorb immigrants from the former Soviet Union. This rift with the George H. W. Bush administration (along with the Likud's other problems) led to the 1992 through 1996 Labor government, which froze new settlements. While the pace of settlements continued to vary over the years, by 2009 approximately five hundred thousand Israelis resided in the settlement communities established since 1967 in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights. Not all of the settlers were ideologues. Residing in the territories became a popular alternative for young Israeli-born Jews seeking reasonably priced housing in the suburbs of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv and for new immigrants of limited means.

Although Israel takes pride in itself as a democracy, the Palestinian populations in the occupied territories were deprived of political and civil rights, and they experienced the frustrations, inconveniences, and humiliations of living under military occupation. Under these conditions, the PLO, generally considered to represent the Palestinians, was established in 1964, with the ultimate goal of achieving national independence for the Palestinians. The Palestinian inhabitants of the territories achieved high levels of national solidarity with the advent of the PLO, even though they were cut off from the leadership of the organization, who resided outside of the country.

The Palestinian refusal to accept the status of Israeli occupation erupted in the intifada, an uprising of the Arabs in the territories, which began in December 1987. Palestinian civilians and Israeli soldiers engaged in skirmishes, with casualties mounting on both sides, although Palestinians incurred greater losses. A year later, in 1988, when the US government agreed to enter into discussions with the PLO, the organization's legitimacy reached a high point. Israeli opinion split over negotiations, although the portion of Israelis who were prepared to enter into negotiations with the PLO grew gradually, despite the fact that both major parties, Likud and Labor, rejected the notion. Some Israelis feared that the Palestinian position meant that they ultimately wanted to dismantle the state of Israel; therefore, tough policies were a matter of continued survival. Others felt that a solution could be reached only by political, and not by military, means. Either way, Israeli policy remained unchanged and the Palestinian uprising continued. The situation would change five years later.

In September 1993 in Washington, a handshake between Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO leader Yasir Arafat marked the signing of the Oslo I agreement (formally known as the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements) between Israel and the PLO. The agreement included provisions for Palestinian self-rule in Gaza and Jericho and the transfer of specific government functions on the West Bank to the Palestinians. Two years later, in September 1995, the Oslo II agreement was signed. It provided for Palestinian rule in areas of the territories, led by the new Palestinian Authority (PA), while it created three zones on the West Bank: Area A, to be controlled solely by the Palestinians, which included the cities of Bethlehem, Jenin, Nablus, Qalqilya, Ramallah, Tulkarem, and parts of Hebron; Area B, including many towns and villages in which activities of the PA would be coordinated and confirmed with Israel; and Area C, consisting mainly of unpopulated areas of strategic importance to Israel and Jewish settlements, to remain under sole Israeli control. In addition to its other provisions, Oslo II included, among other things, a timetable for the redeployment of the IDF, elections to the Palestine National Council, and provisions for the beginning of negotiations regarding the permanent status. Theoretically, this meant self-rule for the Palestinians. Practically, however, it resulted in a further division of the West Bank and full diplomatic recognition of Israeli interests in the West Bank. The subjects of Jerusalem, refugees, and final borders were saved for a later date.

This agreement, however groundbreaking, meant little as neither side scaled back its political agenda. Israeli settlements were not removed, and all further reconciliatory policies were stunted in 1995 with the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin by a Jewish extremist. In addition, Palestinian attacks on Israeli territory, most notably embodied by suicide attacks by the Islamist group Hamas, continued. In 2000, shortly before leaving office, President Bill Clinton attempted to rekindle negotiations, summoning Israeli Prime

Minister Ehud Barak and Yasir Arafat to Camp David for another round of talks. These proved unsuccessful, however, as the Palestinian side deemed the proposed agreement unbalanced because no provision was made to ensure the creation of a viable, sovereign Palestinian state.

Shortly thereafter, another Palestinian uprising—called the al-Aqsa intifada—began. This renewed violence between the two sides led to substantial increases in the Israeli military occupation of the West Bank. Whereas previously the Israeli policy in the West Bank had been dominated by settlement, now a full infrastructure developed. This included Israel's military presence in all sectors of Palestinian society, a complex web of checkpoints and physical obstacles to Palestinian movement, and the full segregation of Israeli settler populations from Palestinians through a labyrinthine network of bypass roads.

This military conflict resulted in heated political discussion on both sides. In Israel, support for reconciliation with the Palestinians shortly gave way to the assumption that negotiations were impossible and that Israeli security would only be protected via full separation between Jews and Arabs. Labor's Amram Mitzna ran on a platform of unilateral separation in 2003 and was defeated in a landslide by the hard-line prime minister, Ariel Sharon. By 2004, however, unilateral separation had become Sharon's own policy preference, supported by a majority of the population. This precipitated the building of an actual physical security barrier around Jewish settlements in the West Bank. At issue for Israel was not whether the barrier should be built, but where to put it: Should it be placed on the 1967 borders, or should it protect settlements far inside the territories established since 1967? The international response was critical, as this move clearly violated international law as well as international norms of conduct. Indeed, many in the West likened the separation barrier to the Berlin Wall.

In 2004, Prime Minister Sharon made the unprecedented decision to end Israel's military and civilian occupation of the Gaza Strip and to dismantle four West Bank settlements. The plan's central strategic objective was intended to remove Gaza's 1.3 million Palestinians from the sphere of Israel's internationally recognized responsibility by ending the military occupation of Gaza that began in June 1967. At the same time, Israel would continue to exercise control over the entry and exit of people and goods—thus preserving the aspects of occupation most beneficial to Israeli security. Approximately eight thousand settlers were removed in stages from twenty-one settlements in Gaza and four settlements in the northern West Bank. The disengagement met no significant Palestinian armed resistance, but it met substantial nonviolent settler resistance, especially from religious ideologues who felt betrayed by the state. This division in Israeli politics continues to simmer.

In 2006, elections were held for the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), with the Islamist group Hamas under leader Ismail Haniyah winning the elections. Following immediate US and Israeli pressure, international financial supporters cut funds to the PA. Soon thereafter, US and Israeli officials sought to build up Fatah, Hamas's primary competition for rule and heir to PLO leadership under Yasir Arafat. The internal division between Fatah and Hamas soon led to a violent schism in the Palestinian territories, with Fatah taking control of the West Bank and Hamas seizing Gaza.

During this period, despite putatively pulling out of Gaza and being committed to separation between the two populations, Israel continued to settle the West Bank. By the

end of 2006, Israel's Interior Ministry reported a civilian population of 268,400 in the West Bank in approximately 125 settlement areas; in East Jerusalem, approximately 190,000 Israelis were in residence; and on the Golan, eighteen thousand settlers resided in thirty-two settlements. Indeed, despite the removal of more than eight thousand settlers from Gaza, the total settler population increased in 2005. In addition to the more than two hundred officially recognized settlements, there are more than one hundred settlement outposts throughout the West Bank, where construction is ongoing.

That summer a war raged between Israel and its northern neighbor, Lebanon, with skirmishes and rocket exchanges with the Islamist group Hizbullah. This led to massive, disproportionate devastation of Lebanon by Israeli forces in a manner not witnessed since the Lebanese civil war. This growing regional insecurity precipitated another attempt at conflict resolution, pushed this time by President George W. Bush. In November 2007, the Annapolis Conference called as many as forty additional countries into attendance. This convention marked the first time a two-state solution was articulated as the mutually agreed-upon outline for addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The objective was to produce a document on resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict along the lines of President Bush's Road Map for Peace.

Diplomatic headway was made, but resolution once again proved elusive. Much like the fissure that occurred within the Palestinian side after Camp David, the Israeli side fell apart at Annapolis. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert indicated that he would be willing to give parts of East Jerusalem to the Palestinians as part of a broader peace settlement at Annapolis, and this drew considerable criticism from right-wing Israeli and foreign Jewish organizations and Christian Zionists. The ultra-Orthodox Shas Party left the government coalition, thereby ending the coalition's majority in the Knesset. That development coincided with Olmert's resignation as head of Kadima because of pending charges of bribery and influence peddling. Olmert's problems aside, the ability of any Israeli prime minister to make concessions regarding Jerusalem remains in question.

Both sides were now at a diplomatic impasse, and the United States and Israel continued their attempts to undo the effects of the 2006 elections and eliminate Hamas's rule in the West Bank. By December 2008, the Israeli army returned to the Gaza Strip, in an operation code-named Operation Cast Lead, with the stated aim of stopping Hamas rocket attacks on southern Israel and arms smuggling into Gaza. Frequent Hamas rocket and mortar attacks on Israeli cities led to the targeting of Hamas bases, police training camps, and police headquarters and stations. Civilian infrastructure, including mosques, houses, medical facilities, and schools, were also attacked, with Israel stating that they were used by combatants and as storage spaces for weapons and rockets. Hamas intensified its rocket and mortar attacks against civilian targets in Israel throughout the conflict, hitting previously untargeted cities such as Beersheba and Ashdod; Israel countered with a ground invasion. Some 1,300 Palestinians and thirteen Israelis died in the conflict.

Since 2009, the Likud under the leadership of Benjamin Netanyahu has formed increasingly hawkish government coalitions highly wedded to an agenda of settlement retrenchment and opposition to territorial withdrawals. On their part, the split Palestinian political landscape ties the Palestinian leadership's hands in moving forward on peace negotiations. Yet even in the event of internal Palestinian reconciliation, the prospects for a peace agreement are bleak. The Israeli government has declared that it would not

negotiate with the PA in the case of a unity government with Hamas, which it considers a terrorist organization. The latest rounds of violence between Israel and Hamas in November 2012 and in July 2014, which devastated infrastructure in Gaza and witnessed rockets launched from Gaza at Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, have further set back the prospect of reconciliation. Gaza has effectively been under siege by Israel since 2007. This has created an economic and humanitarian catastrophe in the Strip. By 2017, the unemployment rate stood at 44 percent. Eighty percent of the population relies on assistance from humanitarian organizations, and 96.2 percent of local water is polluted and undrinkable. Electricity shortages makes everyday life extremely difficult and limit hospitals, workplaces, and water treatment facilities from operating sufficiently.¹⁵ The situation has put Hamas's government under increased strain and alongside its international isolation has weakened its bargaining position with Israel. Demonstrations by frustrated Gazans, with the encouragement of Hamas beginning in March 2018, which were met by Israeli sniper fire and led to over two hundred dead and thousands injured, have led to renewed indirect negotiations between the sides, with the objective of easing some aspects of the suffocating siege. A lifeline to Hamas, however, serves Israel's interest in the continuation of the split between the West Bank and Gaza. Finding the path to fruitful negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians has eluded all who have attempted to bridge the seemingly unbridgeable gaps. The great mutual distrust and historical grievances, Israel's government continuing to drift toward the far-right, and the seemingly never-ending Fatah-Hamas split make the task of reaching a peaceful resolution to the conflict daunting.

Photo 13.3 Jerusalem remains a main point of contention in the conflict, with sites holy to Jews, Muslims, and Christians concentrated in close proximity in the Old City.



Lih Ben Shitrit

Foreign Relations

The two central forces shaping Israel's foreign relations for much of its history have been the dynamics of the cold war in the region and Israel's fraught relations with its Arab neighbors. As a small and vulnerable state at its establishment in 1948, Israel searched for allies to secure its existence in a hostile Arab region. At first, Israel pursued a policy of nonidentification, hoping to maintain channels to both Eastern and Western blocs. However, the 1950s saw a deterioration in Israel's relations with the Soviet Union as the Soviet Union moved closer to the new leftist nationalist regimes in the Arab world. In 1953, the relationship hit a low point, with temporary severance of ties between the Soviet Union and Israel.

At this time, Israel began to move closer to Europe and the United States. France had been by far Israel's greatest ally since independence and its largest weapons supplier. In 1953, following the Holocaust reparations agreement between Israel and West Germany, diplomatic relations were slowly established with Germany, culminating in full diplomatic relations in 1965. In the 1950s, Israel also established contacts with a number of recently decolonized African nations and with Asian countries, providing many with development consulting and training based on its own successful experience, mainly in agriculture, irrigation, and rural development.

This state of affairs proved to be short lived. As relations with the Soviet Union worsened in the aftermath of the June 1967 War and the October 1973 War with Egypt, Israel's relations with many African and Asian countries in which Soviet influence was strong suffered. Israel's new status as an occupying power further diminished its esteem among the decolonized nations. Relations with France also cooled in the 1960s, owing to France's new rapprochement with the Muslim world following the end of its occupation of Algeria. As a result of these developments, Israel began to look mainly to the United States.

The United States, while providing some financial assistance to the new state in the 1950s, was invested in developing its ties with the Arab world in an attempt to contain Soviet influence in the region. After the demise of the Baghdad Pact with the regime change in Iraq, however, strategic relations of the United States with Israel picked up significantly. The United States came to Israel's aid in the 1973 war with Egypt, sending an airlift that saved the country from a devastating defeat. In the following years, the United States played a central role in pushing for Israeli-Arab reconciliation, again in hopes of containing Soviet influence in the Middle East. The US facilitation of the peace between Israel and Egypt in 1979 also brought about the beginning of the country's unprecedented heavy military and financial support for Israel, which continues today.

Although 1979 was a year of peace between Israel and Egypt, 1979 also heralded the breakdown of ties between Israel and its most significant Middle Eastern friend at the time—Iran. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 ended the strong military and economic relations of the two countries.

In the 1980s, Israeli-Soviet relations improved, although full diplomatic ties were not renewed. With the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1989, the Gulf War in 1991, and the start of the Madrid talks between Israel and its Arab neighbors, Israeli foreign relations

experienced a diplomatic blossoming. Ties between Israel and many African and Asian countries, significantly China and India, expanded. Israel's relations with Turkey improved, and the countries developed an increasingly strong diplomatic and military alliance. As for the United States, its strategic interest in Israel was transformed as the Cold War ended, and a new world order was introduced. The United States now focused more insistently on fostering peace between Israel and the Arab states in order to protect US interests in a stable Middle East. The 1993 Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestinians enabled a transformation in the relations between Israel and some Arab and Muslim states: It led to a peace agreement with Jordan, and it also led to the opening of Israeli diplomatic representation in Tunisia, Morocco, Oman, and Qatar.

The failure of the 2000 Camp David and Taba efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the outbreak of the al-Aqsa intifada brought another round of deterioration in Israel's relations with the Arab world. Many Arab states suspended their ties with Israel, a violent conflict with Lebanon emerged, and tensions with Syria seemed to be escalating. The strong alliance between Israel and Turkey had also experienced some strains over Israel's conflict with the Palestinians. Relations with the countries of the European Union are also affected by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While Europe sees itself as a natural mediator between the two sides, Israel prefers US facilitation, which it sees as more attuned to Israeli concerns.

The eruption of the Arab Spring brought with it at first some degree of uncertainty for Israel. The ousting of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt raised fears about the stability of Israel's peace treaty with its southern neighbor. The undermining of the Assad regime in Syria raised similar concerns. Though a staunch rival of Israel and a supporter of Hizbullah and Hamas, Syria has generally been a stable neighbor, abiding by the cease-fire agreement of 1974 and keeping the Israeli-Syrian border quiet. The ascendance of popular democratic and Islamist forces in the region could have led to a reconfiguration of the security threats Israel faces. Alternatively, it could also have presented new opportunities as democratic neighbors might be more adequate potential partners than oppressive authoritarian regimes.

Iran came to represent a growing threat in Israel's view, owing to Iran's pursuit of nuclear capabilities and its Supreme Leader's threats against Israel. Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, has voiced his determination to prevent a nuclear Iran by any means, even at the cost of a unilateral Israeli strike against Iran. However, Israel does not possess the capability to carry out such a strike without military support from the United States. Furthermore, leaders from Israel's intelligence and military communities have expressed their opposition to military action and their support for the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, popularly known as the Iran Nuclear Deal, signed in 2015 between Iran and the P5+1 countries (see [Chapter 11](#)). In addition, the Israeli public does not view a strike favorably.

Yet Iran's growing influence in the region has also led to surprising thawing in Israel's relations with the Arab world. Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, who see Iran as their main rival, have been moving closer to Israel on security matters, even if still unofficially. Egypt and Saudi Arabia, close allies of the United States and opponents of both Iran and Muslim Brotherhood-style Islamists, find common threats with Israel, a fact that is reconfiguring alliances throughout the Middle East. Cementing these relations further is US

President Donald Trump's antagonism toward Iran and Sunni Islamist movements. Standing unabashedly on the side of counterrevolutionary authoritarian regimes in the region and on the side of Israel, Trump seems to have abandoned US (nominal) commitments to democracy and human rights. The US president has vouched to broker the "deal of the century" in the Middle East between Israelis and Palestinians, but by all signs, such a deal—if it ever were to materialize—will greatly disadvantage the Palestinians and frustrate much of their hopes for a viable state with Jerusalem as its capital.

Conclusion

What stands out to the student of Israeli politics who is considering its decades of independence is the stable nature of the system alongside the perception of fragility and eminent crisis; in other words, we notice the familiarity and persistence of the parties, leaders, and issues, together with the long list of intractable issues that could tear the system apart. Inevitably in politics, each new crisis is also a resource for those in search of power. Thus, a crisis with the United States can be portrayed as proof positive that one version of the future is true: that the world is against Israel so Israelis might as well stand even taller and go it alone if needed or that without support of the world powers and cooperation with their leaders, the country is doomed. Thus, even though the pills are bitter (say both sides), Israelis have no choice but to swallow those pills if cherished goals are to be achieved. There can be debate on the prioritization of these goals (a Jewish state, a democratic state, peace, retaining the whole of Eretz Yisrael), but these topics consistently focus the political debate and structure electoral competition.

In the first decades of the state, a single party or political group (Mapai, Labor, the Left) gained dominance over the levers of power and over political discourse. What developed was a form of social democracy, a tough but conciliatory approach to issues of foreign policy, and containment of the religious issue by judicious negotiation. If it is fair to characterize those decades as dominated by the Left, the years since the Likud victory in 1977 look more and more like the introduction of decades of dominance by the Right. Social welfare rights were moderated, a tougher foreign policy position emerged, and a greater willingness to acquiesce to the demands of the religious parties was evident. While the details differed dramatically, the core structure of politics of the two periods remained; they were perhaps poorly made, but they were made of iron.

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14 Jordan

Laurie A. Brand

The Making of the Contemporary State

During World War I, British troops ousted Ottoman forces from Palestine and Transjordan with the assistance of an army of Arab tribesmen raised by the Sharif Hussein of Mecca, the great-great-grandfather of the current king of Jordan, Abdallah II. In exchange, the sharif had been promised an Arab kingdom, a realm he expected would stretch from Palestine to Mesopotamia. Imperial ambitions, however, dashed his hopes. London instead created thrones for two of his sons: Faisal, who, chased from an erstwhile kingdom in Syria by the French, was crowned monarch of Iraq, and Abdallah, who was named amir of the new entity of Transjordan.

From the emirate's inception, London provided a subsidy that constituted the majority of the annual budget. A civil service was also gradually established, trained by the British, and, as was characteristic of Britain's involvement in Iraq and Egypt, all matters of foreign affairs, finance, and defense were part of the colonial purview. The British, therefore, also established police and reserve forces, which were soon replaced by what was called the Arab Legion, troops drawn primarily from southern Bedouin tribes but commanded by British officers.

In the meantime, London's initial skepticism gradually evolved into confidence in the amir's value. As a result, although the British continued to control the army and hold key advisory positions, Transjordan was granted formal independence on May 22, 1946. Abdallah was proclaimed king, the name of the country was changed to the Kingdom of Transjordan, and a new constitution was issued the following year.

More important for subsequent developments was the crisis and then war in Palestine. On May 15, 1948, Transjordan's Arab Legion joined the battle, and by the time of the armistice in 1949,

Transjordanian forces controlled central and eastern Palestine, as well as East Jerusalem. Abdallah then initiated a gradual annexation to the kingdom of these territories, which became known as the West Bank. The name of his realm was changed to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and by April 1950, the annexation was complete.

Abdallah's role in the Palestine debacle ultimately proved his undoing, as in July 1951 he was assassinated by a Palestinian. The rein of his successor, his son Talal, was brief (September 1951–August 1952), cut short by mental illness that forced his abdication. A regency was then set up for Talal's eldest son, Hussein, who ruled until his death in 1999. King Hussein navigated the country through a series of regional wars and domestic challenges. Some were derived from the country's involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict, and in particular its special relationship with Palestine and the Palestinian; others were the result of the kingdom's lack of natural resources and the continuing search for economic stability.

Societal Changes and Challenges

At the time of its founding in 1921, Transjordan was a sparsely populated territory whose perhaps three hundred thousand inhabitants could be divided between the Bedouin (both nomads and seminomads) and primarily rural or small-town inhabitants. In the preindependence period, regime consolidation was intertwined with British efforts to co-opt the indigenous Bedouin tribes through recruitment into the security and military forces. The amir Abdallah developed a special relationship with the tribes during the early 1920s, which his grandson Hussein later strengthened and institutionalized into a pillar of regime support.

As for the rest of the population, among the town dwellers were two minorities from the Caucasus region, the Circassians and Chechens, who had been given refuge from Czarist Russia by the Ottomans. While relatively few in number, they have long had a close relationship with the Hashemites, enjoying specially designated seats in parliament and representation in government cabinets. The Amir also recruited Syrians, Iraqis, and Palestinians to serve in both the civil administration and the military. Many of these bureaucrats made Transjordan their home, and several rose in prominence to become the country's most powerful political figures. However, this importation of political elites also triggered resentment among the indigenous population and played a role in the emergence of a proto-nationalism among Transjordanians.

Key Facts on Jordan

AREA 34,495 square miles (89,342 square kilometers)

CAPITAL Amman

POPULATION 10,248,000 (July 2017 est.), including Syrian refugees

PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION UNDER 25 54.75

RELIGIOUS GROUPS (PERCENTAGE) Sunni Muslim, 97.2; Christian, 2.2; others, 0.6

ETHNIC GROUPS (PERCENTAGE) Arab, 98; Circassian, 1; Armenian, 1
DATE OF INDEPENDENCE May 25, 1946 (from League of Nations mandate under British administration)
OFFICIAL LANGUAGE Arabic; English widely spoken
TYPE OF GOVERNMENT Monarchy
GDP (PPP) \$88.809 billion (2017 est.), per capita \$9,153 (2017)
GDP (NOMINAL) \$40.068 billion (2017 est.), per capita \$4,130 (2017)
PERCENTAGE OF GDP BY SECTOR Agriculture, 4.3; industry, 28.9; services, 66.8
TOTAL RENTS (PERCENTAGE OF GDP) FROM NATURAL RESOURCES 1.29 (2016)
FERTILITY RATE 3.19 children born/woman

Sources: Adapted from the Central Intelligence Agency, *CIA World Factbook, 2018*; World Bank, "International Comparison Program database," <http://www.indexmundi.com/facts/indicators/>.

Demographic Changes: Refugees and Migration

Jordan's history has been profoundly shaped by episodes of migration and waves of refugees. The first massive population influx was triggered by the 1948 Arab-Israeli War: More than seven hundred thousand Palestinians were expelled or fled from the part of Palestine that became the state of Israel. Some seventy thousand went directly to the East Bank. Another 280,000 took refuge in the part of Palestine that subsequently came to be called the West Bank. Its population of approximately 720,000 (both refugee and indigenous inhabitants) was then annexed to the East Bank, and its Palestinian residents were subsequently granted Jordanian citizenship.

Some of the Palestinians who arrived in Jordan as refugees prospered economically; however, many others were left destitute by the war and came to reside in one of the refugee camps administered by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Middle East (UNRWA). The 1967 war then brought additional strains. Not only was the West Bank occupied, but some 265,000 of its inhabitants, many of them originally displaced in 1948, were forced across the Jordan River to the East Bank. The unexpected arrival of more than 250,000 destitute refugees further strained an already resource-poor country. UNRWA continued to provide basic food rations as well as educational and health facilities to most of these refugees, but the impact on the kingdom was severe.

Map 14.1 Jordan



Subsequent refugee waves have also profoundly affected the kingdom. Saddam Hussein's August 1990 invasion of Kuwait led to the return of about two hundred thousand Jordanian citizens. The kingdom struggled under the weight of these returnees, as its pleas to the international community for aid went largely ignored because King Hussein had refused to participate in the anti-Saddam international coalition. The launching of the war in January 1991 triggered a new influx, this time of Iraqis, which continued over the following months.

The March 2003 US invasion of Iraq triggered yet another round of forced Iraqi immigration into Jordan, with estimates ranging between four hundred thousand and five hundred thousand. This influx strained existing housing stock and significantly drove up prices more broadly just as the kingdom was reducing a wide range of subsidies on basic commodities. Most recently, beginning in mid-2011, the Assad regime's brutal repression of the Syrian uprising

triggered yet new refugee flows: As of April 2018, the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) had formally registered more than 660,000 Syrians, but the total number in the kingdom was widely believed to be closer to one million.

The Intercommunal Divide: Palestinian and East Banker

King Abdallah's long-standing desire for a kingdom larger than Transjordan led him to oppose the emergence of a separate Palestinian state following the 1947 UN partition plan, as he hoped instead to add Palestinian territory to his own realm. To be successful, however, the Hashemites needed not only the territory but also the population. Through the 1954 Nationality Law, all of these Palestinians were accorded Jordanian citizenship.

Although King Hussein also tried to engender a Jordanian identity on these Palestinians, the struggle over the national identity of Jordan's population of Palestinian origin has marked many aspects of the country's development. The incorporation of population through annexation is generally a fraught process, and for the Palestinians, the trauma of 1948 was intensified by rumors regarding Hashemite collusion with the Zionist leadership in Palestine. Not surprisingly, then, as the appeal of Arab nationalism grew in the 1950s, with its target not only Israel but also Western powers, Palestinians were generally eager partisans, as were many Transjordanians.

However, by the mid-1960s, a renewed Palestinian nationalism had emerged with a new organization, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), as its representative. After the defeat in the 1967 war, Hussein's regime was too weak to oppose recruitment by the Palestinian resistance (*fedayeen*). As these organizations grew in strength, a showdown between them and the Jordanian state became inevitable. It finally came in 1970 in a twelve-day assault by the Jordanian army: Black September, as it was called, destroyed much of the resistance and pushed the rest into the northwest of the country, from which it was expelled the following year.

In this confrontation, there were Palestinians who fought with the Jordanian army, just as there were Transjordanians who belonged to various Palestinian guerrilla organizations. Nonetheless, the civil war

led the regime and much of the Transjordanian population to regard Jordanians of Palestinian origin as potential traitors. The most immediate result was the initiation of an “East Banker first” policy aimed at preferential recruitment of Transjordanians into the government and the virtual exclusion of Palestinians from high-level military or security-related positions.

In the meantime, the struggle to prevent the PLO from securing the loyalty of Jordan’s Palestinians continued, along with Hussein’s desire to restore Hashemite sovereignty over the West Bank. The competition for this loyalty affected the king’s participation in the Arab-Israeli peace process as well as his involvement in inter-Arab politics. Finally, however, a combination of domestic and regional factors led in July 1988 to the king’s decision to disengage administratively and legally from the West Bank.

While this move settled many of the questions that had long vexed the relationship between the Hashemites and the Palestinians, it failed to address the question of the identity of the remaining Jordanians of Palestinian origin, who now made up perhaps 50 percent of the population. Tensions have continued between the two groups: over Jordan’s peace treaty with Israel, the Palestinian right of return, a possible definitive settlement of refugees in Jordan, the threat of arbitrary withdrawal of citizenship from Jordanians of Palestinian origin, and the continuing economic and political privileges that Transjordanians enjoy from the Jordanian state.

Religion

The role of Islam in Jordan has been shaped in part by the fact that the ruling Hashemite family traces its lineage to the Prophet Muhammad. Its long service under the Ottomans as guardians of Mecca and Medina has lent it a base of legitimacy that no other leaders in the Eastern Arab world can claim. Just as important, the close intertwining of the family's Muslim and Arab identities has been central to the broader historical narrative of the regime.

From the time of the amirate, the overwhelming majority of the population has been Muslim, and successive constitutions have enshrined Islam as the religion of state. However, Jordanians are equal before the law with respect to rights and obligations "regardless of origin, language or religion," and freedom of belief and worship has been guaranteed, as has the right of religious congregations to establish their own schools, subject to government oversight.

In the critical realm of national education, Islamic history figures centrally in the curriculum. In addition, Muslim students take classes in Islam and Islamic upbringing, while Christians are offered their own lessons. Muslim holidays are part of the government school calendar, while Christian schools may also have Sundays and their own holidays off. Successive educational laws have also stressed the importance of religion in building the citizenry.

State control over religion has long been viewed as critical and has in part been secured through government administration of shari'a courts in the case of Muslims and the Council of Religious Communities for non-Muslims. Shari'a courts are appointed by royal decree, and matters of personal status (e.g., marriage, divorce, inheritance) fall within the exclusive jurisdiction of these courts when the parties are Muslim. The state has also long exercised control

over mosques through appointing and dismissing imams and in guiding the content of Friday sermons.

In the realm of civil society, the most important group that over the years has had a religious message at its core has been the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan). While other parties and associations experienced varying degrees of repression over the years, the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) long operated openly, often with government support, as its conservative program reinforced the pro-Western orientation of the regime.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, religious activism grew with no objection from the state. Even after a crackdown on the MB in 1985 related to relations with Syria, the relationship was not irreparably strained. Indeed, when economic riots shook the kingdom in April 1989, the MB aimed its criticism at the government, not the king, and worked to defuse tensions. Not until the signing of the peace treaty with Israel in 1994 did a real rupture occur. Since then, the relationship between the regime and the MB has been fraught, as the state has continued to undermine its power through direct repression as well as subtler means.

Outside the realm of politics, the Hashemites have engaged in a number of high-profile endeavors to emphasize the family's responsibility to the broader Muslim community. In Jerusalem, King Hussein initiated restorations on the Muslim holy sites from 1952 to 1964 and again in 1969 (after a fire seriously damaged the al-Aqsa mosque), as Jordan continued its responsibility for their administration even after the 1967 Israeli occupation. From 1992 to 1994, the king spent more than US\$8 million of his personal wealth to finance another restoration of the Dome of the Rock.

Promoting a moderate reading of Islam has also long been a hallmark of Jordanian policy. The first major institutional initiative in this area was the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, established in 1980 by King Hussein. Another institution that has reinforced the Hashemite narrative of a tolerant Islam is the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies (RIIFS). Established in 1994, it has

supported the interdisciplinary study and rational discussion of religion and religious issues, with particular reference to Christianity in Arab and Islamic society. Both of these institutions have high profiles, giving Jordan—but especially the royal family—a notable voice in the Islamic world as well as in the international community of interfaith organizations.

Such initiatives took on even greater importance after September 2001 and the growing Western focus on emerging extremist groups such as al-Qa'ida. Most notable was The Amman Message, issued in November 2004. Its call for tolerance and unity in the Muslim world is regularly referenced by the regime, including in the context of the direct threat posed by the rise and territorial conquests of the self-proclaimed Islamic State (ISIS/Da'esh) in Syria and Iraq. Official statements and policies have continued to denounce and suppress jihadist activity, while asserting an alternative model of Islamic tradition and practice promoted by the kingdom.

Institutions and Governance

After Hussein's 1953 accession to the throne, he gradually replaced his grandfather's governing style with one geared toward an increasingly complex modern state. Since this basic transformation, neither the structure nor the system of government has changed significantly. The political system continues to be a hereditary monarchy, in which the monarch both reigns and rules. The government comprises an executive, consisting of the king, the royal court, and the cabinet (Council of Ministers); a legislature, composed of the popularly elected lower house (Council of Deputies) and the Senate (Council of Notables), whose members are appointed by the king; and a judicial branch, to which a nine-member Constitutional court was added in fall 2012. The constitution provides for a separation of powers between branches, but in practice, the monarch remains the ultimate arbiter.

In 2013, Abdallah officially gave the parliament a say in the selection of the prime minister, but in practice, it is still he who, in addition to having authority over foreign policy and security, designates the head of government. Ministerial posts are traditionally assigned according to considerations driven by both external political challenges and internal power balancing and patronage distribution: Every cabinet has had to have representation from both the North and the South of the country, it must also have a couple of Christians and Circassians or Chechens, and there is an expectation of a predominance of Jordanians of East Bank rather than Palestinian origin. Among these calculations are those related to rotating portfolios among important tribes. Hence, while many cabinets have been described as "technocratic," qualifications for heading a particular ministry are often of secondary importance.

Photo 14.1 The Hashemite monarchs (left to right): King Abdallah I, King Hussein, King Abdallah II, King Talal, and Sharif Hussein.



Courtesy of Laurie A. Brand

The early 1960s did witness moves to professionalize the domestic civil service, the diplomatic corps, and the judiciary, as well as attempts to implement an economic strategy intended to reduce Jordan's dependence on external sources of revenue. Whether such attempts would ultimately have reset Jordan on a more self-reliant course is impossible to know because the 1967 war intervened to drastically change the course of the kingdom's development.

The loss of the West Bank rendered problematic the holding of elections and the functioning of the parliament. In 1974, after the Arab League designated the PLO the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinians, Hussein decided to suspend parliament to ensure that there was no formal body in which political conflicts, especially between Palestinians and East Bankers, would surface. Not until 1978 was an alternative body established, the National Consultative Council, but its members were appointed by the king, and it had no legislative power. It was finally dissolved in 1984 when the king recalled parliament as part of a strategy to strengthen his hand with what was by then a weakened PLO. Nevertheless, only four years later a combination of domestic and regional pressures led to the king's decision to disengage from the West Bank (see *The Intercommunal Divide: Palestinian and East Banker section*).

Less than a year after the disengagement, severe economic riots rocked the kingdom. In response and to reinforce the throne, Hussein announced that parliamentary elections, the first since prior to the 1967 war, would be held for a new National Assembly. This move was only one part of a broader political opening that followed, characterized by greater freedom of expression and a retreat of the coercive security apparatus. Elections in November 1989 for the new 80-seat parliament were the freest since 1956.

The king further demonstrated his commitment to increased political liberalization in his April 1990 appointment of a sixty-member royal commission charged with drafting a national charter intended to reformulate the bases of the state-society relationship. Perhaps most significant, the charter legalized political parties in exchange for a societal statement of allegiance to the monarchy.

However, subsequent events demonstrated the weak commitment to political liberalization, for as opposition to a possible peace treaty with Israel grew, so did regime intolerance of opposition. To curtail the impact of dissent, the electoral law was changed in 1993¹ to favor tribal over ideological (in particular, Islamist) candidates; new laws curbed press freedom; municipal councils were restructured and filled with government appointees; and the *mukhabarat* (internal intelligence services) was given freer rein to suppress civil society.

Toward the end of the 1990s, Hussein's health overshadowed political developments. Diagnosed in June 1998 with lymphatic cancer, he underwent six months of treatment in the United States. The king returned on February 4, 1999, changed the succession from his brother to his eldest son, Abdallah, and died three days later. The new king, Abdallah II, had not been groomed to rule; nevertheless, he quickly consolidated his position by ushering out several old-guard figures and recruiting a new generation of advisers.

In the summer of 2001, with the second intifada raging in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, the king dissolved parliament,

citing as justification the tense political situation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. He proceeded to govern by royal decree over the next two years, issuing some 250 “temporary laws,” many of which further limited political freedoms. The post–September 11 “war on terror” facilitated this trend as the regime used it to justify its clampdown on Islamists.

Political freedoms suffered another blow when, in August 2002, the king again postponed elections, citing the impact of regional instability. When legislative elections were held in June 2003, proregime candidates scored a major victory. The same was true of elections in 2007 in which the state interfered heavily. Nevertheless, Abdallah dissolved this parliament after only two years for failing to “address the people’s needs.” A new round of elections was held in 2010, with Islamists boycotting as they had in 2007 and progovernment candidates again taking a majority of seats.

Since the early 2000s, the king has periodically raised the issue of political reform, and a number of plans have been proposed, but few concrete changes have resulted from demands for change driven by Jordan’s external patrons. However, when antiregime demonstrations broke out across the region in early 2011, small groups of activists from across the political spectrum organized protests focused specifically on the need for reform.

In response to popular demands, the government opened investigations into a range of corruption cases, although the parliament ultimately refused to proceed against any of those charged. A new electoral law, one that sorely disappointed those calling for reform, was approved in June 2012. Dissension over it, in the context of broader demands for change, led parliamentary elections, initially slated for the fall of 2012, to be postponed. When the polling was finally held in January 2013, a large number of conservative tribal leaders and proregime loyalists once again won a majority of seats. The next round of parliamentary elections held in 2016 largely preserved the status quo, although the MB’s Islamic

Action Front (IAF) participated, ending a near ten-year boycott of elections.

A more interesting development came on August 15, 2017, when, as part of a broader program of decentralization, Jordan held its first-ever local elections for twelve new governorates and one hundred municipal and local councils, as well as for mayoralities. Over six thousand candidates competed for the 1,833 open seats. The government strongly promoted the importance of participation in these polls, which were hailed as a key political reform marking a new era of greater citizen participation. In the end, however, the turnout was only 37 percent, ironically leading to successes by candidates affiliated with the MB, an outcome the state had certainly not wanted or anticipated.

Actors, Opinion, and Participation

Associational life and political participation in Jordan have been marked by the wars and crises that have punctuated the kingdom's history. While the East Bank was not without civil society activity during the amirate period, the incorporation of the West Bank and its Palestinian population introduced institutions born during the pre-1948 struggle against Zionism. Organizations of women and workers, doctors, lawyers, and engineers all engaged in work related to charitable, social, or professional issues, but the ongoing conflict with Israel was never far removed from their concerns.

The same was true of political parties, which began to grow in importance with the surge of Arab nationalism in the mid-1950s. The parliamentary elections of 1956 marked a high point of political freedom in the country. Shortly thereafter, however, political instability triggered the imposition of martial law. Political parties were banned and political publications were closed. The MB, which was opposed to communism and other secular and oppositional ideologies, then drew closer to the regime, thus laying the groundwork for what would be a near-forty-year symbiosis.

With political parties outlawed, elections in the 1960s produced little of the excitement that had characterized the process in 1956. However, the June 1967 War was a turning point because in its wake, with the West Bank occupied, elections for parliament—in which half of the seats were allocated to the territory—could not be held. In the absence of both legal political parties and parliamentary elections, professional associations—unions of doctors, lawyers, pharmacists, dentists, and others—began to play an increasingly important political role. Their leadership elections came to serve as a gauge of the strength of political currents in the country, and they became the only organized voices of opposition in the context of a martial law regime.

Only with the political liberalization of 1989 were political parties once again allowed to operate openly. After years of harassment and suppression by the regime, Arab nationalist and leftist political parties were at pains to elicit much electoral support. Instead, it was the MB and associated Islamists who, through their networks of social welfare institutions operating at the grassroots level, took more than a third of the seats.

Still, political exiles started returning home, the media engaged a wider range of issues, and new publications began to appear. The Political Parties Law was finally passed in September 1992, allowing for the legal registration of parties, but of the twenty parties that registered in the first wave, the only one of any significance was the IAF, the political party extension of the MB. Since then, the country has seen the emergence and disappearance of numerous political parties; with the exception of the IAF, most have had quite limited membership bases and served as little more than narrow extensions of prominent individuals.

What had appeared to be a promising process of political liberalization after 1989 might have continued had Jordan's move toward peace with Israel not intervened. Concern over popular opposition to a peace treaty led the regime to insist upon changes to the electoral law in order to cut the power of the Islamists and thereby produce a more pliant parliament. As opposition continued, the regime resumed many of the practices that had characterized the martial law period. The new Press and Publications Law, enacted during the negotiations with Israel in 1994 and amended in 1997, was one key indicator of the state's retreat from previously granted political liberties.

Had peace on the Israeli-Palestinian front been secured, resistance to the kingdom's own peace treaty might well have dissipated. However, the stalling of the Oslo Accords increased the legitimacy of the "antinormalization front," a network of members of professional associations as well as parts of the MB and the IAF, which called for severing relations with Israel and abrogating the 1994 treaty. The

outbreak of the second Palestinian intifada in 2000 only increased popular anger toward Israel and, by extension, the regime.

With peace in Israel/Palestine nowhere in sight and with Jordan supportive in various ways of the US military involvement in both Iraq and Afghanistan, the Islamists continued to constitute the most significant domestic opposition. Parliamentary elections in November 2007, the second under a 2001 law that increased the number of seats overall to 110 and allocated a quota of 6 seats to women, reduced the number of Islamist MPs from 17 (elected in 2003) to 6. Meanwhile, attempts to crack down on domestic support for Hamas, the Palestinian branch of the MB, and to shore up the sagging popularity of Fatah, the main Palestinian political formation in the West Bank, appeared only to backfire as Abdallah II's positions on a range of foreign policy issues were out of step with those of a majority of his subjects.

Yet it was not primarily these issues that produced near-weekly demonstrations as the contagion of antiregime protests arrived in Jordan in early 2011. Instead, it was the deterioration of the standard of living against a backdrop of economic corruption that brought not only groups of leftists and Islamists but also tribal groupings traditionally assumed to be strong backers of the regime to the streets.

Still, the regime was not seriously threatened, and the king promised the release of those protestors who had been arrested.

Parliamentary elections were then finally held in January 2013.

Although European Union (EU) observers praised the process, the decision by the MB and other opposition parties to boycott because of concerns over lack of progress on reforms and outcome-rigging led to a mediocre 56.5 percent participation level. By this time, however, the attention of Jordanians—regime and populace alike—was increasingly focused on the external threats posed by the ongoing instability in Iraq and the civil war in Syria. Rather than youth calling for regime reform, the security forces concentrated on the growing appeal of jihadist groups based in neighboring countries

whose programs attracted supporters from salafist and socioeconomically disgruntled sectors of Jordanian society.

Encouraged by the Egyptian military's ouster of MB President Muhammad Morsi and by Saudi and Emirati support for a clampdown on Brotherhood branches elsewhere in the region, the regime moved to further weaken its primary opponent. While it did not go as far as Cairo, which labeled the MB a terrorist organization, it jailed the deputy head of the MB for criticizing the UAE (United Arab Emirates) and then in spring 2015 colluded in a process aimed at splitting the MB: ousting the hard-liners and recognizing only the more dovish wing as the legitimate MB. Yet the state's alternative to the MB failed to achieve legitimacy among the broader population. Indeed, in the 2016 round of parliamentary elections, the IAF ended its boycott and won 15 seats. A little under a year later, in polls that were part of a purported decentralization program, the MB demonstrated its mobilizational capability among an otherwise largely apathetic electorate, as its candidates won 78 of the 154 seats it contested.

Yet as late spring 2018 brought a controversial income tax law to the Jordanian parliament as part of the ongoing implementation of economic reforms, the leadership against it came not from the MB, but from the professional associations, one of which—the large and powerful Engineer's Union—had just held elections in which the MB lost its leadership position for the first time in 26 years. What ensued was a dramatic outpouring of popular anger, culminating in thirty-three unions and professional associations calling for a general strike against the proposed law on May 30. Such a dramatic wave of protest forced the king to dismiss the government and designate a new prime minister. The new government won a confidence vote in mid-July, but the economic problems that had produced the income tax law—as well as the impact of the manifestation of such deep and widespread popular discontent—remained.

Political Economy

Jordan is an example of a rentier economy—that is, one that relies heavily on external sources of income and support rather than a robust domestic productive base for sustenance and growth. The external income or rent that Jordan has received has taken different forms over the years: general budgetary support, aid for the military and security services, grants or concessionary loans for development projects, payments from UNRWA, royalties for oil pipeline passage, payment for overland transport, and remittances from growing numbers of Jordanians working abroad.

The roots of such an economic system may be traced to the beginnings of the amirate, as British subsidies constituted more than 50 percent of state expenditures. At the time, the country had a very small population, limited agricultural land located primarily in the Jordan Valley and the North, and few natural resources (phosphates and potash). Abdallah's own extraction of revenue was highly uneven: Some tribes were exempted as a way of courting or rewarding them; others were punished by being forced to pay.

The annual subsidy was particularly important in developing and funding the various security forces that were critical to maintaining stability. An additional benefit was that these forces provided employment to influential tribes whose already often-precarious economic situation had deteriorated with the ending of tribal raiding and attempts to settle them. Offsetting poverty was key to establishing the symbiotic relationship between the state and the tribes that became so central to the Jordanian political system.

World War II brought a boom to Jordan, but it was followed by the 1948 Palestine war, which introduced several hundred thousand largely destitute refugees, who strained the state's limited capabilities. Still, British subsidies continued, and UNRWA, established in 1950, took charge of the displaced Palestinians,

ultimately helping to provide housing, education, basic food needs, and health care. In addition, the influx of Palestinians, combined with the subsequent annexation of the West Bank, increased the population by 200 percent and added territory, much of it productive agricultural land, to the kingdom's economic base.

Britain terminated its annual subsidies in 1956 in response to Hussein's dismissal of the British commander of the Arab Legion. However, the day that martial law was imposed following a purported coup attempt in 1957, the United States granted Jordan \$10 million, and for the next ten years, the United States sent some \$60 million annually to the kingdom. US aid continued uninterrupted until 1967, when Amman accused Washington of backing Israel in the June War.

With the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Jordan lost 25 percent of its arable land and half of its industrial capacity, as well as its major tourist attractions and pilgrimage sites, most notably East Jerusalem. GDP dropped by 40 percent, and a new wave of refugees was pushed onto the East Bank. The Arab states then stepped in to provide annual financial support to aid in postwar rebuilding. However, in the wake of the September 1970 battles with the PLO, Kuwait and Libya suspended their aid, and Syria closed its border, thus severely obstructing trade.

After a few difficult years, the growing oil boom and the payments Jordan received from Arab states following Hussein's acceptance of the PLO's 1974 designation as the sole, legitimate representative of the Palestinian people helped to speed recovery. Indeed, the combination of Arab support, a decrease in domestic unemployment owing to migration to the Gulf oil states, and the resultant remittances sent to the kingdom led to a notable rise in the standard of living and the emergence of a middle class. Concomitantly state sector employment also grew, although it disproportionately benefitted Transjordanians, who were preferentially recruited following Black September of 1970.

At the Arab League summit in Baghdad convened in the wake of Egypt's March 1979 signing of a peace treaty with Israel, the oil-producing states renewed their financial commitments to the remaining confrontation states—Jordan and Syria—and the PLO. Yet this marked the end of an era. The 1980s brought regional recession due to changes in the international oil market and the impact of the Iran-Iraq War. In response, the oil states gradually reduced or reneged entirely on their Baghdad promises. Moreover, many expatriates working in the Gulf failed to have their contracts renewed, as belt-tightening required budget cuts and forced them to return home.

Ironically, the one market that showed promise was that of Iraq, into whose economic orbit Jordan was gradually drawn. Special lines of credit were opened to promote trade, and Aqaba became Iraq's primary sea access after its own port, Basra, was badly damaged early in the war. Overland trade between the two countries also played a major role in sparing Jordan the worst effects of the regional recession. Nevertheless, fiscal mismanagement gradually continued to increase the kingdom's debt. So, too, did Hussein's renunciation of Hashemite claims to the West Bank in July 1988. The disenfranchisement of West Bankers, and the anxiety it triggered among even East Bank-resident Palestinians, led many to transfer their resources out of the kingdom. The resultant capital flight weakened an already frail system. The dinar lost half its value, and by January, the kingdom was forced to go to the IMF to reschedule its debt.

The implementation of IMF-stipulated reductions in fuel subsidies in April 1989 triggered the most severe rioting the kingdom had witnessed since 1956. The unrest spread throughout the country (although it did not touch the capital) and led Hussein to call for new parliamentary elections as part of what would become an "Amman spring." While political liberalization did follow, so did the implementation of painful austerity measures that took a terrible toll on the poor and the middle class.

Then, suddenly, a new crisis intervened to compound the economic problems. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on August 2, 1990, led to the imposition of sanctions on Jordan's most important trading partner. Just as serious was the dramatic inflow of refugees (returning Jordanians and others). The sudden influx of some two hundred thousand expatriate workers from Iraq and Kuwait increased the size of Jordan's resident population by almost 8 percent, compounding the country's unemployment problem and leading to a loss in remittances, which had amounted to \$623 million in 1989. Lost, too, was the economic aid that Jordan had received from Saudi Arabia and the other oil-rich states, which were furious with the king's stance on the crisis. Some estimates placed Jordan's economic losses from the Gulf crisis as high as \$2 billion (even higher when the loss was projected over subsequent years).

Despite the obvious dangers of such heavy dependence on a single trading partner, Jordan reprised its role of Iraq's lifeline to the outside under sanctions following the 1991 war. Because of the money Iraq had owed to Jordan at the time of the invasion, and because of the importance of Jordan's stability for regional security, Iraqi oil was allowed to continue to flow into the kingdom. The open border with Jordan was of particular importance to Iraq in the early 1990s, but even after Iraq accepted the oil-for-food regime in 1996, the close relationship continued.

In the meantime, the conditions of the IMF agreement continued to sting, with reduced state spending on food and energy subsidies, increased taxes of all sorts, and cuts in domestic and foreign borrowing. The impact could well have been worse had Jordan not been viewed by the IMF's Western backers as a key to regional stability and the Arab-Israeli peace process. Its participation in the October 1991 Madrid peace conference helped repair relations with the United States and, as a consequence, significantly expanded the channels of US aid. For example, following the signing of the peace treaty with Israel, in 1994 and 1995 the United States offered some \$700 million in debt relief to the kingdom. In 1997, the US Congress increased economic aid to Jordan to \$150 million (up from \$112

million in the previous year and only just over \$36 million the year before) and military aid to \$75 million (more than double that of the previous year).

Between 1998 and 2002, annual US economic aid to Jordan stood at approximately \$150 million, with annual military aid around \$75 million. Abdallah's subsequent willingness to work with the Bush administration in its "war on terror" and then with the 2003 US invasion of Iraq helped further raise the levels of assistance. Beginning in 2003, the total assistance package averaged more than \$762 million per year—by 2014 it had reached \$1 billion, thanks in part to annual supplemental appropriations intended to reimburse Jordan for its efforts in support of US military operations in the region. Of these funds, around \$250 million was for Economic Support Funds, used both as cash transfers to service Jordan's foreign debt and to support US Agency for International Development (USAID) programs. In addition, approximately \$200 million was allocated annually for the military. These funds have been used most recently to upgrade Jordan's air force and radar systems and enhance its border monitoring and counterterrorism capabilities.² In February 2018, the United States pledged \$6.3 billion in assistance over a five-year period. This sum represented an increase over its 2015 to 2017 commitment in order to enable Jordan to continue to implement development programs, as well as to mitigate the impact of the cost of hosting over a million Syrian refugees.

The increased economic and military aid from the United States combined with the US aid program's focus on development of the private sector meshed well with Abdallah's announced intention to focus attention on the economy. One of his first initiatives was to diversify Jordan's trading partners, followed by his promotion of a range of reforms aimed at further integrating Jordan into the world economy. An Association Agreement with the EU came into force in 1999; Jordan gained entry to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in January 2000; the Special Economic Zone at the port of Aqaba was established in January 2001; and a Free Trade Agreement (FTA),

which provided for gradual dismantling of tariffs and other trade barriers over a ten-year period, was signed with the United States in 2002. Jordan also established US-promoted Qualified Industrial Zones (QIZs), intended to encourage the establishment of Israeli-Jordanian joint ventures, in an effort to cement the peace while creating employment.

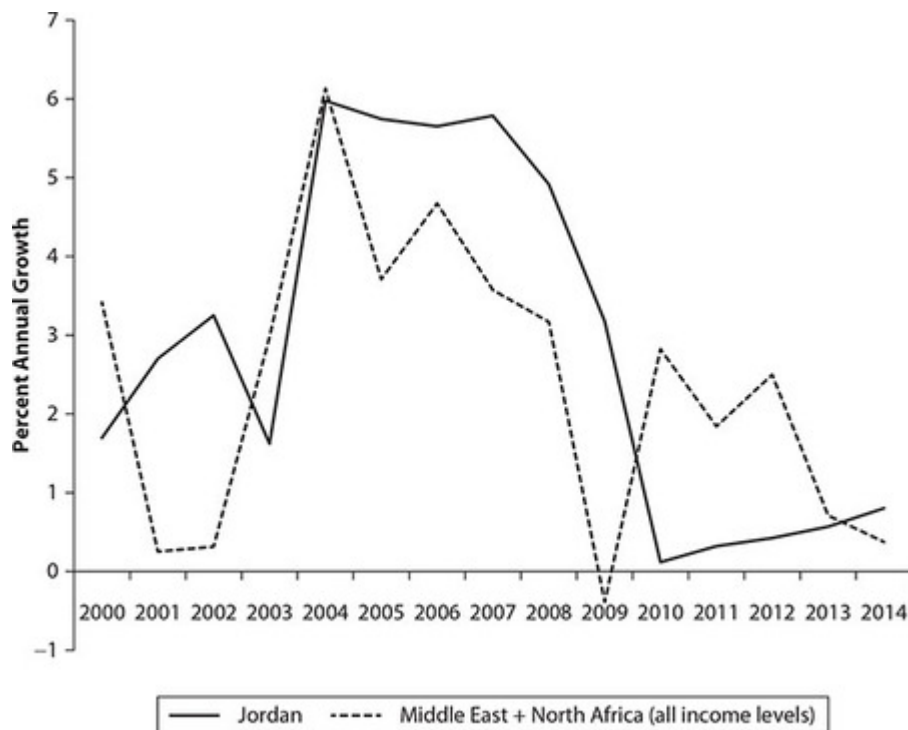
Nevertheless, despite periodic pronouncements regarding the need for economic reform, policies have long stopped short of hurting influential domestic constituencies. The country's economy, therefore, has continued to face serious challenges, mitigated to greater or lesser degrees by various kinds and sources of foreign aid (see [Table 14.1](#)). Total foreign aid, including concessional loans and grants to address the Syrian refugee crisis, was \$3.15 billion in 2016 and rose to \$3.65 billion in 2017. GDP growth (see [Figure 14.1](#)) was estimated at 2.4 percent for 2015, 2 percent for 2016, and 2.3 percent for 2017, down from 2.8 percent in 2013. The official unemployment rate climbed to 16.5 percent in 2017, although the unofficial rate was nearly twice that high. Jordan's foreign debt stood at \$27.72 billion in 2017, up from \$26.38 billion in 2016. In 2017, public debt stood at 87 percent of GDP. To reduce strains on the budget, the state has gradually reduced a range of subsidies, most notably on oil and then electricity. February 2018 saw the reduction in the politically sensitive bread subsidy, to be replaced with direct transfers to the poor and to state employees. While in response the kingdom witnessed regular protests in the streets and an MB-promoted, no-confidence vote in the Parliament (which failed), the government held firm. Indeed, it then proceeded to introduce a new tax law, intended to raise existing rates and curb tax evasion. The long-term impact of these measures would seem likely to be an increase in the size of the population below the poverty line—officially around 13 percent to 14 percent, but unofficially one-third of the kingdom's citizens.

Regional and International Relations

Jordan's relative economic and political weakness and the ongoing conflict over Israel/Palestine have been critical in shaping the alignments and alliances into which it has entered. Given Jordan's own limited resources, its kings have relied heavily on external support—military, financial, and political—to maintain the throne against threats both domestic and external.

Abdallah I's assassination and the 1952 overthrow of the monarchy in Egypt gradually introduced a new dynamic into regional relations. Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser sought to bring Egypt's external relations in line with what he called "positive neutrality." As ruler of a country in which British officers commanded the army, Hussein was a natural target of Egyptian propaganda, and the assaults launched over the Egyptian airwaves intensified as in 1955 Hussein announced his intention to join the US-sponsored Baghdad pact. Ultimately, however, popular anger that was manifested in street demonstrations led him to renounce Jordan's mutual defense pact with Britain and to dismiss the Arab Legion's British commander, General John Glubb.

Figure 14.1 GDP per Capita, Annual Growth Rate, 2000–2014:
Jordan and the Middle East



Source: World Bank, “GDP per Capita Growth (Annual Percentage),”

<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.KD.ZG/countries/1W-JO-ZQ?display=graph>.

Table 14.1 Foreign Aid to Jordan

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	2000	2005	2010	2012
Net aid per capita (current US\$)	\$115	\$131	\$158	\$224
Aid as percentage of GNI	6.5	5.5	3.6	4.6
Aid as percentage of central government expenditure	24.1	15.8	14.3	15.5

Source: Data from World Bank, <http://data.worldbank.org/?display=default>.

Only months later, at the end of October 1956, Israel, followed by Britain and France, attacked Egypt after the government in Cairo nationalized the Suez Canal Company in response to the decision by the United States not to support Nasser's request for a World Bank loan to build a high dam near Aswan. Although Nasser lost the military battle, his willingness to stand up to Western states and Israel electrified the Arab world. Now regarded as the champion of Arab nationalism, the ascendant ideology in the Arab world, Nasser emerged as a formidable opponent to the Western-allied conservative regimes. Hussein managed to remain in power, thanks to the continued backing of his army, support from Saudi Arabia, and renewed Western assistance from the United States and the United Kingdom.

The next major external challenge to Amman came in the form of Egyptian sponsorship of the establishment of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in May 1964. Lone among Arab leaders, Hussein saw his realm potentially threatened by the PLO: Its pool of potential recruits included the large number of Jordanians of Palestinian origin, and its desire to liberate Palestine could have been construed to include the West Bank. Hussein acquiesced only when PLO chairman Ahmad Shuqayri assured him that the land to be liberated did not include the West Bank and that he would not recruit among Hussein's subjects.

In parallel, however, small Palestinian guerrilla groups had begun to emerge independent of Arab state control. The most important of these, Fatah, began launching its operations (largely acts of sabotage) against Israel in 1965. Guerrillas crossed into Israel via Jordan, leading to high-profile Israeli attacks, such as that on the West Bank town of al-Samu' in November 1966. With regional tensions rising and sensing that failure to align with Egypt could have serious implications for his throne if conflict broke out, Hussein flew to Cairo and signed a mutual defense pact just days before Israel launched war on June 5, 1967. During the first few hours of the war, Israeli warplanes destroyed virtually the entire air forces of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, leaving Jordan's ground forces vulnerable to air

attack. Commanded by an Egyptian officer, Jordanian units desperately sought to defend Jerusalem but were ultimately forced to withdraw completely from the West Bank, with significant human and material losses.

Civil War

The 1967 war discredited the armies and leaderships of the so-called frontline states of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, and the guerrillas of the Palestinian resistance movement seemed to offer a viable alternative. Recruitment soared after a combined force of Palestinian guerrillas and Jordanian army units repelled an Israeli incursion into the East Bank near the town of Karamah in March 1968. In a relatively short period of time, a semiautonomous set of guerrilla organizations emerged, operating in and launching attacks on Israeli targets from Jordan. Following the devastating 1967 defeat, the regime, its military, and its security apparatus were in disarray, and civilian support—tacit or overt—for regime methods was soundly shaken. With its legitimacy compromised, Hussein had little choice but to allow the resistance organizations a freer rein.

Nonetheless, the contradiction between the prerogatives of a sovereign state and the needs of a liberation movement could not be suppressed forever. Clashes between the resistance and the Jordanian army became more and more frequent, ultimately leading to the 1970 Black September battles. While consternation over the fighting was expressed throughout the Arab world, only Syria sent armored units across the border. The United States increased its naval presence in the eastern Mediterranean and helped to broker potential Israeli military support for Jordan in the face of the Syrian incursion. With Israel offering strategic depth, Hussein deployed his air force against the Syrian tanks, which were thereby forced to retreat, and the lightly armed guerrilla forces were no match for the Jordanian army.

Foreign ministers of surrounding Arab states then met in Cairo on September 22, 1970, to try to resolve the conflict. Nasser brokered a cease-fire agreement between Hussein and PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat and died the following day. Much of the resistance's infrastructure in and around Amman had been destroyed, but it still held bases in the northwest of the country. The regime continued to

pursue the remnants of the Palestinian groups until July 1971, when the Jordanian army crushed the last PLO positions, leading to the arrest or flight of those fighters who remained.

The Road to Camp David

During the next few years, Hussein's regional preoccupations concerned the loss of the West Bank and how to maintain his claim to the territory in the face of the Israeli occupation and the reemerging Palestinian resistance. Jordan did play a marginal role in the October 1973 War by sending a small detachment of troops to the Golan Heights, but the country was not a part of the Trilateral Alliance (Egypt, Syria, and Saudi Arabia), the major Arab grouping at the time.

In order to repair relations with both his Palestinian subjects and the Arab world in the wake of Black September, in March 1972 Hussein proposed a United Arab Kingdom plan. Such a new political entity required peace with Israel and its withdrawal from the West Bank. Based on a federal structure centered in Amman, it would have given greater autonomy to each of the two banks than in the past.

Unfortunately for the king, realities on the ground had already overtaken such a proposal. Black September had been a serious setback, but the PLO subsequently moved its center of gravity to Lebanon, where by the mid-1970s it had developed a parastatal apparatus that far surpassed what it had previously had in Jordan. Over the objections of King Hussein, at the October 1974 Arab League in Rabat, Morocco, Arab leaders officially recognized the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

In the meantime, after the PLO was drawn into what became the Lebanese civil war beginning in spring 1975, it made tentative attempts to reconcile with Jordan until Egyptian President al-Sadat's unexpected visit to Jerusalem in November 1977 changed the regional calculus. With US involvement and "land for peace" as a basis, al-Sadat's initiative was not unlike a formula Hussein had hoped would return the West Bank to Jordan. The Camp David Accords, signed a year later, prescribed a resolution to the Palestinian problem and presumed a Jordanian role in the final

negotiations. Still, opposition in the Arab world, particularly at the popular level, was significant, and given the large population of Palestinian-origin on the East Bank, Hussein preferred to temporize. In the end, he opted not to join in the process because the West Bank territory offered was too little and did not include Jerusalem.

Instability in the Gulf

Jordan's refusal to join in the Camp David process led to a cooling of its relations with the United States, which had expected the kingdom to follow Egypt's lead. Relations might have continued to deteriorate had two other regional events not intervened. The first was the 1979 Iranian Revolution, which, in overthrowing the shah, deprived the United States of its policeman in the oil-wealthy Persian Gulf. The second was the Iraqi attack on Iran in September 1980.

As a Western-oriented monarch, Hussein viewed the advance of revolutionary movements anywhere in the region as a potential threat. The leaders of the Arab Gulf states also feared the call from Iran's new leader, the Ayatollah Khomeini, to export the Islamic revolution. It was this fear that led these states, including Jordan, to support Saddam Hussein, who had formally come to power in 1978, to attack Iran in an effort to overthrow the new regime. This new threat from the East forced Jordan to decide between its then-strong relationship with Damascus, which was feuding with Baghdad, and Saddam. King Hussein chose the wealthier and more powerful Iraq, thus initiating a political, military, and economic relationship that would shape Jordan profoundly over the next two decades.

Competition with the PLO

In the meantime, developments on the Palestinian front had led to several shifts in relations between the PLO and King Hussein. The Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June 1982 destroyed much of what had become an extensive Palestinian political, military, economic, social, and cultural presence in the country. While the Syrians worried that a weakened PLO would be an easy target for outside pressures forcing a peace with Israel, King Hussein viewed the organization's weakened position as an opportunity once again to assert Hashemite prerogatives in the relationship.

The new efforts to affect a rapprochement came against the backdrop of the Reagan plan, a blueprint for a future regional peace, which was announced by the US administration in September 1982. Although it included the land-for-peace formula and spoke of the "legitimate rights" of the Palestinians, it had no provision for a Palestinian state; nor was the issue of Jerusalem directly addressed. Instead, it envisaged Palestinian self-government on the West Bank in association with Jordan. To Hussein's dismay, the PLO rejected the Reagan plan; however, PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat's weakness led him to reengage with Jordan. Relations warmed to the point that the Palestine National Council convened in Amman in 1984, and in February 1985, the two agreed to coordinate on the peace process.

As with other episodes of Jordanian-PLO coordination, however, this one was short lived, and the following February, the king announced its end. In the meantime, unsuccessful in his negotiations with Arafat and stung by the refusal of the US Congress in 1985 to sell Jordan mobile air defense missiles, F-16s, and Stinger missiles because of his rejection of the Reagan plan, Hussein turned his primary attention to inter-Arab relations. Although Egypt's membership in the Arab League had been frozen as a result of its separate peace with Israel in 1979, Jordan had never completely cut ties. Indeed, it was thanks to both these continuing ties and Jordan's geographic

location that a line of material and human support for Iraq's war effort developed, beginning in Egypt and crossing Jordan.

The 1987 Arab League summit, held in Amman, constituted the high point of Hussein's diplomatic efforts in the Arab world. First, despite Damascus's support for Iran during the Iran-Iraq War, Hussein secured Syrian support for a resolution condemning Iran for holding Iraqi territory and for failing to accept a UN-sponsored cease-fire. Second, Assad agreed to a resolution explicitly permitting Arab League states to restore diplomatic relations with Cairo.

Yet Hussein's diplomatic triumph was soon eclipsed by the central arena of conflict. By this time, the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza was twenty years old, and Israeli land confiscation and settlement construction had intensified following the Likud electoral victory in 1977. In April 1987, Hussein, who had maintained secret channels of communication with Israeli leaders over the years, conferred with Labor Party leader Shimon Peres in London and reached an agreement to work toward a five-power international peace conference. The attempt at advancing negotiations foundered, however, when Peres failed to secure the Israeli cabinet's support. The pressures born of an increasingly oppressive occupation finally produced an explosion in December 1987.

The Palestinian uprising, or intifada, quickly spread and intensified, taking the Arab states as well as the Israelis by surprise. For Jordan, however, the unrest was more than a foreign policy issue. Given that perhaps half of his East Bank population was of Palestinian origin, Hussein's most immediate concern was that the violence might spill over the Jordan River. Moreover, the intifada was led by a new generation of Palestinian activists who were clearly nationalist, not Hashemite, in their orientation.

The United States, which at the time was still constrained by a 1970s memorandum promising not to talk directly to the PLO until it had renounced violence and accepted Israel's right to exist, continued, along with its Israeli partner, to insist on a central role for Jordan in the peace process. In March 1988, as the intifada raged, US

secretary of state George P. Shultz proposed a multistep, two-track negotiating process. The first track would be multilateral, consisting of an international advisory committee to the second track—which would consist of direct, bilateral talks between Israel and a joint Jordanian-Palestinian negotiating team—mediated by the United States. Hussein could not agree to the proposals because they went beyond the Arab consensus at the time, but he did remain open to US attempts to restart negotiations, knowing that he would be a key player in any such effort.

In response to the continuing uprising, an extraordinary Arab summit was held in June 1988 in Algiers. Two of its decisions were of particular importance to Jordan. The first was that the oil-producing states declined to renew their financial support for the kingdom. Had this not been sufficiently galling for Hussein, the second stipulated that funds from these states for the PLO, which had been channelled through a joint Jordanian-Palestinian committee, were now to go directly to the PLO, bypassing Jordan. The king's response took all observers by surprise.

Renunciation of West Bank Claims

On July 31, Hussein renounced all Jordanian legal and administrative ties to the West Bank and called on the PLO to take responsibility for the Palestinians in the Israeli-occupied territory. He dissolved the Jordanian parliament, half of whose members represented West Bank districts, and ordered Jordanian passports held by West Bank Palestinians to be changed to two-year travel documents. He thereby deprived of Jordanian citizenship and rendered stateless all those whose normal place of residence was the West Bank.

Initially shocked by the king's move, many criticized him for violating the norms of Arab unity. The PLO itself, only recently recovered from its 1982 expulsion from Lebanon, was caught off guard. Palestinians, both those West Bankers who suddenly found themselves stateless as well as those residents on the East Bank who wondered what their future held, initiated massive financial transfers from Jordanian banks, thus putting increasing pressures on an economy that was already reeling from the regional recession.

Ultimately, however, the PLO realized the opportunity the disengagement represented: Hussein's move opened up the West Bank as land that, in the event of an Israeli withdrawal, could form the basis of a Palestinian state. The Palestine National Council, in a historic meeting the following November, proclaimed Palestinian independence (which Hussein recognized immediately), accepted UN Security Council Resolution 242, recognized the existence of Israel in a formula finally deemed acceptable by the United States, and began a formal dialogue with Washington. The "Jordanian option" so dear to the United States and the Israeli Labor Party leaders—a solution to the Palestinian problem that avoided the creation of an independent Palestinian state—appeared to be dead.

The Persian Gulf Crisis

During the Iran-Iraq War, Iraq and Jordan had become heavily economically interdependent. Strong ties of cooperation had also developed between their two militaries, while Saddam Hussein courted journalists with lavish gifts and the average citizen through a range of contributions, including the building of mosques. Whether King Hussein believed the press's rhetoric about Iraq's constituting Jordan's strategic depth is unclear; what is certain is that he had a strong personal relationship with the Iraqi leader.

At the same time, Jordan had close ties with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the smaller Arab Gulf states, and the principal Western powers that quickly coalesced to oppose the invasion of Kuwait. The king's position was that, while he opposed the Iraqi move, the matter needed to be resolved diplomatically on an inter-Arab level. The Jordanian stance was, therefore, one of neutrality, but in a context in which neutrality had been effectively excluded as an option. Perhaps it was because of the strong pro-Iraqi reaction among the Jordanian population—both Palestinians and Transjordanians—that his policy was viewed abroad as tantamount to supporting Saddam Hussein. In any event, as a result, Jordan experienced near-complete international isolation. Yet despite the economic hardships that flowed from general adherence to the economic embargo, the loss of aid from members of the anti-Iraq coalition, and a large influx of refugees from Iraq and Kuwait, the king's popularity at home rose to new heights.

The Peace Process and the Israeli-Jordanian Treaty

Jordan's relations with Kuwait and Saudi Arabia (and, to a lesser extent, the other Gulf states) remained strained for years following the 1991 war, but its ties with the United States and other Western countries improved rapidly. Central to Jordan's rehabilitation by the Western states was the fact that the George H. W. Bush administration's decision to move ahead on an Arab-Israeli peace initiative following the war required a Jordanian role. Israel still refused to deal directly with a Palestinian negotiating team; hence, the participation of Jordan was critical. By July 1991, the United States had restored \$35 million in economic aid, and following Jordan's participation in the first round of Arab-Israeli talks held in Madrid in October 1991, the United States extended an additional \$22 million in military assistance.

The Madrid conference appeared to be a success, but as time passed, the bilateral and multilateral talks it spawned—including, ultimately, direct Israeli-Palestinian discussions—stalled. Then, in June 1992 the Labor Party, headed by Yitzhak Rabin, returned to lead the Israeli government. Soon thereafter, Israel opened a secret, direct dialogue with the PLO under Norwegian auspices, which culminated in mutual recognition and in the signing of the Declaration of Principles in Washington on September 13, 1993.

The Israeli-PLO agreement took King Hussein by surprise, and he was outraged that he had been excluded. He responded by authorizing the signing and publication of the Jordanian-Israeli peace settlement agenda that had been worked out in the Madrid-initiated bilateral negotiations. As a result, however, the strong domestic support the king had enjoyed since 1990 fractured. Leftist and Islamist members of the Jordanian parliament denounced both the Israeli-PLO agreement and the Israeli-Jordanian agenda. Just as important, those Transjordanians who worried that these agreements might "solve" the Palestinian refugee problem at the expense of

Jordan—that is, through massive permanent settlement of Palestinians on the East Bank—also voiced concern.

Still, with the PLO heavily engaged with Israel in a peace process, Jordan had substantial political cover to pursue its own agreement. On October 26, 1994, the two sides signed a treaty providing for an exchange of ambassadors and broad cooperation in trade, tourism, water allocation, transportation, communications, environmental protection, and border arrangements. Both governments pledged not to allow third parties to use their territory for attacks against the other, and Israel recognized Jordan's role as a guardian of the Islamic holy places in Jerusalem. Hussein's hope was that the new relationship would translate into economic benefits that would strengthen the domestic constituency supportive of a peace agreement.

Ultimately, the anticipated "peace dividend" did not materialize to the degree anticipated, despite debt forgiveness and financial support from Western donors and some growth in the tourism sector. The Jordanian public, skeptical from the start, became increasingly frustrated with the failure of the Palestinian-Israeli agreement to provide a basis for a real peace and with the degree to which Jordan's accord reinforced Israel's power in its dealings with the Palestinians. Israeli settlement activity in the West Bank and Gaza proceeded apace, and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state seemed as distant as ever.

Abdallah's Succession

The challenges Abdallah II faced upon assuming the reins of power in February 1999 ranged from a tense regional situation, including a moribund peace process, to a distressed national economy and his own lack of political experience. On the foreign policy front, the young king first moved to repair Jordan's relations with the powerful oil producers that had been so strained by his father's neutrality in 1990. In April 1999, he chose Saudi Arabia as the destination for his first foreign visit. He also secured rapprochements with the smaller Gulf states, including Kuwait, aiming not only to rebuild trade ties but also to convince them once again to recruit Jordanian workers.

Jordan's strained relations with Syria, where the young Bashar al-Asad had succeeded his father in June 2000, also entered a new era. A shared interest in increased cooperation led to a far-reaching bilateral trade agreement in 2001 and to the initiation of the long-postponed joint al-Wahdah Dam project on the Yarmuk River. Abdallah concluded similar bilateral and multilateral agreements with Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, and Yemen. Amman's relations with the region's non-Arab states—Iran and Turkey—also improved. The young king further moved to deepen Jordan's relations with the European Union (above all, France, Germany, and Great Britain), Japan, and the United States.

Israeli-Palestinian Escalation

Only with the outbreak of the al-Aqsa, or second, intifada in September 2000 did the Palestinian issue return to the king's agenda. Like his father, King Abdallah II, along with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, tried to serve as a mediator between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. As the violence continued, Jordan strongly supported the so-called Road Map, the three-step peace plan put forth in April 2003 by the Quartet—the European Union, Russia, the United Nations, and the United States.

However, against the backdrop of Israel's "targeted assassinations" of Palestinians, the continued growth of Israeli settlements, the erection of a separation wall/barrier in and around the West Bank, Palestinian suicide bombings against Israelis, and the growing "militarization" of the Palestinian territories, the gap between the Hashemite regime's foreign policy and the Jordanian public's stance toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continued to grow. Nowhere was it more obvious than in Jordan's relationship with Hamas, the main Palestinian Islamist organization. Hamas's unexpected victory against the more secular Fatah in Palestinian parliamentary elections in January 2006 was as popular with Jordanians as it was problematic for a regime closely aligned with the United States, which refused to deal with the Islamic resistance movement. The regime even went so far as to assist the United States in arming Fatah to enable it to militarily defeat Hamas as a low-level Palestinian civil war broke out in 2007. Worse, from the point of view of much of the Jordanian public, Jordan's position on the late-2008 Israeli war on Gaza, like that of Egypt and Saudi Arabia, was one largely of watching from the sidelines, hoping for the defeat of Hamas while Gazans were killed by the hundreds. Israel's even more brutal fifty-day war against Gaza in summer 2014, in which more than 2,200 Palestinians were killed and entire neighborhoods were leveled, only further underlined the fact that as long as Hamas was in control of the territory, Arab-state interest in ending the violence would remain weak.

New Regional Order: Continuous War

In the meantime, during the summer of 2002, Abdallah had tried to persuade the Bush administration not to attack Iraq, arguing that such a war would seriously threaten the regional balance of power. When it became clear, however, that the US government was set upon ousting Saddam Hussein, the king, unlike his father, discarded neutrality. He allowed the United States to use two air bases in the kingdom's eastern desert and station hundreds of soldiers on its territory. The two states also participated in joint military maneuvers in August and October 2002. In turn, the kingdom received \$1.1 billion in US aid, which was officially designated as compensation for its war-related losses. Nevertheless, uneasy about the possible backlash from the Jordanian population, Abdallah and his government officially denied supporting the war.

To minimize the detrimental effects of the invasion and war on the kingdom and his throne, Abdallah straddled often-contradictory positions. On the one hand, he supported the US policy of maintaining its military presence in Iraq while gradually transferring political responsibilities to elected Iraqis. On the other, he spoke out fervently against the exclusion of Sunni Arabs when the Shi'i-Kurdish coalition gained an absolute majority in the January 2005 elections for the transitional legislature and in the December 2005 parliamentary polls. However, Jordan also trained a few thousand Iraqi regular police with the aim of fighting the growing Sunni insurgency, and in June 2006, Jordan's *mukhabarat* cooperated with US agencies in tracking down and killing Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, the Jordanian leader of al-Qa'ida in Iraq.

In the context of the growing power of Iran and of the Shi'a in Iraq, Abdallah made controversial statements regarding what he called the threat of a Shi'i crescent emerging in the region. His initial stance during the Israel-Lebanon war in the summer of 2006 was therefore not surprising: He condemned Hizbullah leader Hassan Nasrallah for the fighting, siding with the United States and its regional allies—

Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Israel. Yet when it became clear that the Jordanian public overwhelmingly supported Hizbullah, he backtracked. He condemned the massive Israeli assault and called for an immediate and peaceful resolution of the conflict.

The continuing Israeli and US occupations and wars in the region led to a new set of regional alignments, with US-allied countries like Israel and the leadership in Jordan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia on one side and most Arab populations, Hamas, Syria, and Hizbullah (and Iran) on the other. However, the outbreak of antiregime uprisings beginning in the spring of 2011 began to reconfigure these patterns as well. Mubarak's overthrow rendered Egypt a much less reliable member of the US-dominated axis, while increasing sanctions on Iran, combined with Hizbullah's continuing support of Assad's brutal regime and Hamas's abandonment of Damascus, weakened the anti-West axis. Jordan's position as part of the pro-Western group certainly had its domestic opponents, but it was not problematic for the leadership until the violence in Syria between pro- and antiregime forces heated up in late 2011. In this fraught context, Jordan sought a middle ground. It could not afford to alienate the Arab Gulf states and risk the termination of their largess by vocally opposing them, but it also worried about the potential domestic impact, not only politically and economically but also militarily, of Saudi and Qatari support for arming the Syrian opposition.

For Jordan, the increasing militarization of the Syrian uprising had a much greater and more immediate potential to undermine the kingdom's stability than a purported Iranian threat or any other product of the so-called Arab Spring. Control of its northern border to limit the flow of Syrian refugees, prevent the smuggling of fighters, and keep the armed conflict at bay was of critical concern as extremist groups took control of large swaths of Syrian territory. By September 2014, Jordanian fighter planes were conducting airstrikes against ISIS; however, it was the brutal murder of a downed Jordanian pilot captured by ISIS that opened the floodgates of Jordanian vengeance against the extremists to the north in early 2015. The government executed several convicted terrorists and

unleashed an intensive, if short-lived, air campaign targeting ISIS encampments. In spring 2015, Jordan began to allow the United States to use one of its military bases to train Syrian rebels. But as the security forces occasionally pursued Islamist militants internally (most notably in Irbid in March 2016), the US presence also became the target of limited attacks by Jordanians (in November 2015 and 2016), leaving several soldiers and trainers dead. The northern part of the kingdom also periodically experienced attempts at infiltration, as well as damage from stray mortar shelling or, as in June 2016, the explosion of a car bomb. The kingdom finally closed its borders with both Syria and Iraq in June 2016. The main crossing from Iraq was not reopened until the end of August 2017, following the defeat of ISIS in both its Mosul, Iraq, and Raqqa, Syria, strongholds.

In the meantime, in June 2016, simmering Gulf Arab tensions erupted with the imposition by an emerging Saudi-UAE-Bahraini-Egypt alliance of a siege on Qatar, which they charged with, among other things, support for terrorism. Concomitantly, Saudi Arabia's young Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman's open embrace of Israel, driven largely by a shared antipathy toward Iran, was further rescripting traditional regional roles. In this fraught context, Jordan tried to steer a middle course, except in the Israel/Palestine arena, where, while awaiting the Trump administration's promised "deal of the century" to end the conflict, the US president proceeded with what had been the unthinkable and announced his decision to move the American embassy in Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. This break with long-standing US policy based in UN resolutions on the Arab-Israeli conflict came despite the pleading of the Jordanian leadership and was met with outrage in the kingdom. At the same time, while some comfort could be taken from the fact that ISIS had been defeated in Syria and Iraq, the US withdrawal from the Iran nuclear agreement (JCPOA—Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) in May 2018 opened the possibility for a shift in the nature of the fighting in Syria to direct Israeli-Iranian confrontations.

Jordan had literally dodged bullets in the worst days of ISIS's control in Syria and Iraq. Yet even if, in summer 2018, Iraq appeared to be

on the road to recovery, battles in and over Jordan's northern neighbor promised not only an extended stay for the one million Syrian refugees in the kingdom but also, possibly, a new stage in the civil war. Just as worrying, as Israel celebrated the seventieth anniversary of its establishment, a just settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict seemed as distant as ever, as the Trump administration in conjunction with the Saudi Crown Prince appeared ready to supplant Jordan's traditional role in Jerusalem and ignore the kingdom's other interests vis-à-vis the future of the West Bank.

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15 Kuwait

Hesham Al-Awadi

Kuwait is known today for the prominent place it assumed in global politics during its 1990 and 1991 occupation by Iraq and its tremendous oil wealth. It is a small emirate located strategically on the northern end of the Persian Gulf, wedged between Iraq and Saudi Arabia. With its extensive history of trade and political agreements with foreign powers, Kuwait has long been a nation marked by diverse foreign influences with relative vulnerability to larger neighbors. And although a visitor is much likelier to find modern Kuwaitis poring over investment portfolios than manning the old dhow fishing vessels that characterized Kuwait's pre-oil era, it is a nation that is still largely defined by its ancient tribal and Islamic heritage.

The relatively quick transition from a society of fishermen and nomadic Bedouin to an oil-powered city-state has often been dramatic, and Kuwait is still sorting through massive social and institutional changes. A generous welfare system provides guaranteed schooling, housing, labor, health care, and monthly family allowances to its citizens. Meanwhile, the relative size of Kuwait's citizenry continues to shrink as foreign workers flood in from the Pacific, South Asia, and the West; non-Kuwaitis make up 85 percent of the country's workforce.

Kuwait's emerging democracy has also lately been rocked by change; in 2005, women were given the right to vote and stand for election to political office, and in 2013, two women were elected to serve in the fifty-member National Assembly. This marked a radical shift not only in popular political choices but also in social sensibilities and cultural persuasions. Today, the voice and presence of women in political life is becoming normal and is expected to expand in coming years, adding to their already visible role in the

nation's economic life, where they constitute 30 percent of the workforce.

Kuwait continues to face major challenges, however. Efforts to reduce the country's economic dependence on oil have been largely ineffective, as have attempts to slow the growth of Kuwait's massive bureaucracies and stimulate the private sector. Politically, the continuous tension between the government and parliament, leading to the periodic dissolution of both, has resulted in a political paralysis and stalled development projects. Relations between the royal Al Sabah family and the wider opposition also remain tense, and the lack of charismatic young leaders among the Al Sabah, combined with the rising assertiveness of Kuwait's growing youth movements, leaves the political future of this semidemocratic emirate very much in the air.

History and State-Building

Tribalism, Islam, and foreign influence have largely shaped Kuwait's history and are just as relevant to its contemporary social and political dynamics. Tribalism and tribal politics were particularly evident in the founding of the original town in the seventeenth century and the rise of the Al Sabah to power in the eighteenth century. Islam continues to be the main religious faith of Kuwait's inhabitants and determines not only their daily lives but also their social and political behavior (as discussed in the following sections). Also, foreign interest and, recently, external cultural influences have long characterized Kuwait's historical development. Even prior to the discovery of oil, Kuwait was of strategic interest to powers like the Portuguese in the sixteenth century and, since the eighteenth century, the Russians, the Germans, and the British. The discovery of oil in the 1930s confirmed Kuwait's global significance, and gradually, foreign influence in the country shifted from Europe to the United States.

Key Facts on Kuwait

AREA 6,880 square miles (17,818 square kilometers)

CAPITAL Kuwait City

POPULATION 2,788,534; includes 1,291,354 nonnationals (2012)

PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION UNDER 25 40.53

RELIGIOUS GROUPS (PERCENTAGE) Muslim, 85; Christian, Hindu, Parsi, and other, 15

ETHNIC GROUPS (PERCENTAGE) Kuwaiti, 45; other Arab, 35; South Asian, 9; Iranian, 4; Other, 7

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE Arabic; English widely spoken

TYPE OF GOVERNMENT Constitutional amirate

DATE OF INDEPENDENCE June 19, 1961 (from the United Kingdom)

GDP \$172.4 billion; \$71,000 per capita (2014)

PERCENTAGE OF GDP BY SECTOR Agriculture, 0.3; industry, 49.4; service, 50.2

**TOTAL RENTS (PERCENTAGE OF GDP) FROM NATURAL
RESOURCES** 59.08
FERTILITY RATE 2.48 children born/woman

Source: Central Intelligence Agency, *CIA World Factbook, 2015*, and IndexMundi, "Total Natural Resources Rents (Percentage of GDP)," <http://www.indexmundi.com/facts/indicators/NY.GDP.TOTL.RT.ZS>.

The Founding of Kuwait

Kuwait was founded in the seventeenth century by the Banu Khalid, an Arab tribe that emerged from Najd in central Arabia. By the middle of the seventeenth century, the Banu Khalid dominated northeastern Arabia, from Basra to Qatar. The Banu Khalid used Kuwait as a summer resort and a storage place for their weapons and hunting tools. The original name of Kuwait was al-Qurain (Arabic for “high hill”), and the future country was no more than a small coastal fishing village. But around the 1670s, the Banu Khalid built a small fort, or *kut*, to protect their possessions from tribal raiding. Not only did the fort protect the flourishing village, but it also gave it a more defined existence. Kuwait, the current name of the country, is simply the diminutive of *kut*.

In addition to building the fort, the Banu Khalid were eager to maintain a degree of security in the territories under their control. Security from raids in the desert and piracy in the seaways was a crucial precondition for regular flow of revenue and the supremacy of the tribe. Their success in maintaining overall security eventually attracted more tribes to settle in the region, and the Anaiza, from which the Al Sabah comes, was one of the settled tribes.

The Banu Khalid’s supremacy over northeastern Arabia did not last long. It was challenged by internal strife and the emergence of regional contenders for power. In 1745, Najd saw the rise of Wahhabism, a religious movement named after its founder, Shaykh Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab. The Wahhabis aimed to spread their notion of Islam through territorial expansion and in the process became the bitter enemies of the Banu Khalid. But prior to the rise of the Wahhabis, the tribe was already going through an internal struggle for power. Both of the aforementioned factors caused the central authority of the tribe to weaken, thus paving the way for the rise of localized powers in the towns the Banu Khalid had once dominated. In Kuwait, power was subsequently shared locally by the

leading subdivisions of the Anaiza tribe until the Al Sabah family finally dominated it.¹

Map 15.1 Kuwait



The Rise of the Ruling Family

The Anaiza tribe migrated from Najd in the second half of the seventeenth century in search of better living conditions. Because they were on good terms with the Banu Khalid, the Anaiza were permitted to travel eastward. They first reached Qatar, and by the early eighteenth century, they finally decided to settle in Kuwait.

The Anaiza's leading families in Kuwait soon filled the power vacuum created by the demise of the Banu Khalid. In addition to the Al Sabah, the Anaiza also included the Al Khalifa and the Al Jalahima, all of which had their share in managing the town's affairs. The Al Sabah became responsible for political and military affairs, while the Al Khalifa and Al Jalahima administered the town's land and sea trade. Sabah bin Jaber, or Sabah I, as he is commonly known, became the first local ruler of Kuwait.

Sabah I (1752–1762) was succeeded by his son, Abdallah I (1762–1814). During Abdallah's reign, a dispute erupted between the Al Khalifa and the Al Sabah, possibly over politics because the Al Khalifa had equal ambitions to rule, or over money because they also wished to become wealthier from pearling and trade. In any case, the disagreement was never resolved, and in 1766, the Al Khalifa, and later some of the Al Jalahima, decided to leave Kuwait for Qatar and then Bahrain. Despite the disruption this may have initially caused the town's economy, it certainly consolidated the political power of the Al Sabah. Since that time, the Al Sabah has been the uncontested political family.

Much of Kuwait's history and politics continue to be shaped by tribal identities and tribal politics, but tribalism is not an exclusive factor in the politics of the Arabian Peninsula. Rather, it is also expressed occasionally in combination with other elements, most fundamentally religion. In the history of Kuwait, religion often constituted a force behind its relations with the Ottoman Empire.

Relations with the Ottomans

The Ottomans claimed Arabia in the mid-sixteenth century, when Istanbul conquered Baghdad in 1534 and expanded southward to eastern Arabia in 1550. The Ottoman expansion was driven by a desire to resist the Portuguese incursion in the Gulf, and once the Ottomans achieved supremacy, their control waned. The empire's hegemony in the region ended in 1670 and was replaced in practical terms by that of the Banu Khalid.² But with the demise of the Banu Khalid, and given the Ottoman desire to centralize administration and maximize state revenues, the Turkish Empire's interest in the peninsula was resurrected. In the late nineteenth century, this interest marked a new phase of closer Ottoman-Kuwaiti relations.

During that period, the Al Sabah was eager to maintain Kuwait's autonomy from its powerful neighbors, especially the Wahhabis. Shaykh Abdallah II (1866–1892) was also prepared to recognize the Ottomans' moral leadership of the Sunni Muslim world. In 1871, Abdallah accepted the Ottoman title *qaimmaqam* (provincial governor), which meant, technically speaking, that he was responsible to the Ottoman governor of Basra for the administration of Kuwait. The title was no more than a formality, and Kuwaitis continued in practice to retain their autonomy over their daily affairs. However, Abdallah could not have imagined that his decision to accept the Ottoman title would later be manipulated by modern-day Iraqi leaders to justify the annexation of the tiny country of Kuwait.

The religious factors binding Kuwait to the Ottoman Empire should not be overstated. Kuwait had pragmatic reasons to forge closer relations with Istanbul. First, Kuwait, in addition to its own local wells, depended heavily on drinking water transported by boat from the Shatt al-Arab River in Ottoman-controlled Iraq. Second, the Al Sabah held large estates in Faw, which also fell under Ottoman control. Third, the Al Sabah and the Ottomans regarded the Wahhabis as their enemy.

Kuwait shed itself of Ottoman dominance only after the rise of Mubarak the Great, who is considered the founder of modern Kuwait. Mubarak, who ruled from 1896 to 1915, came to power after he murdered his brothers Muhammad and Jarrah, who ruled Kuwait in partnership from 1892 to 1896. The unprecedented murder paved the way for Mubarak to remove Kuwait from Ottoman dominance and placed it under British control, which lasted until the country became independent in 1961. Thus, foreign influence became a fundamental factor in shaping the country's modern history, in addition to tribalism and religion.

Relations with the British

Kuwait's first recorded contact with the British dates to 1775, when the Persians occupied Basra and the British needed an alternative route for their mail and trade caravans from the Gulf to Aleppo, Syria. Kuwait, with its excellent harbor, seemed to offer a great advantage to the British sending goods from Bombay to the eastern Mediterranean and, eventually, to Western European markets. British caravans brought lucrative benefits to the elite of Kuwait and local commercial interests, but neither the British nor the Kuwaitis desired to take their friendly relations to a more formal level, primarily in order not to provoke the Ottomans. This situation changed when Mubarak came to power.

Mubarak's alliance with the British promised protection from the increasing Ottoman intervention in Kuwait's affairs. Turning to Britain guaranteed Mubarak greater freedom in how the town was managed under his authority. Initially, Britain refused Mubarak's overtures but later responded favorably as a reaction to the growing German and Russian interest in the region. In 1899, Britain signed with Mubarak a secret agreement that placed Kuwait under its protection. The agreement, which lasted until 1961, assured Mubarak the "good offices of the British Government" toward him, his heirs, and successors. It stipulated that Mubarak would not receive the representative of a foreign state or alienate any of his territory without the consent of Her Majesty's Government.³

British interest in Kuwait was part of Britain's broader interests in the Gulf. Before the invention of the telegraph and the opening of the Suez Canal, the Gulf provided Britain with the shortest and fastest route for trade and communications from Bombay to London. It also provided British manufacturers in India with access to lucrative markets in Persia and the Ottoman Empire. Such interests, however, changed with the discovery of oil during the first decades of the twentieth century. Since then, foreign intervention, oil, and local politics have become more than just intertwined.

Independence

After independence, Kuwait faced not only the task of nation-building (as did most Arab states when they obtained independence) but also the challenge of maintaining the integrity of the state in the face of Iraqi claims to the territory. Less than a week after British withdrawal on June 19, 1961, Iraq's prime minister, Abdul Karim Qasim, declared Kuwait part of Iraq and moved his troops to the border, threatening to annex the country. Kuwait's ruler, Shaykh Abdallah al-Salim (1950–1965), immediately called for British support. On July 1, British troops were deployed on the border until they were replaced by Arab forces from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Syria. The Iraqi threat ended with Qasim's execution in 1963, but resumed in 1973 when the new Ba'ath regime in Iraq penetrated three kilometers into Kuwait's territory. Iraqi forces eventually withdrew under pressure from the Soviet Union, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. By that time, it became obvious to the Kuwaitis that while in the past the threat came from the Wahhabis, it now emerged from the radical secular regimes in Iraq.

External threats notwithstanding, the 1960s and 1970s saw the expansion of Kuwait's bureaucracy and welfare state. The 1962 constitution guaranteed Kuwaitis free education from primary school through university, and after graduation, a job in the public or private sector. It also guaranteed public housing, rent subsidies, subsidies for water and electricity, and a monthly family allowance. The generous allocation of social services was crucial in strengthening loyalty to the ruling elite and reinforcing patriotism in the recently independent country.

Kuwait's oil production peaked in the early 1970s, and that enabled the small state to play a role in regional and international politics. It supported the Palestinian cause by supplying money to Palestinian fighters, especially to the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). The PLO chairman, Yasir Arafat, lived in Kuwait from 1958 to 1964, when he founded the Fatah movement. Kuwait was home to more

than three hundred thousand Palestinians by the 1980s, and it increased oil prices to pressure the United States and other countries that provided military assistance to Israel during the 1973 war.

Iran-Iraq War and Domestic Tensions

The 1970s ended with the Iranian Revolution in 1979. The revolution and the Iran-Iraq War, commencing in 1980, made the 1980s the most turbulent decade in Kuwaiti history. Ayatollah Khomeini was critical of the monarchical Gulf regimes and spoke about exporting the ideals of the Iranian Revolution to the region. He also disapproved of Kuwait's support of Saddam Hussein in his war against the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The Iranians began to target Kuwaiti oil tankers, which Iran argued was in retaliation against unfriendly regimes. In response, Kuwait requested help from the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union. The United States and the Soviet Union began to reflag the Kuwaiti fleets with their respective flags as a form of protection. In 1987, the US Navy also began to provide military escorts for Kuwaiti and Saudi tankers sailing in and out of the Persian Gulf.

Khomeini's discourse and policies against the Gulf monarchies radicalized most Kuwaiti Shi'a. From 1983 to 1988, groups of Shi'i Muslims carried out a series of terrorist operations, which included bombing US and European interests in the country, sabotaging oil installations, hijacking Kuwaiti aircraft, and, most seriously, attempting to assassinate the ruler of Kuwait in 1985. Although the majority of the Shi'a condemned the terrorist acts, an air of distrust and suspicion dominated the state's view toward all Shi'a. Security became a serious concern, and during the period, massive deportations of expatriates ensued, many of whom were Iranians.

The Iraqi Occupation and Liberation

Kuwait survived the Iran-Iraq War only to encounter the Iraqi threat once again in the 1990s. On August 2, 1990, approximately 120,000 Iraqi troops, supported by two thousand tanks and armored vehicles, invaded Kuwait. But unlike 1973, when the Iraqi forces occupied only three kilometers of Kuwait, in 1990 the Iraqis annexed the entire country, reaching the capital in less than three hours. The occupation lasted for seven months but had a dramatic, lasting impact on the Kuwaiti psyche.

Saddam Hussein proclaimed several reasons for his decision to occupy Kuwait: (1) Kuwait was historically part of Iraq; (2) Kuwait was stealing \$2.4 billion worth of oil from Iraq by “slant drilling”—that is, by deliberately building oil wells that angled down across the Iraqi-Kuwaiti border in order to pump oil from Iraqi territory; (3) Kuwait was overproducing oil in violation of OPEC’s mandate to lower oil prices and was, therefore, hurting the Iraqi economy; and (4) Kuwait refused to waive the repayment of funds given to Iraq to pay for its war with Iran (about \$13 billion), which Iraq argued was fought to protect Kuwait from Iran. Saddam Hussein accused Kuwait of refusing repayment as part of a wide international conspiracy against Baghdad.

The occupation and the atrocities that ensued signaled the failure of Kuwait’s domestic as well as foreign policies. The government failed to take the Iraqi threat seriously, despite local and foreign intelligence sources confirming its imminence. The regime avoided arming and deploying its forces, speculating that doing so would only aggravate the situation. The result was that at least three-fourths of the armed forces were on leave or away from their posts, and those who remained lacked training, plans for defense, and ammunition.

On the other hand, Kuwait’s diplomatic efforts since independence did yield some advantages. A military coalition of thirty countries, led by the United States, eventually came to liberate Kuwait in 1991. On

January 17, a total of six hundred thousand multinational troops, including the United States, Britain, France, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia, launched a massive air strike on Iraqi targets in what became known as Operation Desert Storm. The ground offensive to recapture Kuwait was launched on February 24, and two days later, it ended the Iraqi occupation. February 27, when Kuwait was fully liberated, marks a national holiday for Kuwaitis. The ruler, who resided in Saudi Arabia during the occupation, returned on March 14, 1991, to resume his power.

Demographic and Social Transformation

Oil, tribalism, Islam, and foreign influence have also shaped Kuwait's social sphere. Kuwaiti nationals comprise one-third of the population of the small state (at roughly 6,800 square miles, it is smaller in size than New Jersey or Wales). Most Kuwaitis are descendants of tribes that migrated from the Arabian Peninsula in the early eighteenth century. Those who settled within the city constitute the urban sector of society, or the *hadar*, while those whose ancestors wandered the desert constitute the nomadic Bedouin, or the *bedu*. Although almost all Bedouin are now urbanized, the *hadar-bedu* division remains one of the important cultural distinctions in Kuwaiti society. Given Kuwait's small size and shortage of inhabitable land, most of the population is concentrated in and around the capital city.

Prior to oil, Kuwaiti society was simply divided into a ruling family, merchants, and pearl divers. After oil, and following the state's distributive policies, Kuwaiti society expanded and became divided along new lines of class, sect, and culture. Today, the royal family plays an important, distinct role, while expatriate-national, citizen-bidun, and Shi'i-Sunni divisions are fundamental dividing lines in society.

The Ruling Family

Prior to oil, the ruling family did not exist as an institution. Instead, the ruler from the Al Sabah relied more on the merchants and intermarriage with leading Sunni families to augment his personal authority. But the discovery of oil liberated the ruler from his past allies and pushed him to rely more on his own relatives. This crystallized the ruling family as a socioeconomic and political institution, specifically in the 1950s, and more so after Kuwait's independence in 1961. Since then, members of the ruling family have been publicly recognized by the title *Skaykh* (*Skaykha* for a woman). All receive monthly stipends, and many are given prestigious posts in the expanding state bureaucracy.

Public discussions of the family's internal affairs were socially and politically taboo until the succession crisis in 2006. Internal rivalries broke boundaries and encouraged society to speak about competing wings within the family. Deputies and the press began to publicly criticize family members by name. One reason for this new trend was related to a generational change within the ruling family. A number of experienced and charismatic figures of the Al Sabah have passed away in recent years, leaving the scene to younger leaders who are ambitious yet impatient and lacking their predecessors' personal appeal. Some of them are openly maneuvering against one another and are forming alliances with journalists and the opposition. In 2013, Shaykh Ahmad Al-Fahad, nephew of the amir, accused Shaykh Nasser al-Mohammad, another prominent member of the ruling family, of plotting a coup against the regime. Although Al-Fahad later apologized, admitting his false accusations, the scandal showed the degree of internal rivalries within the ruling family. If it persists, the divisions will certainly weaken the solidarity of the family as a ruling institution.

Expatriates

Since 1965, Kuwaitis have become a minority in their own country, outnumbered by the expatriates, who constitute the majority. The percentage of foreigners grew from 53 percent in 1965 to 60 percent in 1985 and 70 percent in 2018. Oil spurred job growth and essential demand for manual and skilled labor that could not be filled locally. Also, Kuwait's political neutrality during the cold war made it a favored destination for Palestinians, Iraqis, Syrians, and other Arabs, as well as Indians who had been left behind when British protection ceased.

The government's immigration policy, although inconsistent, tended to restrict immigration and promote "Kuwaitization" in the public and private sectors to balance nationals with foreigners. During the occupation, an estimated 1.3 million, or almost 60 percent of the total population, left the country, including some 250,000 Palestinians and Jordanians. Thousands of Palestinians were also expelled soon after the liberation in response to perceived collaboration with the Iraqis. Their departure radically reduced the size of the immigrant population. But in response to a growing demand for labor to assist in the postwar reconstruction and economic expansion, there was an influx of new labor, particularly from Asia, from 1992 onward.⁴ Thus, between 2000 and 2014 for example, Kuwait's population increased from 2.2 million to 4.1 million; of the 1.9 million increase, 70 percent were non-Kuwaitis.

Bedouin

Historically, Bedouin were desert nomads found outside the walled city. They began to migrate to and settle in Kuwait City in the 1950s as a result of oil and in search of employment. The city expanded, and the wall was finally destroyed in 1957. The majority of Bedouin who settled in Kuwait came from the deserts of Saudi Arabia; the remainder came from Iraq and Syria. Important Bedouin tribes in Kuwait include the Ajman, the Awazim, and the Mutair, most of whom are represented in the cabinet and the assembly.

Most Bedouin were at first recruited into the military and oil fields as unskilled laborers, but with the spread of education, they were absorbed in other parts of the public sector. Despite urbanization, Bedouin continue to retain many of their tribal values and customs, particularly strong tribal loyalty, which is manifest during assembly elections, when tribal members hold primaries prior to the day of the polls to elect the candidate who will represent them in parliament. Primaries, or tribal elections, are outlawed in Kuwait yet are regularly organized.⁵

Bedouin have been traditionally perceived as allies of the government. From 1960 through the 1980s, the state encouraged large numbers of tribal families to settle by granting them citizenship and welfare benefits (e.g., housing, schooling, and social services) in return for their support against the opposition in the assembly. Since their parents settled in the 1950s, however, Kuwaiti Bedouin have become increasingly politicized, and a number of outspoken critics of government policies come from tribal backgrounds. Reasons for the increased politicization include the rise of a politically ambitious young and educated generation that opposes a divided ruling elite and eroding state services.

Shi'a

Shi'a are a Muslim sect and a significant minority in Kuwait; they constitute about 25 percent to 30 percent of the population. Despite their collective name, the Shi'a in Kuwait are a heterogeneous community. Demographically, they are divided into Arabs with roots in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain and non-Arabs who originally migrated from Iran. Economically, they are subtly divided into the affluent old settlers who lived within the walled city and the less affluent latecomers, who were attracted by job opportunities in the oil sector. Politically, Shi'a, like any other community, are divided into secularists with either leftist or liberal leanings and Islamists. But adherence to Islam does not necessarily translate into political activism and may just be a matter of personal piety.

Like the Bedouin, Shi'a were historically viewed as allies of the ruling elite. They were never part of the early movement for political reform in the 1930s, and in the 1960s, they stood by the government against the threat of Arab nationalism. But relations between the Shi'a and the government deteriorated in the 1980s with the outbreak of the Iranian revolution and the Iran-Iraq War. The events mobilized the Shi'a in Kuwait, particularly those who strongly opposed government support for Saddam Hussein against Iran. Some even resorted to violence to express their rejection.

The turbulent period ended in the 1990s with Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the Shi'a's impressive resistance against the occupation. The shared ordeal of Kuwaitis, irrespective of sectarian divisions, created a feeling of national solidarity. The restoration of the constitution returned three Shi'i deputies to the assembly in 1992, five in 1996, and six in 2016, including one woman (Shi'a comprise around 17 percent of the electorate). Despite the large measure of rights and recognition, Shi'a continue to have reservations about their minority status.⁶

Bidoon

Kuwait also has around 112,000 *bidoon* (without nationality), or residents who are stateless or without citizenship. Many are descendants of Bedouin tribes that moved across the deserts of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Iraq before modern borders were drawn. Either because their often-illiterate ancestors did not understand the significance of citizenship or were living outside the city walls, they never retained formal documents to prove their belonging in the country and, hence, were classified as stateless. Until the 1980s, they were recruited into the army and police, but after the occupation were perceived as a security threat. The government argued that some *bidoon* collaborated with the Iraqis, while others were not genuinely *bidoon* and held other nationalities. Today, the *bidoon* account for about 110,000 people. Despite their increase in number and the government's granting of citizenship to four thousand since 2000, the ultimate fate of the *bidoon* in Kuwait has not yet been determined and continues to be a matter of public debate. In 2012 and 2014, inspired by the Tunisians and Egyptians, a few hundred of the *bidoon* took to the streets demanding citizenship, but they were harshly dispersed by the police using tear gas and rubber bullets.

Other Social Sectors

The ruling elite, foreigners, Bedouin, and Shi‘a are not exclusively separate social strata but, rather, interact and, on occasion, overlap. For example, many prominent Bedouin or tribal families are related to the Al Sabah through marriage. Moreover, other important sectors play an important role in Kuwaiti society, including merchants and women.

The merchants formed the backbone of pre-oil Kuwaiti society because trade revenue formed the basis of the city’s income. They made up the core of opposition to the ruling family. Oil undermined the merchants’ political role but certainly not their economic status. During the 1960s and 1970s, a new group of small-business entrepreneurs began to emerge in the economic sector and have since competed with the traditional merchant families. But old merchant families continue to dominate major financial firms, including banks, investment houses, and the powerful Kuwaiti Chamber of Commerce, which was established in 1958. In addition, old merchants are gradually resuming their political influence, albeit in new ways, as the country privatizes.

Women also play an important part in Kuwaiti society and politics. Kuwait made political history when 4 women won seats in the May 2009 elections. Their suffrage came after a long campaign fought since the 1970s. The first proposal went to the assembly in 1971 but subsequently failed for religious and social reasons. It was not until the end of the 1990s that the ruler issued a decree conferring full political rights on women “in recognition of their vital roles in building Kuwaiti society and in return for the sacrifices they made during the various challenges the country faced.”⁷ The decree was issued in 1999 but required the assembly’s approval. After heated debates and amendments to the decree—namely, that women should adhere to the dictates of Islamic law—the bill was finally passed on May 16, 2005. In the same year, the government appointed its first woman

minister, but society had to wait until 2009 to elect four women representatives to the legislature.

It is important to note that not all Kuwaiti women are eligible to vote. Voting rights are only conferred on women whose ancestors resided in Kuwait prior to 1920 and maintained residence until 1959. Women whose ancestors settled after 1920 are naturalized Kuwaitis and are not eligible to vote until they have been citizens for ten years.

Naturalized or not, women continue to be discriminated against in law and in society. For example, women are not entitled to some of the welfare benefits that go to men (e.g., housing and child benefits). Unlike Kuwaiti men who marry non-Kuwaitis, Kuwaiti women who marry foreigners are legally and socially ostracized. Not only are their children non-Kuwaitis, but like their fathers, they are denied the political, economic, and social privileges to which Kuwaitis are entitled.⁸

Religion and Politics

Religion is an important element in Kuwait's society and influences much of its everyday politics. The vast majority of Kuwaitis are Muslims, although there are about 330 Christian Kuwaitis who came from Lebanon, Palestine, and Iraq. Sunnis constitute the majority of Muslims in Kuwait; Shi'a are about 25 percent of the population. The Sunni-Shi'i divide is subtly manifested in residential areas and is more pronounced during election campaigns.

Shari'a is a key source of legislation, but not the only one. Unlike in the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, alcohol is illegal in Kuwait (banned since 1965); yet unlike in Saudi Arabia, there are no religious police in the streets. Moreover, since 1980 Kuwaiti law has prohibited the naturalization of non-Muslims, but there are sizable Hindu and Buddhist and Christian communities that enjoy freedom of worship under the constitution. (There are seven officially recognized Christian churches serving about 450,000 Christians, mostly expatriates.)

During the seven months of Iraq's occupation of Kuwait in 1990, hundreds of Kuwaitis fled to Saudi Arabia, the heart of Wahhabism, and some were subsequently influenced by it and other conservative interpretations of Islam. The result was clearly manifested in the first National Assembly after the liberation in 1992, which had a significant number of Islamist members. The rise of Islamism in Kuwait was also a response to increased waves of Westernization, if not Americanization, since the liberation of the country. There have been several attempts by Islamist deputies to make the shari'a public law, but many Kuwaitis, including successive ruling amirs, rejected any moves in this direction.

Islamists gained wide-scale popularity in the 1990s for their impressive role during the occupation, but their real rise to prominence began in the 1980s when the government turned to

them as political allies instead of the Bedouin.⁹ In the elections of 1999, Islamists became the biggest forces in parliament, controlling 36 percent of the seats. Islamists might be united on certain issues but are practically divided on priorities and tactics. Shi'i Islamists seek to end legal and social discrimination based on sectarian divisions, while the more conservative Sunnis (Salafis) tend to focus on ethical issues and matters of belief. The Muslim Brotherhood focuses more on wider issues of social and political reform.¹⁰

The real threat to Kuwait's society and regime has come from the so-called Islamic State (ISIS). In June 2015, the terrorist group claimed the attack on a Shi'i mosque that killed twenty-six and wounded hundreds. The government soon uncovered a local ISIS terror cell with at least five Kuwaitis, some of whom fought with the terrorist organization in Syria and Iraq.

Institutions and Governance

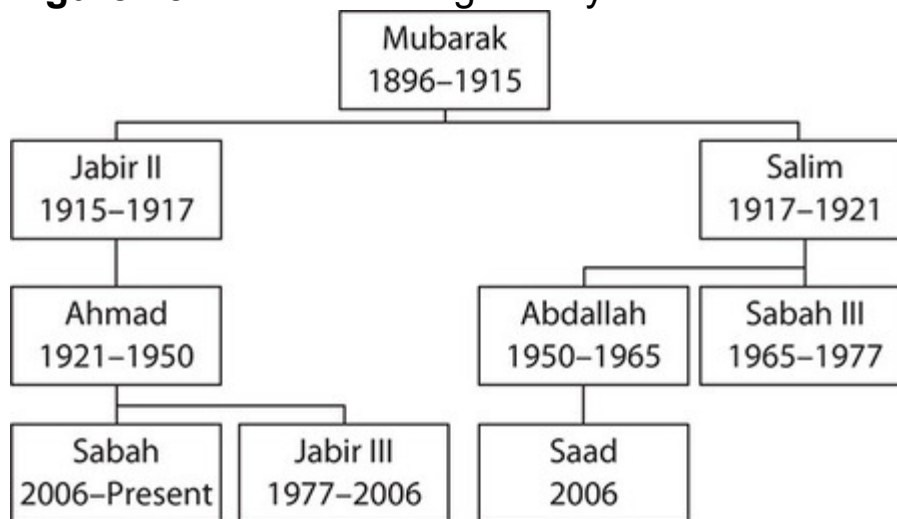
Westerners generally tend to identify Kuwait more with money, oil, and Saddam Hussein, but recent events, such as the succession crisis in 2006 and first-time victory of women in parliamentary elections in 2009, reflect the great complexity of Kuwaiti politics. The ruler's succession and women's ascension to parliament are essentially manifestations of Kuwait's dominant political institutions—namely, the ruling family and the National Assembly, which do not operate alone but are governed by a constitution and a cabinet.

The Ruling Family

Prior to oil, the ruling Al Sabah governed in consultation with the merchants, the most powerful and dominant social force at that time. Merchants provided the Al Sabah with income in the form of customs duties (estimated at about \$40,000 in 1938) and voluntary contributions in return for administration and security. Political power rested more on the ruler than on his family, and he was selected for his personal qualities.¹¹ Furthermore, religion and tribal customs were the basis of much of the Al Sabah's enforcement of law and order.

The discovery of oil in the 1930s consolidated the power of the ruling family over the merchant class, whose financial contributions were no longer needed; much of the customs tariffs were eventually abolished, but that did not entirely dismantle the power of the merchants, who continued to dominate much of Kuwait's business. Nor did the ruling family enjoy absolute political power thereafter. The mobilization of a rising middle class since the 1950s and a liberal constitution enacted in 1962 have limited the power of the Al Sabah. Kuwait, a hereditary emirate, therefore, lies between a constitutional monarchy and an absolute monarchy.

Figure 15.1 Kuwait Ruling Family Succession



In reality the ruler, or *amir*, is the most dominant force in Kuwaiti politics. According to the constitution, his person is “immune and inviolable.” He shares control of legislative power with the National Assembly, control of judicial power with the courts, and control of executive power with the cabinet. In addition, he is the supreme commander of the armed forces, with the authority to declare a defensive war without the prior approval of the assembly. He can also independently conclude treaties that do not affect Kuwait’s security or economy and can declare martial law in a state of emergency.

Since the early twentieth century, the ruling family has developed an informal yet disciplined succession pattern by which leadership alternates between the descendants of Jabir and Salim, the sons of Mubarak the Great (see [Figure 15.1](#)). This alternation was violated once in 1965, when Abdallah al-Salim (1950–1965) was succeeded by his brother Sabah al-Salim (1965–1977), but resumed when Jabir al-Ahmad succeeded Sabah al-Salim in 1977 and named a member of the Salim line, Saad al-Abdallah al-Salim Al Sabah, as his crown prince. The crown prince also has traditionally served as the prime minister—again, an informal pattern since the 1960s.

With the ailing health of Skaykh Jabir and Crown Prince Skaykh Saad, both patterns were seriously disturbed. In 2003, the post of prime minister was separated from that of the crown prince and given to the longtime foreign minister, Skaykh Sabah al-Ahmad. Skaykh Saad continued to retain the title of crown prince. With the death of Skaykh Jabir in 2006 and the inability of Skaykh Saad to assume the expected duties of amir, the ruling family encountered its first serious succession crisis.

Skaykh Saad, who ruled for a mere nine days, abdicated and was replaced by Skaykh Sabah al-Ahmad, the current ruler of Kuwait. Skaykh Sabah immediately named his brother, the eighty-one-year-old Nawwaf al-Ahmad, as crown prince and his nephew, Nasir al-Muhammad, as prime minister. Skaykh Sabah had consolidated the separation of the crown prince and the premiership and, in the

process, denied the Salim clan both jobs. The crown prince and prime minister are members of the Jabir clan of the Al Sabah dynasty.

The National Assembly

Kuwait's political system enjoys a degree of popular participation. The idea of a national assembly that shares legislative power with the ruler is stipulated in the constitution of 1962, yet it has actually existed in practice since the 1930s. Fearing a loss of status in the post-oil era, a group of merchants organized into a political movement and demanded a legislative council. Although the council was dissolved only months after it was founded in 1938, its fourteen elected members managed to significantly reform the economy, administration, and education. Henceforth, Kuwait survived without a national assembly until independence in 1961.

In 1962, Skaykh Abdallah al-Salim called for a general election to elect a constituent assembly to draft a constitution. At that time, Kuwait was confronting several crises, mainly Iraq's threat to annex the country. Skaykh Abdallah was under growing pressure to shift from a traditional to a modern system of governance, without totally dismantling the power of the monarch. The constitution has never been amended since its ratification in 1962 and continues to underpin Kuwaiti politics.

It was written during the peak of Arab nationalism and, thus, contained obligatory mention that Kuwait is "part of the Arab nation" and a sovereign country in its own right. It also defined Kuwait as a hereditary emirate and confined succession to the throne to the descendants of Mubarak the Great. While the constitution recognized the civil rights of individuals and groups, it discouraged the formation of political parties. Political parties are technically banned in Kuwait, but political groupings do exist in the form of newspapers, clubs, and organizations.

The elections for the first National Assembly were held in 1963, and subsequent elections were held at the end of an assembly's four-year term in 1967, 1971, and 1975. Initially, the rulers envisioned that the assembly would be used to build alliances against the

merchants and Arab nationalists. Allies were usually drawn from the politically quiescent Shi'a, conservative Sunnis, and Bedouin, all of whom soon became politicized and critical of their patron's policies.

While the merchants were very influential in the early assemblies in 1963 and 1967, their power began to recede in 1971. In 1981 and 1985, the assembly was dominated by the rising middle class, which included Islamists, nationalists, and tribalists. The assembly increasingly became a political nuisance and, since the 1970s, has been at odds with the government regarding its oil and foreign policies. Amid mounting tension between the assembly and the government, the ruler dissolved the assembly and relegated its powers to the ruler and the cabinet.

The assembly remained illegally suspended from 1976 to 1981. According to the constitution, the ruler may dissolve the National Assembly for a period not to exceed two months from the date of dissolution. Beyond this period, any suspension is regarded as unconstitutional. In 1986, the assembly was again suspended illegally in response to its vehement criticism of state corruption and press restrictions. The suspension triggered a political coalition comprised of liberals, merchants, Islamists, and former assembly members who demanded restoration of the parliament. The coalition continued to be politically active in *diwaniyahs* (informal social gatherings of men) until the Iraqi occupation in 1990.

A year after the country was liberated from occupation, the ruling family decided to restore the constitution and called for parliamentary elections in 1992. Government failure to deal with the entire crisis, the courageous and liberating actions of Kuwaitis inside and outside Kuwait during the period of the occupation, and Western pressure to expand democratic rights have contributed to the Kuwaiti push toward further democratization. One telling outcome of this trend was granting women full political rights in 2005, as discussed earlier. In that same year, the government appointed its first female minister.

The Government

The government is positioned between the ruler and the National Assembly. The ruler appoints the prime minister and other ministers; until 2006, he also named the crown prince. Once the cabinet has been formed, normally at the commencement of the legislative term, ministers are expected to submit their program to the assembly. According to the constitution, the members of the cabinet should not exceed one-third of the assembly's fifty members. Although cabinet ministers are not allowed to sit on assembly committees, they are allowed to participate in the assembly's general debates and are entitled to vote on bills.

The first cabinet was formed in 1962, and eleven out of its fifteen ministers were from the ruling family. They headed the key ministries of foreign affairs, interior, defense, information, finance, and oil. Over time, the Al Sabah's dominance waned as more cabinet ministers were drawn from the National Assembly, business sector, and professions. Recruitment to the cabinet has long been based on patrimony, family background, origins, and sectarian affiliations, among other factors, more than on merit. The regime has maintained the practice of appointing Shi'i and women ministers since 1975 and 2005, respectively. In the 2017 government, there are two—one woman and one Shi'i—but cabinet ministers have continued to be exclusively Muslim and predominantly middle-age, urban Sunni males.¹²

Much of Kuwaiti politics had been a struggle for control between the government and the assembly. Prior to the elections of 1981, the government pushed in 1980 for an amendment to the electoral law in the hope that it would generate a more docile parliament. Since 1962, the law had divided Kuwait into ten constituencies, with five deputies representing each. The new amendment divided Kuwait into twenty-five constituencies, with two deputies representing each. Although redistricting was supposed to please government loyalists (usually tribal factions living on the outskirts of the city), the 1985

assembly proved to be one of the most vocal and critical of government policies. The assembly accused the justice minister, a member of the ruling family, of improper use of government funds during Kuwait's controversial stock market crash in 1982.

The parliament has limited power. During the illegal suspension of the assembly from 1976 to 1981, the government was free to issue a series of decrees that restricted political activities; curtailed freedom of expression; and, in general, empowered bureaucratic institutions to control opposing political ideas and practices. The justifications for the cabinet's repressive measures had much to do with Arab politics of the 1970s. The Lebanese civil war (1975–1990) and the subsequent Syrian military intervention in Lebanon was blamed on press freedom. Many Kuwaitis feared that a misguided freedom of expression would lead to a repeat of the Lebanese experience, causing societal fragmentation and political anarchy. Arab tensions were coupled with outside pressures on Kuwait from conservative neighbors—namely, Saudi Arabia—to adopt a more authoritarian style of governing.¹³

The 1980s were troubling for Kuwait's security and politics. The Iranian Revolution in 1979 and the Iran-Iraq War from 1980 to 1988 added to the tension between the government and the assembly. History repeated itself when the ruler announced the assembly's second dissolution in 1986 and implied that some deputies had conspired to destabilize the country. Strict press censorship was introduced at that time. In 1989, deputies of the dissolved assembly began to press for its reinstatement. The government announced that it would not restore the assembly but would establish a national advisory council. The opposition boycotted the elections, and the council was interrupted by the Iraqi invasion.

The Iraqi occupation lasted for seven months and marked a turning point in Kuwaiti politics. Despite Saddam Hussein's unjustified aggression, there was equally a sense among Kuwaitis that government policies were responsible for the invasion. Critics argued that Kuwait's overproduction of oil since 1989 was a deliberate

attempt to damage Iraq's economy. The government was also accused of censoring information about the seriousness of the Iraqi threat against which it had failed to prepare. Had the government taken Iraq's threat seriously or even negotiated with its representatives in good faith, perhaps the invasion could have been avoided.

Regime failure and the impressive role of Kuwaitis within the country and in exile during the occupation bolstered the push for democracy. The George H. W. Bush administration also pressed the amir to reestablish the parliament as soon as the country was liberated.¹⁴ In 1992, seventeen junior members of the ruling family sent a petition to the amir in which they demanded democratization. In October of the same year, the amir called for parliamentary elections, free of irregularities or interventions. The National Assembly has never been illegally suspended since.

Yet the steps toward democracy did not end the tensions between the assembly and the cabinet; instead, it deepened them. The separation of the posts of crown prince and prime minister has added to the opposition's confidence in criticizing the government. In 2006, two deputies put forth a motion to prosecute Skaykh Nasser al-Mohammad, the prime minister and a prominent member of the ruling family, over the government's handling of electoral reform. It is a deputy's constitutional right to indict government officials, and they have done so in the past, but never had they tried a prime minister, who traditionally was also crown prince and therefore immune from parliamentary questioning. Such motions to impeach the prime minister have been systematically obstructed through either the resignation of the cabinet or the dissolution of the assembly. In 2011, hundreds of protestors stormed the parliament, chanting, "The people want to bring down the head [of government]!" recalling the cries of thousands of Egyptian demonstrators demanding Hosni Mubarak's ouster in 2011. In an unprecedented move, the prime minister indeed resigned in 2011, following serious corruption allegations—related to government bribes to parliamentarians—and the amir appointed a new member from the Al-Sabah (Skaykh Jabir

al-Mubarak) in the same year. This, however, did not end public grievances; rather, it escalated the demands for further political reforms. In 2012, the amir dissolved a popular parliament with a majority of opposition and unilaterally changed the electoral law to give one vote, instead of four votes, to each eligible voter. Although the constitutional court later ruled the amir's action as being constitutionally sound, the leading opposition faction boycotted the 2013 elections, which resulted in a progovernment assembly.

Domestic Conflict

Although Kuwaitis' demands for reform predated the Arab Spring, the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt added a fresh impetus to a popular movement. The amir's dissolution of parliament in 2012 and change of electoral law to constrain the power opposition only added to the domestic tensions. The infuriated opposition took to the streets to voice their strong demands for radical reforms, including demands for an elected popular government. The opposition—comprised of Islamists, liberals, the youth, and major civil society organizations—failed to mobilize the masses, as did their counterparts in Egypt.

The government was successfully able to clamp down on members of the opposition, some of whom were stripped of their Kuwaiti citizenship. In 2015, Musallam al-Barrak, a former vocal assembly member and figurehead of political dissent, was charged with insulting the amir in a public rally and sentenced to two years in prison. Young activists were also jailed for using social networks to defame the amir, a phenomenon that is stirring serious public debate on freedom of expression and e-crimes. The failure of Islamists in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya and political chaos in countries like Syria, Iraq, and Yemen is used to persuade the public in Kuwait that monarchical regime is the best guarantee for a secured and stable future. The challenge, nonetheless, remains for the government to continue to provide its people with efficient welfare services and guard against the dangerous consequences of regional turmoil.

Political Economy

Kuwait's economy is largely based on oil production. Oil was first discovered in Kuwait in the 1930s, but commercial shipment to international markets did not begin until after World War II in 1946. By the 2017 to 2018 fiscal year, oil and petroleum accounted for about 55 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) and 87.8 percent of Kuwait's annual revenue. With total oil production capacity of almost three million barrels per day and 10 percent of the world's crude oil reserves, Kuwait plans to make available four million barrels per day by 2020. The United States, Europe, and Japan are the main consumers of the country's oil. Thus, oil has an undeniable impact on the political economy of Kuwait. To understand the extent of this impact requires a brief discussion of Kuwait's economy prior to oil.

Pre-Oil Economy

As discussed earlier, Kuwait had always enjoyed a fine natural harbor—and, therefore, many of its pre-oil economic activities centered on the sea. In the nineteenth century, Kuwaiti sailors benefited from thriving trade routes and networks in the Indian Ocean, stretching from India to East Africa. The trading season commenced in September and continued for ten months. Sailors began their journey with dates brought from Basra and traded down the Gulf coast to East Africa or to India across the Indian Ocean. Dates were traded for cash or goods, such as rice and spices from India, coffee from Yemen, tobacco and dried fruit from Persia, and wood for shipbuilding from East Africa. Kuwaiti merchants traveled widely and resided abroad for months at a time. As a result, they developed extensive regional networks, based on commerce, kinship, and marriage. This network helped develop an organized and powerful merchant class that came to shape much of Kuwait's politics until the discovery of oil in the 1930s.

In addition to trade, other pre-oil activities included fishing and pearling. Unlike fishing, which was largely for local consumption, pearling was a lucrative export trade in Kuwait. Just before World War I when the industry was at its peak, Kuwait had a large fleet of pearling boats from which about fifteen thousand men—a significant part of the population at that time—dove. The prosperous industry survived for centuries but was finally destroyed in the mid-twentieth century by the Great Depression, the emergence of Japanese cultured pearls, the outbreak of World War II and, of course, the discovery of oil.¹⁵

Photo 15.1 Annual pearl-diving trips, held under the amir's patronage, keep traditions alive.



YASSER AL-ZAYYAT/AFP/Getty Images

Pre-oil activities were not only economic ventures but also affected how society was divided and organized. Divisions did not disappear totally with the discovery of oil; they simply took a different shape. Pre-oil Kuwaiti society was broadly divided into ship owners, ship captains, and crews, which included the divers who collected the oysters. Owners and captains, who were sometimes one and the same, amassed wealth from trade and pearling for their powerful families. They were usually the urban, Sunni families who claimed descent from the early Najdi settlers. The divers, at the bottom of the economic pyramid, were nomads from the desert, Shi'a from Persia, and slaves from Africa.

Oil Economy

Kuwait's oil was discovered in 1938 by Kuwait Oil Company (KOC), originally a joint holding of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, later British Petroleum (BP), and American Gulf Oil. By 1953, Kuwait had become the largest producer of oil in the Persian Gulf and in 1956, the largest in the Middle East. The government bought KOC in 1976, thereby becoming the first Arab oil-producing state to achieve full control of its output.

The state's full ownership of oil enabled it to develop an all-embracing welfare system that does not charge income tax and provides citizens with housing, generous retirement pensions, free health and education services, and comprehensive support for orphans, the elderly, and the handicapped. The welfare system is a reflection of the interrelated social responsibilities of the pre-oil era and is in keeping with local Bedouin traditions of paternalism. In addition, the state's ownership of oil provides the ruling coalition with a modern base of legitimacy to support its traditional one.¹⁶

Social and economic stratification in the post-oil era continued under a different guise. Pre-oil nomads, fishermen, and divers now turned into bureaucrats and technocrats in the developing state sectors, while ship owners and ship captains turned into businessmen. The government promised merchants new state contracts for development work, so when contracts were given to foreign firms, the government stipulated they take Kuwaiti partners. These and other policies maintained the merchants' pre-oil status in the new oil economy.

Oil has had a significant impact on the provision of state services and the population. In 2016, for instance, the literacy rate among Kuwaitis was more than 95.7 percent, which is on a par with Western Europe. This is largely due to the government's increase in oil revenues and subsequent provision of free education to its nationals (those attending the local university receive a monthly stipend of

about \$870, and those who attend college overseas are also generously funded). As a result, the educational status of nationals has shown steady improvement. In the 1970s, for example, only 22 percent of technical staff in the government sector was Kuwaiti; by 2015, this figure exceeded 70 percent. With the rising level of education, traditional attitudes toward women's education and employment have changed. Kuwaiti women outnumber men in Kuwait University and constitute a significant labor force in the public sector (ministries, other public authorities, and state-owned oil companies).

Non-Oil Economy

Higher oil revenues enabled Kuwait to embark on an ambitious program of further diversifying its economy away from oil. The government became increasingly aware that oil was a nonrenewable resource and started to take serious steps to make its future economy less reliant on it. Many of Kuwait's efforts to diversify its income began in the 1960s with plans to industrialize. In 1964, the Shuaibah Industrial Zone was built to include distilling plants and electrical production facilities to support manufacturing. Factories to produce cement, asphalt, and other industrial chemicals, such as chlorine, were also constructed. Despite these efforts, industrial development has never reached the levels found in other Gulf countries, such as Saudi Arabia. Like industry, agriculture was never a success story in Kuwait, partially because of the country's difficult weather conditions. In 2017, agricultural products account for as little as 0.4 percent of the GDP.

A significant source of income comes from investment projects abroad. In 1976, Kuwait founded the Reserve Fund for Future Generations, in which 10 percent of oil revenues is deposited and invested. Initially, most of the investments—about \$7 billion in the late 1970s—were concentrated in the United States and Europe. In the 1980s, investments were also made in Japan. With its carefully chosen and successful ventures, by the mid-1980s Kuwait was earning more from its overseas investments than it was from direct sales of oil: Foreign assets in 1987 reached \$6.3 billion, and its oil revenues totaled \$5.4 billion. Following the Iraqi invasion in 1990, these assets became the only source of funding for the Gulf War expenses and reconstruction. By 2013, assets in the Reserve Fund were worth more than \$340 billion.

In addition to its overseas investment, Kuwait is relentlessly developing its private sector. To encourage private non-oil industry, the government began establishing joint ventures with private capital in the early 1960s and again in the 1980s, when it had to buy up

shares to support prices on the local stock exchange. Kuwait's private sector, however, suffers from a narrow base and a lack of advanced technology. To improve and widen the role of the private sector, the government began in 1994 a privatization program, which has not been remarkably successful. Fewer than 5 percent of Kuwaitis were employed in the private sector in 2017. Nonetheless, the government is relying more on the private sector in carrying out public projects and is privatizing the production of some public goods and services. In 2000, Kuwait for the first time permitted foreigners to own shares in Kuwaiti companies, a change that recently turned Kuwait's local stock exchange into one of the most active in the Arab world. There are general fears, however, that privatization will result in higher unemployment among young Kuwaitis, most of whom prefer working in state sectors.

In an attempt to turn the country into a regional trading center, a free-trade zone allowing full foreign ownership was established in 1998, and a second one was approved for the northern area of the country. After a hiatus of thirteen years, trade with Iraq is wide open again; the effort to rebuild Iraq is creating massive opportunities for the transport and construction industries. Kuwait, with its developed ports and transport facilities, expects to be the import route of choice for the reconstruction of Iraq and to become a regional trading hub in the long run.¹⁷

Foreign Policy

Following independence in 1961, Kuwait attempted to assert its political autonomy and achieve international recognition. It became a member of the Arab League in 1961, and in 1963, a member of the United Nations and some UN-related agencies, such as the World Bank and General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). Regionally, Kuwait began to expand its relations with Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Syria to thwart growing threats from Iraq. Indeed, during most of the 1960s and 1970s the major regional threat to Kuwait's security and sovereignty came from Iraq, which continued to instigate minor border conflicts. In 1961, days after Kuwait's independence, Iraq threatened to annex the emirate, and in 1973, it mobilized troops along the border before finally standing down under pressure from other Arab countries.

To garner Arab support, Kuwait established the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development in 1961, with the prime task of offering grants and low-interest loans to Arab states to develop their economies. Its capital dramatically increased from \$150 million in 1961 to approximately \$6.75 billion in the 1980s.¹⁸ In 1984, Kuwait allocated 3.81 percent of its gross national product (GNP) to development assistance and has consistently been ranked among the top-ten donor countries to Arab states such as Yemen, Tunisia, Sudan, and Jordan and to the PLO.

Because of their generosity through the fund, the support that the PLO and the governments of Jordan, Yemen, and Sudan gave Saddam Hussein during the 1990 invasion shocked Kuwaitis, and they were hard pressed to formulate a more pragmatic diplomacy. Prior to the Gulf War in 1991, Palestinians constituted the largest expatriate community in Kuwait (about 30 percent of the population). After liberation, thousands of Palestinians were forcibly expelled, reducing their number in 2006 from 350,000 to 4,000. Palestinians today make up less than 3 percent of the population, with little

chance that their number (about seven thousand) will dramatically increase in the near future.

Kuwait has acted within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) toward the uprisings in the Middle East that began in 2011. It sent a naval force to Bahrain's coast in support of the GCC's military intervention to assist Bahrain's government against its Shi'i uprising in 2011. It also cooperated with the GCC to bring about the peaceful transition of power in Yemen. Kuwait is eager to maintain its relations with Egypt, even if after the downfall of its ex-president and close ally, Hosni Mubarak, and the coming of the Muslim Brotherhood to power. Because Syria is aligned with Iran, Kuwait is hoping that the downfall of Bashar al-Asad in Syria would weaken Iran's position in the region.

Relations with Iran

In 1979, the Iranian Revolution radically changed the political scene in the region. The most serious threat to Kuwait during much of the 1980s came from Iran. During the Iran-Iraq War, Kuwait supported Saddam Hussein against Ayatollah Khomeini and sought international protection of its oil tankers from the Soviet Union and the United States. Until the end of the cold war, however, Kuwait made serious diplomatic efforts to appear neutral in its relations with both superpowers. Although the British withdrew from the Gulf in 1971, the United States did not become Kuwait's key international ally until the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990.

Revolutionary fervor in Iran has abated since the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989 and the presidency of Hashemi Rafsanjani from 1989 to 1997. Rafsanjani, pragmatic compared to revolutionary Khomeini, sought to improve relations with other Gulf countries, especially Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Rafsanjani condemned the Iraqi invasion in 1990 and gave thousands of Kuwaiti refugees shelter in Iran. Relations between Kuwait and Iran have improved significantly since then. This is partially reflected in increased trade relations and Kuwait's recognition of a more active Iranian role in Gulf security.

Despite improved relations, Kuwait continues to harbor concerns over Iran's regional ambitions and influence, particularly on the Shi'a in Kuwait and Iraq. If Iran fosters sectarian violence inside Iraq, Kuwait fears it will spill over the borders. In 2015, Kuwait charged one Iranian and twenty-five Kuwaiti Shi'a with contacts with Iran and the Lebanese Hizbullah group in order to plot attacks inside the country. The authorities seized arms and explosives allegedly smuggled in from Iran.

Kuwait also worried that Iran's nuclear deal with the United States in 2015 will embolden Tehran to increase its backing for its allies in Syria and Yemen—at odds with Gulf Arab countries—and increase its interference in the internal politics of majority Shi'a Bahrain. Such

concerns were diminished, at least somewhat, as the United States under the Trump administration distanced itself from this deal.

Relations with the EU

Kuwait's relationship with the member states of the European Union (EU) has been largely based on economic development rather than on military cooperation. Kuwait's imports from Europe in 1994, for example, constituted 36.3 percent of its total world imports, and in 1995, Kuwait ranked number one in consumption of European goods among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman.¹⁹ Increased trade has also marked Kuwait's relations with individual European countries. In 2011, Kuwaiti imports from Britain rose by nearly 20 percent, and Kuwaiti exports to Britain reached €1.6 billion. In 2012, German exports to Kuwait came to €1.02 billion, and the country was the fourth-biggest exporter to the Gulf nation.

Economic cooperation has been the pattern governing GCC-EU relations, especially since they signed a formal cooperation agreement in 1988.²⁰ The EU, a major, diversified trading bloc, relies heavily on the export of manufactured goods and is, therefore, highly interested in continued access to lucrative markets in the Gulf states, including Kuwait. In 1992, the EU accounted for nearly 40 percent of the GCC's imports, in contrast to the United States, which accounted for less than 20 percent.

Although the EU plays a junior role compared to the United States in political and security matters of the Gulf, Kuwait and the rest of the GCC welcome greater European political involvement in the region. Kuwait, for instance, supports the European policy of engaging Iran through dialogue, in contrast to the punitive measures and coercive diplomacy of the United States. Furthermore, Kuwait anticipates a European role in the Arab-Israeli peace process that is more effective than the US role.

Relations with the United States

Kuwaiti-US relations date to the 1940s, when a US oil firm owned 50 percent of Kuwait Oil Company. The relationship changed from a commercial to a political one as Britain's influence waned in the 1960s. In 1971, the United States named its first ambassador to Kuwait, and in 1972, the US Department of Defense conducted an important survey of Kuwait's national defense requirements, paving the way for future arms sales.

Ties between the two countries began to strengthen in the 1980s, when Kuwait sought US protection from Iranian aggression during the Iran-Iraq War. In 1987, the US Navy escorted Kuwaiti tankers under the US flag to thwart attacks from Iran. At the end of the Iran-Iraq War in 1988, Kuwait loosened its ties with the States because it did not want to be seen as openly aligning with the West.²¹

Kuwaiti reluctance to pursue warmer relations with the United States changed in 1991. In that year, Kuwait declared the United States its strategic partner and signed a ten-year defense pact (renewed in 2001) that provided for stockpiling US military equipment in Kuwait, US access to Kuwaiti ports and airports, and joint training exercises and equipment purchases.

Before the George W. Bush administration (2001–2009), the main goal of US policy in the Gulf was to preserve a pro-US regional balance of power and prevent any hostile state from asserting its dominance. But in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks, the Bush administration decided to change the power configuration of the Middle East and the domestic politics of regional states. It invaded Iraq, defeated Saddam Hussein, and established a new government in Baghdad. The costs of this new policy were enormous for the United States, and the regional repercussions were largely negative.

While the United States may have ended the Iraqi threat forever in 2003, its military presence in the region is forging new enemies. In 2002, two Kuwaitis fired on US Marines conducting military exercises on Failaka Island, killing one and injuring another. Kuwaiti authorities were later informed that one of the gunmen had sworn allegiance to Osama bin Laden. There was another shooting involving American troops a week later. In 2003, another gunman shot dead an American civilian and wounded a second near Camp Doha, one of the main US military bases in Kuwait.

The presence of al-Qa`ida elements in Kuwait was confirmed in 2005 when Kuwaiti security forces rounded up a group of militants, among them Kuwaiti military personnel. Calling themselves the Lions of the Peninsula, they had plans to attack US bases and interests. Thirty-seven militants were charged; of them, thirty-four face the death penalty. In August 2009, Kuwaiti authorities arrested six alleged al-Qa`ida militants who were planning to attack Camp Arifjan, the second-largest US military base, which houses fifteen thousand American soldiers.

Relations with the United States have fluctuated with different administrations. Under President Barack Obama, US policy was more moderate than under George W. Bush. The Obama administration took a balance-of-power approach to the Gulf, tried to maintain the United States' preeminent role, and worked to prevent hostile powers from dominating the region. Obama's active engagement with Iraq was a visible illustration of current US policy. The Trump administration's policies stand in contrast to those of the Obama administration, with Trump taking a more standoff approach to the region.

Future Prospects

With the end of the Iraqi threat in 2003 and the execution of Saddam Hussein in 2006, Kuwait feels safer than it did in the 1990s, although the tiny country's problems have not disappeared totally. Kuwait is still concerned with the bloody tensions in Iraq between the Shi'a and Sunnis, which could affect the country. On many occasions, the ruler, Skaykh Sabah al-Ahmad, has warned community leaders and the press about the dangerous consequences of sectarian politics and has emphasized the need for a united national front. Kuwait continues to be watchful for al-Qa'ida insurgents and wary of Iranian intentions, but not to the extent of collaborating with the United States in a war against the Islamic Republic. Kuwait supports US dialogue with Iran.

Domestically, Kuwait is eager to make a strong comeback as the "pearl of the Gulf"—its nickname in the 1970s. With a healthy increase in oil revenues and a booming economy, the state is becoming a regional financial center. It wants to liberate the economy, attract foreign investments, and expand the private sector. Despite difficult weather conditions and bureaucratic and cultural constraints, the country is working hard to develop tourism.

The desire for transforming Kuwait into a financial center is hindered by the continuous tension between the cabinet and parliament. Since 2006, the government has reshuffled five times, and the assembly has been dissolved four times.²² The schism is dividing society and is leading youthful protesters, inspired by Arab uprisings since 2011, to call for reforms. However, unlike the protests that led to regime change in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt, Kuwaitis do not aim to change the rule of the Al-Sabah but to limit its grip on power and expand popular participation in governance. Some are demanding that Kuwait become a constitutional monarchy, in which the assembly, not the amir, names a prime minister, but the amir understandably rejects any move in this direction. The amir has the ultimate power to

appoint prime ministers, all of whom have so far been picked from the Al-Sabah family. The resignation of one prime minister and the reform of the electoral law in 2013 did not end Kuwait's political deadlock, but exacerbated it. If the crisis persists in an already troubled region, the possibility that parliament might be dissolved—unconstitutionally this time—is one that haunts many Kuwaitis.

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16 Lebanon

Paul Salem

Lebanon is a puzzling contradiction. On the one hand, it is a country that has rebounded from years of internal and external war to return to political and economic normality; on the other hand, it is a country that remains divided along communal lines and crippled by wars and their aftermath. It is the longest-standing constitutional democracy in the Arab world, dating back to 1926, yet its political system is one of the most archaic in the world, characterized by confessionalism, clientelism, oligarchy, and corruption. It is a unique example of civilizational coexistence and cooperative Christian-Muslim government in a world bedeviled by rising civilizational clashes; at the same time, it is a festering swamp of communal tensions and confessional narrow-mindedness. It is a haven of free speech, free association, and civility; yet it is a highly stressed society, where freedoms are subtly or not so subtly curtailed, where communal tensions lurk dangerously below a civil surface, where weapons are readily available, and where armed organizations operate beyond the control of the state. It appears to be an open, secular society; however, it is a federation of inward-looking conservative religious communities, each with its own religious hierarchy and its own fundamentalisms. It is a brazen little country, the only Arab country to force an Israeli withdrawal from its territory; yet it is a precarious republic limping along with a myriad of ailments, weaknesses, and stresses.¹ Its postwar reconstruction effort seems to offer a glittering example of rebounding from collapse, but the country's economy has been crippled by public debt that has ballooned to 170 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP), and the distribution of income has grown dangerously skewed. In many ways, Lebanon is a failed state—a state unable to control its borders or its territory; but if it is a failed state, it certainly appears to be one of the most successful failed states of modern times.

Understanding the environment and dynamics of Lebanese politics and government is a challenging prospect. The current dynamics cannot be understood without an understanding of the historical processes that created Lebanon's institutions and political culture and without an understanding of the broader political environment within which Lebanon exists.

Making of the Contemporary State

From Amirate to Special Province

Since the sixteenth century, Mount Lebanon had been an informally autonomous region within the Ottoman Empire. Its politics were based on negotiation, competition, and cooperation among prominent semifeudal families that had been granted tax farming authority by the Ottoman Porte in a hierarchy topped by a local amir. For several centuries, the Druze community had been the dominant political and economic force in Mount Lebanon, but during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the demographic and politico-economic balance had begun to shift to the Christian Maronite Catholics.²

This, as well as other regional political factors, led to a breakdown of the semifeudal order in 1840, and two decades of political troubles ensued, often pitting Maronites and Druze against each other. An attempt during this period to set up two provinces—one Christian and one Druze—in order to reduce tension only made matters worse, as minorities in both provinces felt increasingly threatened. In 1861, after formal talks between the Ottoman state and the European Great Powers, a formal constitutional document, known as the *Reglement Organique*, was proclaimed. In it, the idea of a united Mount Lebanon was revived, but this time not as a semifeudal amirate but as a legally defined special Ottoman province. The governor would be a nonlocal Ottoman Christian (from the Greek or Armenian Ottoman communities) appointed in consultation with the European Great Powers, some of whom by this time regarded themselves as guardians of Lebanon's Christians, and he would govern in consultation with an elected administrative council. Seats in this council would be apportioned to the main religious communities in the province (mainly Maronites and Druze, but also some Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholics, Sunnis, and Shi'a).³

Key Facts on Lebanon

AREA 4,015 square miles (10,400 square kilometers)

CAPITAL Beirut
POPULATION 4,047,270 Lebanese; 1.5 million Syrian refugees and residents; 200,000 Palestinian refugees
PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION UNDER 25 40.51 (2017)
RELIGIOUS GROUPS (PERCENTAGE) Muslim, 59.7; Christian, 39; other, 1.3
ETHNIC GROUPS (PERCENTAGE) Arab, 95; Armenian, 4; other, 1
OFFICIAL LANGUAGE Arabic; French, English, and Armenian widely spoken
TYPE OF GOVERNMENT Republic
DATE OF INDEPENDENCE November 22, 1943 (from League of Nations mandate under French administration)
GDP (PPP) \$89.26 billion; \$14,676 per capita (2017)
GDP (NOMINAL) \$51.84 billion; \$8,524 per capita (2017)
PERCENTAGE OF GDP BY SECTOR Agriculture, 5.7; industry, 21; services, 73.3 (2017)
TOTAL RENTS (PERCENTAGE OF GDP) FROM NATURAL RESOURCES 0.001
FERTILITY RATE 1.72 children born/woman

Source: Central Intelligence Agency, *CIA World Factbook, 2017*; World Bank.

Note: No reliable statistics are available for the overall demographics of Lebanon. The most recent census was conducted in 1932. The current voter rolls are public and accurate, but they give information only about citizens above the age of twenty-one and do not indicate who resides inside or outside the country.

The importance of this period is that it established a number of patterns of modern Lebanese politics: political identities based largely on religious community, confessional competition and sometimes conflict, foreign intervention and influence, power sharing based on confessional representation, and a habit of intercommunal negotiation and cooperation within an elected council.

Map 16.1 Lebanon



Greater Lebanon: A Troubled Beginning

Greater Lebanon was established by the French in 1920 as the amalgamation of the special Ottoman province of Mount Lebanon and districts of the Syrian Ottoman provinces of Beirut (including Tripoli, Sidon, and Tyre) and Damascus (including the districts of Baalbek, Rashaya, Hasbaya, and Moallaka)—essentially about half of the area of modern Lebanon. The creation of Greater Lebanon—later, simply Lebanon—was a point of serious contention between Christians and Muslims throughout the interwar period, with many Muslims, particularly Sunnis, demanding unification with Syria. An agreement, known as the National Pact and in which the Sunnis accepted the creation of Lebanon in its present borders and renounced unification with Syria, was struck on the eve of independence in 1943; this was in exchange for the Maronites renouncing French protection or suzerainty and accepting that Lebanon would be a country with an Arab orientation. The National Pact also specified that the president of the republic would be a Maronite and the prime minister would be a Sunni and that the distribution of seats in parliament and high offices of the state would be in a fixed six-to-five ratio between Christians and Muslims. This ratio reflected the Christian majority among the population that still existed at the time and was based on the census figures of 1932 to 1934. This balance would shift in favor of the Muslims in the 1950s and 1960s and would become a major bone of contention in Lebanese politics.⁴

The French, with local consultation, had promulgated a constitution for Lebanon in 1926. This constitution was largely modeled after the French Third Republic, and it has remained in force, aside from a few suspensions by the French during and around World War II, until the present day. It was significantly amended twice: first, in 1943 to eliminate the authority of the French high commissioner, and again in 1990 to bring an end to the war that lasted from 1975 to 1990 and institute reforms agreed upon in the Taif Accord of 1989. The constitution stipulated that Lebanon was a parliamentary democracy.

Legislative authority was vested in a chamber of deputies directly elected by the people (males over twenty-one years of age; women got the vote in 1956). Executive authority was vested in the president of the republic, who was elected to a nonrenewable six-year term by parliament. He was aided in his task by a Council of Ministers and a prime minister, all of whom he named. This Council of Ministers had to acquire an official vote of confidence from parliament. It could be dismissed by the president or by the parliament in a vote of no confidence.

From Independence to Civil War: 1943 to 1975

With independence from the mandate in 1943 and the abrogation of the post of high commissioner, the constitutional powers of the president emerged as paramount. He enjoyed supreme executive authority, had a secure six-year term, had the power to appoint and dismiss prime ministers and councils of ministers, could greatly influence elections to parliament, and could dismiss parliament. In practice, however, he had to share much of this power with the Sunni prime minister. Independence had been won under the banner of the National Pact and on the basis of a national alliance between Bishara Khoury, a leading Maronite politician, and Riad al-Solh, a leading Sunni politician. Their alliance symbolized the national coalition between Christians and Muslims, and the ethos of politics in postindependence Lebanon always fell back on the principle of power sharing, particularly between the president and the prime minister.⁵

Bishara Khoury's first term in office set in place many elements of postindependence political life: close cooperation between a Maronite president and a Sunni prime minister, rotation and co-optation of other political elites through frequent changes of government, co-optation also through managing parliamentary elections to favor allies and clients, and managing elite politics through the patronage of jobs and services offered by the state.⁶ During the presidency of Camille Chamoun (1952–1958), Lebanon became dangerously embroiled in regional and Cold War politics. The United States was trying to align Middle Eastern allies against Soviet influence, while Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel was trying to align Arab countries under his regional leadership, which had already veered closer to the Soviet Union. The tensions led to armed clashes and a brief civil war in 1958, which ended only after US Marines landed on the shores of Beirut and a deal was brokered, with Nasser's cooperation, to elect the centrist head of the army, Fuad Chehab, as president in place of Chamoun.

During his presidency (1958–1964), Chehab recognized that many of the country's problems were due to weak institutionalization of the state and to socioeconomic inequalities. He strengthened the army and internal security forces, committed the state to providing public education and health services, and set up civil service training and control institutions.

In the period that followed, Lebanon entered in earnest into the web of regional conflict. After the armies of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan were summarily defeated in the June 1967 War, Palestinian refugees in Lebanon began to arm heavily, with support from Syria and other Arab states, and Lebanon became an arena for direct conflict between armed Palestinians and the Israeli army. A similar situation in Jordan led to a strong crackdown by the Jordanian state. In Lebanon, the state was unable to control these developments. In fact, after a series of incidents, Lebanon and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)—under Nasser's patronage—signed the Cairo Agreement in 1969 in which the Lebanese state effectively ceded part of its territory to the PLO for cross-border operations against Israel. This loss of sovereignty that began in 1969 continues to the present day—although in 1969, it was to the PLO, and today it is to Hizbullah.

Tensions over the Palestinian armed presence and the Arab-Israeli conflict exacerbated internal political tensions among Christian and Muslim politicians and between rightist and leftist parties. Christian and right-wing parties began to arm themselves against the Palestinian presence, and Muslim and leftist parties moved into alliance with the PLO to press the Maronite-dominated state for communal and socioeconomic concessions. With the political elites unable to resolve the crisis or agree on reforms, the situation escalated into months of strikes and demonstrations. Finally, in April 1975 one incident in a neighborhood of Beirut was enough to bring armed gangs into the streets and unleash a wave of armed unrest. The state could have used the army to try to restore order, but disagreement among politicians as well as fears that the army itself

might splinter along confessional lines meant that the state simply stood by as the country sank into full civil war.⁷

The Civil War: 1975 to 1990

The period extending between 1975 and 1990 witnessed a plethora of events, conflicts, wars, and interventions that are hard to place under one label. In Lebanon, this period is variously described as “the war years” or “the events” or “the civil war” or “the war of others on Lebanese soil.” The inability to agree on a name hints at the multiple perspectives, players, and forces that were involved in this period.⁸

The first phase is often referred to as “the two-year war,” and it extended from the outbreak of fighting in April 1975 to the summer of 1976. It saw the rapid collapse of central authority and the outbreak of widespread fighting between two camps of rival militias: a group of mainly Christian right-wing militias on one side and an alliance of leftist, Palestinian, and Muslim militias on the other. The fighting split the capital, Beirut, into West and East Beirut and demolished most of the downtown of the city. Alarm bells rang in Damascus, which feared that a PLO-dominated Lebanon would create a radical and uncontrollable neighbor on its western flank. Syria sent troops into Lebanon beginning in January 1976, but then more forcefully in June. The Syrian troops stopped the advance of the Palestinian-leftist-Muslim coalition and put an effective end to this phase of the war. The United States indirectly brokered a “red-line agreement” in which Israel would tolerate the Syrian incursion into Lebanon on the condition that Syrian troops not deploy south of the Awwali River in south Lebanon.

This phase ended with the election of a new president, Elias Sarkis, and an Arab agreement, brokered with Saudi Arabia and Egypt and the agreement of Lebanon, to create an Arab deterrent force of which Syrian troops would be the main component. Syrian troops would stay in Lebanon for the next twenty-nine years.

The precarious calm was shattered in early 1977 by the assassination of the Druze leader, Kamal Jumblatt, near a Syrian checkpoint. Jumblatt had been the political leader of the leftist-Palestinian-Muslim alliance and had been on bad terms with the Syrians since their intervention in mid-1976. The assassination—the first in a string of political assassinations that would extend on and off through 2007—led to revenge killings of large numbers of Christians in the communally mixed southern Mount Lebanon region. These communal tensions would erupt again in 1983 into all-out war between Christian and Druze militias in those mountain areas.

Clashes were also escalating at this time between Palestinians and Israelis in south Lebanon. In 1978, Israel launched an invasion of south Lebanon and established a self-proclaimed “security zone,” which it controlled and which was manned by a local Lebanese militia. The Israeli occupation would extend for twenty-two years. Lebanon was now under a dual occupation.

Relations had also deteriorated between Christian and Syrian forces, leading to fierce fighting and the withdrawal of Syrian troops from East Beirut. The killings in the mountains in 1977 and the clashes with the Syrians in 1978 led some Christian leaders, guided by the young Bashir Gemayel, to build an alliance with Israel, which had now become a player in the country. Gemayel hoped to use Israeli power to defeat both the Palestinians and Syrians and to rebuild a Maronite-dominated Lebanese state. He figured that if the Israelis and Americans had helped King Hussein in Jordan to retain his state against Palestinian and Syrian power in 1970, they would do the same for him in Lebanon.⁹

The alliance led to the second Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, which devastated the entire south of the country and reached all the way up to Beirut.¹⁰ The PLO and allied militias put up stiff resistance but were overwhelmed, and Syrian forces retreated after suffering losses. The war led to a prolonged siege of Beirut and the negotiated withdrawal of PLO leaders and fighters from Lebanon under the auspices of a US-led multinational force deployed to Beirut. The

withdrawal of the PLO effectively ended almost fifteen years of strong Palestinian armed presence in Lebanon.¹¹

Under Israeli guns, parliament met and elected Bashir Gemayel to the presidency. The grand plan to remake Lebanon with a restored Maronite domination and an alliance with Israel unraveled when Gemayel was assassinated a few days later by a member of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party allied with Syria. Christian militias retaliated with revenge massacres in the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila, and the US president, Ronald Reagan, ordered US peacekeeping troops back into Beirut after they had just left. To fill the constitutional vacuum, parliament met again to elect Gemayel's more centrist brother, Amine Gemayel, to the presidency.

Israel wanted Lebanon to sign a peace treaty and bring Lebanon into the Israeli orbit, while the new Lebanese administration wanted to negotiate the withdrawal of Israeli forces short of a peace treaty and to lean on US and Arab support to maintain its independence. The US-brokered withdrawal talks between the two sides resulted in what came to be known as the May 17 (1983) agreement.¹² Although the Lebanese parliament overwhelmingly approved the agreement, it was never implemented. Israel sent a side letter to the United States stating that it would not withdraw before Syrian troops did, and Syria rejected the agreement and urged various groups in Lebanon to oppose it.

With the stillbirth of the withdrawal agreement, the situation once again began to unravel. Israel, giving up on peace with Lebanon and its whole 1982 adventure, unilaterally began to implement a withdrawal from Beirut, the mountains, and points north of the Litani River to settle back into its 1978 security zone in south Lebanon. Tensions in Beirut between the state and an ascendant Amal movement led to open clashes between the Amal movement and the army in August 1983 and again in February 1984. Tensions between Druze and Christian militias in the mountains after the Israeli withdrawal from there led to massive clashes, known as the "war of the mountain," that ended in a Druze victory and the displacement of

dozens of Christian villages. This period also saw the birth of Hizbullah in Lebanon; it was organized with strong support from the new Islamic Republic of Iran and fed on popular opposition to the Israeli occupation.

Operatives linked to Hizbullah blew up the US embassy and Marine barracks in Lebanon, and opposition groups allied to Syria led a revolt against the authority of the Gemayel-led state in February 1984 and took over West Beirut from the central authority. President Reagan ordered US troops out of Lebanon, and Gemayel dismissed his government and formed a new one that renounced the May 17 agreement and was led by a member of the Syrian-allied opposition, Rashid Karami.

After the removal of the strong Palestinian factor from the Lebanese scene in 1982 and during the presidency of Amine Gemayel, talks intensified among Lebanese groups to reach an agreement that would institute reforms and bring an end to the war. A first agreement, known as the tripartite agreement, between the main Christian, Druze, and Shi'i militias was brokered in Damascus in December 1985, but it collapsed after the leader of the Christian Lebanese Forces militia was unseated in an internal coup. A second round of talks made progress but came to a halt when the prime minister, Rashid Karami, was assassinated in 1987, apparently by Christian militia operatives.

This situation of stalemate continued through the end of Amin Gemayel's term in 1988. Parliament failed to meet and elect a new president, and as the minutes of his term ticked away, Gemayel appointed the head of the army, General Michel Aoun, to the post of prime minister, as the holder of the prime ministership could constitutionally exercise the powers of the vacant presidency. The appointment was contested by the incumbent prime minister, Salim al-Hoss, who refused to resign his post. Lebanon thus drifted into a situation of two governments, one with authority in mainly Christian East Beirut and surrounding areas and one with authority in West Beirut and allied areas.

Aoun proved an explosive leader. He first declared war on the country's militias and tried to close down their illegal ports; he then declared a war of liberation on Syria and vowed to drive it out of Lebanon. These moves plunged the country into various rounds of fighting that were among the fiercest since 1975.

The crisis galvanized Arab and international attention and led to a new wave of diplomacy to try to end the long Lebanese civil war. The efforts culminated in a round of meetings among Lebanese members of parliament in Taif, Saudi Arabia, in 1989. The meetings were sponsored by Saudi Arabia and the Arab League and supported by the United States and other international players. They resulted in the approval of the national reconciliation document that outlined key constitutional reforms and steps to end the civil war and restore state authority. The document is commonly referred to as the Taif Accord.

Michel Aoun rejected the accord and mobilized opposition to it, while the deputies met and elected a president, Elias Hrawi, to end the period of two governments and implement the accord. The standoff between Aoun and Hrawi ended a year later, in October 1990, when Syrian-backed troops loyal to Hrawi's administration overran Aoun's positions in the eastern enclave. Aoun went into exile in France, and the postwar period began in earnest under strong Syrian dominance and within the framework of the Taif Accord.

The Taif Agreement

The Taif Accord was a document of political and institutional reform as well as an agreement to end a decade-and-a-half-long civil war. It amended important elements of the constitution of 1926 but also presented itself as a transitional document toward a later future in which other reforms relating to deconfessionalization would be implemented.¹³

In terms of political reform, the agreement shifted power from the president to the Council of Ministers, which, as a collegial body, was vested with supreme executive authority. The president is no longer the hegemonic player in the executive branch but retains some procedural and symbolic powers. Whereas the pre-Taif system was dominated by the president, the post-Taif system shows a wider distribution of power, primarily among the three “presidents” of the system: the president, the prime minister, and the speaker of parliament.

Among its major reforms, Taif also mandated an equal representation of Muslims and Christians in parliament; this replaced the six-to-five ratio in favor of Christians. Article 24, which stipulates this parity, stipulates as well that this is a temporary requirement until such time as a parliament on a nonconfessional basis can be elected, and confessional representation would then be preserved only in a proposed senate.

In another aspect of the Taif Accord, the document also dealt with issues related to the war, Israeli occupation, and relations with Syria. The agreement contained provisions about the disarming of all nongovernmental militias and the extension of state authority throughout the country. Regarding the Israeli occupation of south Lebanon, the agreement talked of

taking all necessary measures to liberate all Lebanese territory from Israeli occupation; extending the state's authority over its entire territory; deploying the Lebanese army to the internationally-recognized border area; and endeavoring to reinforce the presence of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon.

Under Syrian influence, Hizbullah was exempted from the provision to disarm all nongovernment armed groups, was brought under the protection of the phrase "taking all necessary measures to liberate all Lebanese territory," and was redefined more specifically as an anti-occupation resistance force. Palestinian militias in the various refugee camps in the country were also not disarmed. In other words, Lebanese state sovereignty was not fully reestablished after Taif.

With regard to international relations, Taif resolved that Lebanon would have "special" relations with Syria and that the two countries would coordinate policy in security, defense, foreign affairs, and other key areas.

The Postwar Period: 1990 to 2005

This period was marked by overwhelming Syrian influence. The end of the Cold War and the politics surrounding the first Gulf War largely explain this. When the Cold War ended, the United States could afford to allow an expansion of Syrian power in Lebanon without that being a loss on the global chessboard. As the United States assembled an Arab and international coalition to push Saddam Hussein's forces out of Kuwait after the invasion of August 1990, it was eager to gain Syrian participation. Meanwhile, Michel Aoun had strayed from US favor by striking up an alliance with Saddam's Iraq to counter Syrian power in Lebanon. Both the United States and Israel looked the other way as Syrian air and ground forces launched their attack on Aoun's strongholds in the Christian enclaves of Beirut and its surroundings in October 1990. Syria thus gained control of the main areas of the country, excluding the Israeli-occupied southern strip.

Syrian-Lebanese relations were institutionalized through a Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation and Coordination; a Supreme Council (including the presidents and prime ministers of both countries); and a large number of pacts and agreements. The institutions were those of a loose confederation; the reality was that Syria effectively controlled most of Lebanon and could dictate major policy decisions. The control was maintained by the presence of tens of thousands of Syrian troops and the activity of Syrian intelligence officials and offices working openly throughout the country.

The first steps after the war ended were the formation of a new government and the integration of most of the Taif Accord into an amended constitution. Progress was also made in disarming and dissolving militias. Key militia leaders had been co-opted by being awarded ministerial posts; some fighters were integrated into the army or internal security forces. Others found their way in private life.

Hizbullah and the remaining armed Palestinian groups were exempted from the dissolution order.

While attention was focused on security, a financial crisis led to the collapse of the national currency and the prioritization of economic issues. Within this context, Rafik al-Hariri, a Lebanese-Saudi billionaire, emerged as an economic savior of sorts. After parliamentary elections were held in 1992, Hariri was named prime minister. He would become a dominant figure in Lebanese government and politics until his assassination in 2005.

Hariri served as prime minister for ten of the next thirteen years. He was given leeway by the Syrians in economic matters, while they worked with Hizbullah and other allies inside and outside the government on security matters. Hariri focused on rebuilding basic state institutions and the utilities infrastructure; rebuilding the destroyed downtown of Beirut; and building up Beirut as a hub of banking, tourism, and other services. He started his tenure in 1992 in the midst of the Madrid peace process, and he made his plans with the optimistic expectation of Lebanon soon being part of a peaceful and prosperous region. When large-scale reconstruction funding was not available—most Western funding was focused on rebuilding central and eastern Europe—he did not hesitate to borrow, figuring that deficit financing would soon be alleviated by regional peace and rapid economic growth in the country. In 1995, when Yitzhak Rabin was killed, the peace process ground to a halt. Lebanon's boom fizzled, and the country found itself in a debt trap. By 1998, the national debt was already above 100 percent of the country's GDP.

The Syrians had always kept Hariri at arm's length. They were happy to have him to worry about domestic economic issues while they focused on security and regional politics, and his premiership was part of their bargain with Saudi Arabia, which supported him. By 1998, the relationship had soured. Hariri had gone well beyond his businessman profile to emerge as the most influential political leader in Lebanon. As a minority Alawite-dominated regime, ruling over a Sunni majority population, Syria preferred to keep Sunni leaders cut

down to size. In 1998, Syria engineered the election of Emile Lahoud, head of the army and an archrival of Hariri, to the presidency. Hariri was pushed out of the premiership, and between 1998 and 2000, Salim al-Hoss, a centrist former prime minister, filled the post.

Now in opposition, Hariri put together a formidable coalition and came back in force by winning the parliamentary elections of 2000 and barreling back into the premiership. Hariri's second tenure, from 2000 to 2004, was a troubled one. His relationships with President Lahoud and the Syrians were both bad, and his policy outlook was not based on the optimism of the early 1990s but focused instead on devising emergency rescue packages for an economy in massive debt and crisis. Hizbullah had also become a dominant force in the country and did not share Hariri's vision for the country.

Hizbullah had scored a signal success in 2000 by forcing an Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon after a twenty-two-year occupation. Indeed, this was the only time an Arab country had ended an Israeli occupation by force, and it was trumpeted as such by Hizbullah. Liberation did not lead to the army being dispatched to the south or the end of armed resistance now that the occupation was over. Instead, Syria leaned on Lebanese decision-makers not to send the army, and Hizbullah declared that there were still some areas of Lebanon—mainly the Shabaa farms, whose ownership between Lebanon and Syria was disputed—that were occupied and, hence, the armed resistance had to continue. Eventually, Hizbullah would even move beyond this logic, arguing that it had to remain armed indefinitely as a “deterrent” against potential Israeli aggression.

In general, this postwar period, despite its many crises, managed to bring back much stability to the country after sixteen years of civil war, and it saw the significant rebuilding of many state and economic institutions and a general return to normalcy. Three parliamentary elections were held during this period—albeit with terribly gerrymandered election laws—and local elections were held in 1998 and again in 2004. The Syrians provided much of the stability during

this period, but they were also the main obstacle to a full regaining of sovereignty and further political and economic development.[14](#)

From the Syrian Withdrawal to the Arab Uprisings: 2005 to 2011

The postwar status quo began to break down in 2003, when Syria and the United States parted ways over the US invasion of Iraq. Although Syria had cooperated with the United States vigorously after the September 11, 2001, attacks and had shared key intelligence, Syria was dead set against the US occupation of Iraq. Like Iran, Syria could welcome the fall of Saddam Hussein, but it was panicked about having US troops on its borders. The George W. Bush administration then considered Syria an enemy and moved to push back its power. In Lebanon, that meant that the United States no longer gave tacit acceptance to Syrian control in the country, which had been the case since 1990. The United States joined France in September 2004 in sponsoring UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1559 (aimed at Syria), which called for the withdrawal of all “remaining foreign forces” from Lebanon and the disbanding and disarming of all Lebanese (meaning Hizbullah) and non-Lebanese (meaning Palestinian) militias.

Syria interpreted the resolution as a direct threat and suspected Hariri of being partially behind it, given his close friendship with French president Jacques Chirac. Syria mobilized its allies in Lebanon and forced the extension of President Lahoud’s expiring mandate for a further three years, while Hariri built an essentially anti-Syrian alliance that brought together key Christian leaders as well as Druze leader Walid Jumblatt. The focus was on winning the upcoming parliamentary elections in the spring of 2005. Politicians in Lebanon, many of whom had cooperated with the Syrians in the 1990s, began to sense the winds of change under the Bush administration and believed that perhaps the Syrian regime’s days were numbered.

Tensions escalated with the attempted assassination of a close associate of Jumblatt, Marwan Hamadeh, in October 2004. But the

situation erupted in February 2005 when a massive car bomb killed Rafik al-Hariri and a number of associates, aides, and guards. Mourners turned into demonstrators and openly accused Syria of killing Hariri. The demonstrations turned into what looked and felt like a people's revolution on March 14, when more than one million people congregated in Beirut's Martyrs' Square to call for a Syrian withdrawal. The size of the demonstration reflected the accumulated frustration with the long Syrian presence; the amount of shock caused by Hariri's assassination; and a response to a demonstration organized a few days earlier, on March 8, by Hizbullah and allied groups to express their continued support for Syria and its presence in Lebanon.

Under intense international pressure and facing massive demonstrations in Lebanon, Syria abruptly withdrew its military and (visible) intelligence forces from Lebanon in April. This ended a twenty-nine-year presence and an entire era of Lebanese politics.

The sudden withdrawal was hailed as a historic victory for what had now become known as the "March 14 coalition." Then, the coalition faltered. First, one of its main Christian members, General Michel Aoun, left it after apparent disagreements over his role. Second, the coalition agreed to hold the upcoming parliamentary elections on the basis of an old Syrian-gerrymandered law. General Aoun joined the pro-Syrian coalition, now dubbed the "March 8 coalition," which included Hizbullah, the Amal Movement, and the Marada party of Suleiman Franjeh. In the elections held in May and June of that year, the March 14 coalition won a 72-seat majority in the 128-seat parliament.

The new government worked with the United Nations to set up a special international tribunal to adjudicate the case of Hariri's assassination and moved to try to fill the vacuum left by the Syrian withdrawal. The government was stymied, however, by the continued opposition of President Lahoud and by the reluctance of Hizbullah and other opposition parties to support the March 14 agenda.

The situation was overtaken by the events of July 2006 when a border raid by Hizbullah on an Israeli patrol led to an Israeli retaliation that quickly escalated to an all-out Israeli attempt to cripple Hizbullah. The war lasted for thirty-three days and devastated much of south Lebanon and the southern suburbs of Beirut. Hizbullah, however, fought Israeli forces to a standstill in many areas and continued to fire rockets into northern Israel throughout the confrontation. The United States had encouraged Israel to escalate and prolong the attack, seeing it as an opportunity to deal a knockout blow to what some in the US administration considered “the A-team” of terrorism. The Lebanese government tried from the beginning to convince the UN Security Council to call for a cease-fire, but the United States delayed the move, hoping to give Israel enough time to achieve its goals. As the devastation mounted and world public opinion rallied, and as it became clear that Israel was failing to achieve its objectives, the United States relented, and a cease-fire was negotiated. The terms were announced in UNSCR 1701 issued on August 11. The resolution calls for the cessation of hostilities, the deployment of Lebanese army troops to the South, the expansion of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), the disarming of nonstate armed groups, and the stopping of cross-border arms smuggling. Hizbullah described the war as a “divine victory,” but the outcome did create a new buffer zone in the South, manned by a ten-thousand-strong multinational force and by a larger number of Lebanese army troops. This buffer has helped to maintain calm on the border until this writing.

Internal tensions in Lebanon escalated again after the war. Hizbullah had accused March 14 leaders of siding with the United States during the war, and March 14 leaders accused Hizbullah of triggering the devastating war by their ill-timed cross-border raid of July 12. Tensions came to a head over the issue of the special tribunal. Shi'i ministers withdrew from the government in November 2006 over the way in which the tribunal issue was being presented to the government, and this ushered in an open-ended stalemate. This tense situation continued into May 2008. On May 6, the government issued two decisions: one, to remove the head of security at Beirut

International Airport, who was close to Hizbullah, and the other, to investigate Hizbullah's private communication network. Hizbullah interpreted this as a direct threat. Two days later, its fighters overran the capital in a matter of hours and besieged the government and March 14 leaders. Various mediation efforts led to meetings in Doha, Qatar, and the negotiation of the Doha Agreement. The agreement called for a cessation of hostilities; the election of a new president of the republic, army chief Michel Suleiman; the formation of a thirty-member National Unity government; the holding of parliamentary elections; and the resumption of "national dialogue" talks to discuss the relationship between the state and the armed resistance. The events of May underlined Hizbullah's military dominance in the country, but the Doha Agreement did find a way to patch over differences and proceed with electing a president, forming a government, and ending the political paralysis that had been in effect since November 2006.

Suleiman was elected president in May 2008, a National Unity government was formed, and parliamentary elections were held in June 2009. In a closely fought contest, the March 14 coalition managed to secure a 71-seat majority. Saad Hariri, son of the late Rafik al-Hariri and leader of the coalition, was designated premier, and another National Unity government was formed in which power was shared between the two rival coalitions and the president.

In his first days in office, Prime Minister Saad Hariri made a historic visit to Damascus—this, after he had publicly and repeatedly held Syria directly responsible for his father's assassination. The visit came after Saudi King Abdallah's rapprochement and visit to Syria and after Europe and the United States had started to rebuild their relations with Syria. Hariri's erstwhile ally, Walid Jumblatt, who had accused the Syrians of killing his own father, Kamal Jumblatt, had made amends to the Syrians earlier in the year.

The Hariri government did not last long. Differences between Hariri and Hizbullah over the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) and other issues soured the relationship, and as Syria and Hizbullah felt on the

ascendant, they used their influence to bring down the Hariri government on January 12, 2011, and replace it with one more to their liking. Najib Mikati, formerly aligned with Hariri, broke away and accepted the nomination to the post of prime minister, but it took him a full five months to put together a new government—this one with a March 8 majority and with no participation from March 14 members. The coalitional spirit of the Doha agreement had been dropped.

When Hizbullah and its March 8 coalition allies moved to bring down the Hariri government in January, the uprising in Tunisia had already begun a few weeks before, in December 2010, but few recognized that this was the beginning of a general Arab awakening that would spread throughout the region and soon take root in Syria. Lebanon initially absorbed the general shock waves of the Arab Spring. Arab protestors were generally militating to bring down a dictator and establish freedom and constitutional democracy. Lebanon had no dictatorship to bring down, and it already had a wide margin of political freedom and a constitutional democratic system—despite its many faults. In another interpretation, Lebanon had already had its Arab Spring in 2005, when a vast cross section of the Lebanese public had flooded the streets to demand, and achieve, the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon.

A small civil society protest movement did emerge in early 2011 to pick up the themes of the Arab Spring and to interpret them for Lebanon in demanding an end to the confessional political system. The movement persisted for several months but failed to spark wider national sympathies.

Surviving the Syrian Civil War: 2011 to the Present

The Syrian civil war put enormous strain on Lebanon, but the small republic managed to survive the maelstrom, at least so far. On the political track, Lebanon has witnessed continued government instability. When protests began and then spread in Syria, PM Mikati announced an official government policy of “dissociation” from the conflict; this, although his coalition partner—Hizbullah—was funneling support and troops to the Asad side in Syria. By the end of 2011, it was clear that the situation in Syria had morphed into the beginnings of an armed civil war, dividing the country along sectarian lines and drawing in regional and international proxy supporters. Rising casualties in Syria were exacerbating tension between Sunnis and Shi’a in Lebanon, and this was taking its toll on Mikati’s own government. In May of 2013, Hizbullah leader Nasrallah publicly declared that Hizbullah was going all in concerning the fight alongside Asad in Syria. These and other tensions led Mikati to submit his government’s resignation in late May of 2013.

A somewhat independent figure from the March 14 camp, Tammam Salam, was named to form a new government. After ten months of negotiations, Salam was finally able to announce the formation of a national coalition government in February of 2014 that included members from both March 8 and March 14, who now realized that the conflict next door was going to take much longer than they had initially expected. March 8 did not want sectarian tensions in Lebanon to erupt and distract them from the war in Syria, so they wanted March 14 leaders back in the fold. March 14 leaders, realizing that the Syrian crisis would be a long one, did not want to be out of power. They also did not want to see the sectarian fighting next door lead to an armed clash with Shi’a in Lebanon or to allow radical Sunnis to gain ground in Lebanon’s Sunni areas. Indeed, the head of the March 14 movement, Saad Hariri, returned to Lebanon

in August 2014 to shore up moderate support among the Sunni community and to launch a political dialogue with Hizbullah.

In the meantime, however, the political system continued to decay. Parliamentary elections scheduled for June 2013 were postponed for a year and then postponed again to 2017. The post of the president subsequently fell vacant with the end of Michel Suleiman's term in May 2014. But after twenty-nine months of political deadlock, the various parties settled on electing Michel Aoun to the presidency in October of 2016. Saad Hariri was named back to the Prime ministry and formed another national unity government with the March 14 and March 8 coalitions and Hizbullah.

But after the election of President Donald Trump in the United States and the rise of Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman in Saudi Arabia, this formula of coexistence with Hizbullah in Lebanon came under external pressure. In a bizarre development, Prime Minister Hariri was summoned to Saudi Arabia in November of 2017 and forced to read out a letter of resignation, denouncing Hizbullah and Iran. The episode caused an uproar among both supporters and opponents of Hariri in Lebanon as a blatant interference in Lebanese affairs and was also denounced by the United States, France, and Egypt. The Saudis backed down, and Hariri returned to Lebanon to a wounded hero's welcome.

Parliamentary elections, after a nine-year hiatus, were finally held in May of 2018, under a new election law that featured proportional representation. Hariri's broad Future Movement was arguably the biggest electoral loser, and the Hizbullah-dominated March 8 coalition came out with a majority. Nevertheless, Hariri was once again designated to form a government, a process that took eight months to conclude.

The main long-term impact of the Syrian conflict on Lebanon might end up being the major refugee influx into the country. By the spring of 2015, there were already one million officially registered Syrian refugees in Lebanon and probably at least another half million Syrians in the country who are not registered as refugees.

Societal Changes and Challenges

Although a census has not been conducted for decades, the resident Lebanese population is estimated at about 4.1 million. Add to that around 1.5 million Syrians and 400,000 Palestinians, and the total population approaches six million. Emigration has been high among all communities during the past decades, and there are roughly another million Lebanese living abroad. This is aside from the several million people of Lebanese descent around the world who do not hold citizenship.¹⁵ About 30 percent of the population is below the age of eighteen.¹⁶

The demographic balance among sectarian communities is a politically sensitive issue. Current voter rolls—which list all citizens (whether resident in country or abroad) above the age of twenty-one and which are quite reliable—show the Muslim-Christian ratio among voters at around 63 percent Muslim and 37 percent Christian. Sunni and Shi'i communities are approximately the same size; each is about 28 percent of the voting population. The government does not publish the overall citizenship lists (that is, lists that include those below the age of twenty-one), but as birthrates among Muslim families have been higher than in Christian families in past decades, the differential at below the twenty-one-year-old age bracket is probably higher; therefore, the overall Muslim-Christian ratio in the country is probably closer to 70 percent Muslim and 30 percent Christian, with the Muslim ratio increasing. The Taif Accord fixed parliamentary and government representation at 50/50, and this has held in the postwar period. But as time goes on, there is no doubt that demographic imbalances will continue to put a strain on the Lebanese formula.

Lebanon has hosted a Palestinian refugee population since 1948. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency lists around 450,000 Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.¹⁷ The Palestinians are distributed among twelve camps and live in dire socioeconomic and security

conditions, and many live in abject poverty. Their conditions have worsened as Palestinian refugees have fled from Syria to Lebanon, and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) has been increasingly unable to tend to their needs as a result of a withdrawal of US funding support by the Trump administration.

The number of Palestinian refugees has recently been dwarfed by the number of Syrian refugees. The UN lists over one million officially registered Syrian refugees¹⁸; estimates add about half a million who are not on the official registers. This brings the Syrian refugee estimate to around 1.5 million in a country whose original population is around four million. This is the highest refugee population burden in the world. The country has received \$5 billion since 2012 to meet refugee needs, but UN aid appeals are only meeting about 50 percent of demand. Over 70 percent of Syrian refugees live in extreme poverty,¹⁹ and the UN has only been able to provide aid to 30 percent of the refugees.²⁰ Tensions between host communities—most of them poor themselves—and these refugee populations have risen as refugees strain already-tight economic and infrastructure resources. Some municipalities have evicted refugees from their towns,²¹ and a number of government officials have called for a rapid repatriation of refugees back to Syria; and indeed, a trickle has gone back. But the bulk of refugees have no homes to go back to, and many fear that they will be arrested—or worse—by the Asad regime if and when they cross the border. International conventions prohibit forced and unsafe repatriation; the bulk of the Syrian refugees are likely to stay for the foreseeable future.

Assessing overall poverty and income distribution in Lebanon is difficult because of scarce data. The latest comprehensive household survey was conducted in 2004 and 2005 and showed roughly 7 percent of the Lebanese population lived below the “absolute” poverty line; another 25 percent lived below the “upper” poverty line.²² These numbers for Lebanese have likely worsened since the massive Syrian refugee influx. Among refugees, the UNHCR estimates that one-third to one-half of the 1.1 million Syrian refugees live below the absolute poverty line, as do almost one-half

of the two hundred thousand Palestinian refugees.²³ The distribution of wealth among citizens is unequal, with the bottom 20 percent accounting for only 7 percent of consumption and the top 20 percent accounting for 43 percent.²⁴ Other reports from Swiss sources reveal Lebanon to have one of the highest levels of inequality in the world, trailing only Russia and Ukraine, with the top 0.3 percent owning 50 percent of the country's wealth.²⁵ Poverty among Lebanese is worst in the northern part of the country in the districts of Akkar, Dinnyeh, Tripoli, and Hermel, followed by the Bekaa area and the South. The poverty is partly the result of poor government performance in providing infrastructure and services to outlying regions, and partly the result of the economic setbacks and stagnation related to war and its aftermath. The growth that occurred in the postwar period was largely in and around Beirut and favored the banking, tourism, and real estate sectors; it was not a strong engine of job creation. Since the uprising erupted in Syria next door, the Lebanese economy has slowed to a crawl.

Internal displacement has been of various kinds. Repeated Israeli attacks and incursions since the late 1970s have driven hundreds of thousands of residents of the south part of the country and the southern Bekaa away from their villages; many of these people have settled in the southern suburbs of Beirut, which now house about five hundred thousand people. The majority of these internally displaced are Shi'a. Their displacement is not total because they still visit their villages and participate in municipal elections there, but they have become mainly resident in the urban environment of southern Beirut. The other large internal displacement was of tens of thousands of mainly Christian villagers from the southern Mount Lebanon area in the wake of the "war of the mountain" between Druze and Christian militias there in 1983. Most of these have settled in East Beirut and points north. Despite the return of some villagers after the war and several steps toward Druze-Christian reconciliation, the number of returnees remains small, and relations remain somewhat tense.

Photo 16.1 The St. George Church and Al-Ameen Mosque in downtown Beirut reflect Lebanon's religious diversity.



AP Photo/Nasser Nasser

Women are relatively well represented in the workforce and in education. This contrasts sharply with their severe underrepresentation in parliament and elected local bodies. There were only four women in the parliament elected in 2009, and six in 2018. Attempts to boost women's representation through a quota system or other measures have been batted down.

Literacy is relatively high, at 94 percent, when compared with the Arab region.²⁶ The illiteracy is mainly among older rural residents—women more than men—and among some of the younger displaced who missed out on their elementary education because of internal or external war. Although not of the highest quality, public elementary education, which started to be built up in the early 1960s, suffered severe setbacks during the civil war, but it has reached almost all areas of the country during the past decades. The public education system includes a fairly large secondary school system as well as the public Lebanese University. The country boasts a large private school and university system. The quality of education in the private institutions is relatively strong, and some of the private universities are among the best in the region. The government has a national curriculum and examination program that all schools, public and private, have to generally adhere to; however, the government has not been able to produce a national history textbook, a symptom of the system's continuing inability to produce a unified vision of the country's past—or future.

Institutions and Governance

As described in the historical section, the institutions of governance are defined by the constitution of 1926 and the Taif Accord of 1989. Lebanon is a parliamentary democracy with a hybrid executive, as executive power is shared among the president, the prime minister, and the Council of Ministers as a collegial body. The further peculiarity of the system is that it fixes confessional quotas: 50/50 Christian-Muslim representation in parliament and government; equally specific subquotas for Sunnis, Shi'a, Druze, Alawites, Maronites, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholics, Armenians, Protestants, and other minorities; and reservation of the presidency for a Maronite Christian, the prime ministership for a Sunni Muslim, and the speakership of parliament for a Shi'i Muslim. No other country in the world uses communal quotas as extensively as Lebanon does. Confessionalism is identified by many in the country as one of the main weaknesses of the system as it politicizes confessional identities and keeps the country divided and often at the brink of civil war; indeed, the Taif Accord stipulates that moving beyond political confessionalism is a national goal, and it calls for the establishment of a national commission to devise a gradual plan to do so. Taif suggests that the first step along this road would be to establish a senate in which confessional quotas would be preserved and that would have authority only in major systemic issues (e.g., war and peace, change of constitution, or change of educational system), but such a senate would liberate the parliament and normal politics from confessional quotas. Neither the commission nor the senate has been established. Others argue that agreeing on power sharing is better than fighting over it in a divided society like Lebanon, and they argue further that this power sharing has sustained the most participatory system in the Arab world and provided the widest margins of political and individual freedom.

The system is dominated by a small number of sectarian political bosses. Recent parliaments have effectively been dominated by

seven men: Saad Hariri, Hassan Nasrallah, Nabih Berri, Walid Jumblatt, Michel Aoun, Samir Geagea, and Suleiman Franjeh. This dominance is made more dysfunctional because of the absence of internal political party democracy. The Lebanese system thus essentially functions as an oligarchy. When the oligarchs are in agreement, decision-making proceeds smoothly; when they are in disagreement, government is paralyzed and disagreements translate into communal tensions and possibly fighting in the streets.

Unlike most Arab countries, the military and the intelligence services, while influential, do not have a dominant role in government. Although the head of the army has become president of the republic several times, the armed services remain under the influence of government officials and, for better or for worse, sectarian political bosses.

Despite promises in the Taif agreement to strengthen the judicial branch, this branch of government has remained more an arm of the executive than an independent third branch of government. The executive branch still controls appointments, promotions, and salaries within the judiciary and thus dominates it. The judiciary was also hit hard by the violence of the war years and by the decline in government salaries.

There are more than 1,100 municipalities in Lebanon, but government remains highly centralized. Although municipal elections are significant and free affairs that bring more than ten thousand people into elected office every six years, the municipalities have meager resources, and most of their decisions require approval from representatives of the central authority. And although the Taif Accord called for extensive administrative decentralization, this has not been done. There is a draft administrative decentralization law in the wings that elected regional councils at the level of the "Qada" (Lebanon is currently subdivided administratively into twenty-five Qadas) and organizes the finances and duties of these proposed entities, but it is not likely to make it into parliament anytime soon. Such regional councils would have the size and resources to

undertake meaningful developmental and service projects, especially in underserved outlying regions. Elites of the central government remain reluctant to cede resources and power to regionally elected bodies.

Actors, Opinion, and Participation

Parliamentary elections in Lebanon after the Syrians left in 2005 have been generally free and fair, although not cheap: Hundreds of millions of dollars are spent in election campaigns to influence and buy votes. The election law changed in 2018 from a majoritarian block-vote system to a proportional system. The earlier system allowed powerful blocks to sweep all seats in their districts. The new law creates a more varied outcome. Nevertheless, the main oligarchic powerbrokers in the country still dominated the new parliament, and minor parties or new civil society groups scored no major breakthrough.

There are many parties in Lebanon, but the main political actors in the country are the principal sectarian parties. Among the Shi'a, Hezbollah is the dominant party and is led by Shaykh Hassan Nasrallah, followed by the allied Amal movement led by parliament speaker Nabih Berri. A "third way" among the Shi'a, led by a coalition of leftist, secular, and old-family leaders, had a significant presence in the 1990s but since then has largely faded away.²⁷ In the Sunni community, the Future Movement established by Rafik al-Hariri and now led by his son, Saad, still holds the primary position although there are significant rival politicians within the community. In the Druze community, Walid Jumblatt and his Progressive Socialist Party enjoy a permanent majority based on old and semifeudal family loyalties. The Arslan wing of the community, led by Talal Arslan, enjoys a permanent minority. In the Christian (mainly Maronite) community, leadership is more divided. Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement is the largest single group, but it has to compete for power with the Lebanese Forces led by Samir Geagea. They also have to share power in the North with Suleiman Franjeh, who has his own power base.

While the Syrians were in Lebanon, they dominated most of this political class and dictated terms and outcomes. Since they left,

many have remained allied or rebuilt relations with them, but the Syrians have lost the ability to dictate terms as before. In the country, Hizbullah is the most powerful player, stronger than the Lebanese army and able to dictate terms. The terms it has dictated have been mainly to be left alone to build its independent military, intelligence, communication, and foreign policy network. It has not sought to fully dominate the state; instead, it has chosen to have enough power in the state to make sure the state doesn't get in its way. It proposes coexistence between the state and itself rather than a takeover of one by the other. Of course, this has been a point of great contention among various Lebanese groups.

Civil society is vibrant and of long standing in Lebanon. The country has a liberal law of association, and several thousand nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) operate throughout the country. Some of these are service providers, receiving funds from the government or international sources to provide needed social or humanitarian services; others are communally based NGOs organizing activities and providing services with funding and guidance from communal or religious authorities. The number of national and independent civic associations is limited, but they have had an impact in raising issues, including political reform, human rights, handicapped rights, and the environment at a national level. In some cases, they have been able to influence decision-makers to adopt or amend laws or to change decrees and procedures, but civil society remains a voice on the outside calling in rather than an empowered force.

Lebanon has among the oldest and freest presses in the Arab world. It also has a plethora of private television and radio stations that represent a spectrum of views. Since the Syrians left, there is effectively no censorship in the country, and one can find any opinion expressed at least somewhere. The flip side is that the sectarian power structure has moved into the media sector and cordoned off most of it. Television is the most powerful medium of opinion formation, and each station in Lebanon belongs to a particular confessional party or leadership and expresses those particular

political points of view. Newspapers are slightly less strictly defined, but they too have fallen under the sway of money and resources commanded by the main sectarian leaderships. So although there is freedom of expression, the dominant expression in the media is of particular sectarian and leadership views. In recent years, the new media of the Internet, social networking sites, Twitter, and the like have taken off. They have become public spaces where people—especially young people—communicate and interact; these are also spaces where they partially form their political identity and from which they organize occasional mobilization and real-world action.

Religion and Politics

The Lebanese writer philosopher Khalil Gibran wrote, “Pity the nation that has many sects but is devoid of religion.” Religion has all, and nothing, to do with politics in Lebanon. Political mobilization and leadership—as well as the political system—are set up mainly along the contours of religious communities. But religion is largely a marker of political identity, not a core part of politics, and the politics of the country still resemble the nature of politics in most other societies: a scramble for who gets what, when, and how. The majority of parties and leaders over the past century, from all communities, have run on various secular programs—nationalist, leftist, rightist, or even sectarian—but few have had an overtly religious program.

The exception has been some Islamist parties in the Sunni community who were and remain in the minority; Hizbullah, however, is an exception. It has merged an overtly religious program with a political and military one and has come to dominate the Lebanese Shi‘i community. Whether religion is merely being used to serve a political and strategic objective or whether religion is at the core of its mission, I will leave for discussions elsewhere, but from its name (the Party of God) to its allegiance to the Wilayet al Faqih, the supreme leader of the Islamic revolution of Iran, Hizbullah has introduced a new form of religious politics into Lebanon and into the Levant in general.

Political Economy

Lebanon is a middle-income country with an official exchange rate GDP of around \$51.8 billion and a per capita GDP of around \$14,700.²⁸ Services of various types (including banking, insurance, advertising, and trade) account for more than 70 percent of GDP, with industry and agriculture accounting for only approximately 21 percent and 6 percent, respectively; imports exceed exports by a margin of seven to one. The country has usually managed, however, to maintain its balance of payments through large-scale remittances from Lebanese living abroad and inflows to the Lebanese banking sector because of attractive interest rates, surviving banking secrecy laws, and the fact that it remains a stable sector in the face of regional and global financial shocks. Bank deposits have reached 300 percent of GDP, which is among the highest ratios in the world. Economic activity is concentrated in Beirut and the Mount Lebanon area. The second-largest city, Tripoli, has virtually no economic role, and rural areas languish as a result of the marginalization of agriculture. The Gini coefficient for income distribution is around 0.36, which is comparable with other middle-income countries.

The economy's main burden is the national debt, which stands at around \$81 billion, or 157.3 percent of GDP. This is among the highest ratios in the world. The government has been able to reduce its fiscal deficit from 10 percent to 7.3 percent of GDP,²⁹ which is a marked improvement but still difficult to sustain. GDP growth rates were strong in the early postwar recovery period, stagnated between 1997 and 2002, and picked up moderately after that. But 2011 through 2018 have seen slow growth because of the unrest in Syria. Lebanon requires much more robust and sustainable growth to dig itself out from under its large debt burden. The official unemployment rate hovers around 6.29 percent.³⁰ It is much higher among young people, and the jobs that are available are of limited attractiveness to skilled workers and university graduates. In effect, Lebanon's main export has been its young people, with Lebanese manning hundreds

of businesses in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Qatar, Kuwait, and Riyadh, or emigrating to North America, Europe, Africa, or Australia.

The government operates a social security fund that covers the members of the workforce who are officially employed; the fund offers basic health insurance, family allowance, and end-of-service indemnity. There is currently no general pension system. The government also covers selected emergency hospital medical care to the general public but not regular health insurance. There is no unemployment insurance, and agricultural workers and day laborers are not covered by the social security fund or other public insurance.

Regional and International Relations

Since the collapse of central authority during the 1970s, different communities in Lebanon have pursued different foreign policies. The Sunnis have a special relationship with Saudi Arabia, and the Christians developed relations with Israel for a while and then with France and the United States. The Shi'a have a strategic alliance with Iran and Asad's Syria and have set up their own ministate. The Druze have swung from alliance with Syria to opposition several times.

Differences over foreign policy had been a major bone of contention in the 1930s and again in the 1950s, 1970s, and beyond. The National Pact of 1943 included an agreement over foreign policy in which the Christians would relinquish French protection in exchange for the Muslims relinquishing demands for unity with Syria or a larger Arab state. In the 1950s, differences between the pro-US Chamoun government and the pro-Nasser opposition led to a brief civil war. In the 1970s, different positions regarding the Palestinian movement split the country again. During the civil war, the sides were divided over the roles of Syria, Israel, the United States, and other players. The Taif Accord sought to settle the issue by declaring that Lebanon would have "special relations" with Syria and would coordinate its foreign policy with it. For a while, this calmed foreign policy differences. But when relations with Syria soured and after Hariri's assassination, the issue was thrown wide open again. The March 14 coalition had strong relations with Saudi Arabia and the United States, and the March 8 alliance had alliances with Syria and Iran. During the height of the George W. Bush years, the regional confrontation among these states dramatically escalated tensions among factions in Lebanon. Differences over foreign policy threatened to escalate again in the context of the Syrian civil war. The government tried to maintain an official policy of "dissociation." As the Asad-Iran-Russia axis has gained the upper hand in Syria, Lebanon will fall once again under stronger Syrian-Iranian sway.

Internal Conflict

In a way, Lebanon's political system is predicated on the permanent risk of internal conflict. The Taif Agreement was a deal to end a long civil war and to try to prevent another civil war from erupting. The Syrians who dominated Lebanon for the first decade and a half after 1990 exploited internal divisions and the threat of internal conflict to consolidate their rule. Sectarian elites today justify their dominance within their communities as a bulwark against the threat of harm or attack from other communities, and these same oligarchs justify their collective monopolization of power and spoils in the central government by hinting that the alternative is a collapse of order and a return to civil war. And yet Lebanon has managed almost three decades of relative post-1990 internal peace, even as countries next door have disintegrated into sectarian and ethnic civil war. There has also reemerged a significant cross-sectarian Lebanese nationalist current that expressed itself in the massive demonstrations against Syrian occupation in March 2005 and again in demonstrations—this time against government mismanagement and corruption—one decade later in August 2015.

On the security track, Lebanon has been affected by many of the spillovers of the Syrian conflict, but it has managed to maintain basic stability so far. The main breach has been in the northeastern Bekaa border area of Aarsal. ISIS and Jubhat al-Nusra fighters set up an armed enclave there until the Lebanese army and Hizbullah drove them out in August 2017. The army has received support from the British and Americans to shore up its border protection capacities. Interestingly, while the political system has declined, the capacities of the Lebanese army and internal security forces have actually increased markedly.

However, the Lebanese armed forces have not been able to curb Hizbullah. When Hizbullah fighters took over the capital in May 2018, the armed forces stood idly by; and as Hizbullah streamed fighters across the Lebanese-Syrian border to wage war in Syria, against the

express policy of the government, the armed forces also did nothing. The fact of the matter is that if they tried, the army would likely split apart along sectarian lines, and the country might be driven straight back into civil war.

Conclusion

Lebanon proceeds through the second decade of the twenty-first century with causes for both optimism and concern. It has overcome years of internal and external war, undertaken key constitutional reforms, pushed out Israeli and Syrian occupation, and revived an economy despite a heavy debt burden. But the country still faces multiple challenges: how to manage the duality of sovereignty between the state and Hizbullah and coax the latter into national integration; how to manage the political system to adapt to rapidly changing demographic realities; how to develop the system to move away from confessionalism to a more civic citizenship; how to avoid another war with Israel; and how to manage the massive Syrian refugee presence in the country. The situation in the Middle East does not look promising for Lebanon, with a set of failed Arab uprisings and transitions, a Sunni-Shi'i proxy war raging through the region, a stalled peace process, and high tensions between Israel and Iran. Internally, the Lebanese political elites have not proven particularly mature or adept at recognizing the need for unity and reform and then achieving it. Lebanon is likely to muddle through the next years, falling into crisis from time to time before dusting itself off and moving on. Lebanese society has proven extremely resilient and adaptive, and although one might have described the Lebanese state as having failed several decades ago, Lebanon somehow continues to find ways to revive and thrive.

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17 Libya

Jacob Mundy

Nearly a decade after the upheavals of the Arab Spring, Libya's transition to a new political order continued to be undermined by various domestic and international forces. Following the violent revolution of 2011, Libya's weak and divided transitional leadership—despite holding several elections at the local and national level—failed to consolidate political power under a universally recognized central authority. In this context, the country's countless militias, who steadfastly refused to disarm after having plundered the state's vast armories in 2011, helped drive the country back into civil war in 2014.

This new conflict to define postrevolutionary Libya played out against a backdrop of economic crisis: World oil prices had collapsed that year as well, depriving Libya's authorities of the means to quell an increasingly anxious population through public-sector salaries and mass subsidies on imported goods. As Libya's civil war dragged on, myriad factions vied for control over key urban spaces, pivotal economic resources, vital infrastructures, social allegiances, and sources of foreign support, both financial and military. Amid the chaos of this conflict, militants claiming allegiance to the Islamic State (*al-dawlah al-islamiyyah*)—a powerful transnationalist Islamist insurgency that grew out of the Syrian civil war and extended its territorial control to Iraq—managed to seize control of the coastal city of Sirte, halfway between the capital, Tripoli, and the country's second city, Benghazi, further east. Meanwhile, hundreds of refugees and migrants, facilitated by the boom in human trafficking and other illicit economic activities in Libya, taking advantage of the country's weak rule of law, attempted to cross the Mediterranean to European shores. A 2015 peace agreement signed in Morocco and backed by the United Nations aimed to unify Libya's rival governments under a single, internationally recognized authority, the

Government of National Accord (GNA), which could address the metastasizing crises of terrorism and human trafficking. Nonetheless, no single individual, group, movement, political body, military force, or ideology has been able to achieve hegemony within Libya's multipolar political landscape after years of civil war.

For over forty years, Libyans lived under one of the Middle East's most durable regimes, that of Colonel Muammar al-Qadhafi, who came to power in a military coup in 1969. Since that regime's demise in 2011, it has been impossible to restore central authority. For decades, the political system in Libya seemed to be one of the most indelibly "personalist" yet consistently opaque to the outside world. Now, Libya's countless factions seem to be tearing the country apart, albeit with assistance from outside interests in the Middle East and further afield. How then to explain this discrepancy? How could a country that seemed so politically static for so long instantly become one of the world's most disconcertingly dynamic in recent years? In coming to the aid of the revolution in 2011, had NATO and the Arab League, through their military intervention on the side of the rebels, unleashed implacable sociopolitical forces and an untamable war economy? Going beyond such simplistic assumptions, the answer first lies in the failed transitional period (2012–2014) and the various social, political, and economic mechanisms of rule the al-Qadhafi regime used to maintain order. Yet any account of Libya's current disarray also has to contend with the historically impoverished foundations of the state—such that any foundations existed—dating back to the periods of Ottoman and Italian rule, as well as the period after independence in 1951 under King Idris of the Sanusi order, a monarch installed by Libya's British and American patrons who had occupied the country during World War II.

History of State-Building

The history of modern efforts to assert or construct state power in Libya can be roughly divided into five periods: the Ottoman period from 1551 to 1911, including periods of Karamanli rule in the West and the Sanusi rule in the East; the Italian period from 1911 to 1943, immediately followed by a brief period under an international protectorate (1945–1951); the period of independent state-building under the Sanusi Monarchy (1951–1969); the al-Qadhafi regime (1969–2011); and finally the post-Qadhafi transition from 2011 to now. Throughout this chapter, we will ask whether or not the latest phase in Libya’s history represents a sustained period of state-*unmaking* as the country continues to tumble down various indices such as the UN Human Development Report’s annual rankings amid terrorism and civil conflict.

Map 17.1 Libya



Several innate features of Libya, as well as the violence and discontinuities of imperial rule, have historically impeded state-building. Whereas neighboring Tunisia enjoyed a smaller landmass, ample terrain for cultivation, and a history of centralized state-building, Libya has had almost the opposite conditions working against it. Ottoman and European imperialism had almost the opposite effect on Libya as well: Whereas Turkish (1574–1881) and French (1881–1956) rule helped to reinforce the structures of the state in Tunis, foreign rule tended to preempt or disrupt what nascent states could be said to have existed in Libya prior to 1951.

The territory that would become Libya is roughly equal in size to Iran and Sudan, yet it has never boasted a commensurate population. In terms of agriculture, water, and other resources (excluding oil), Libya's natural endowments were meager. The country's three main regions correspond with major population centers where simple

agricultural livelihoods were historically eked out: the coast and hills of Cyrenaica in the East, the plains and mountains of Tripolitania in the West, and the Saharan oases of Fezzan in the Southwest. What might be considered Libya's fourth region, Kufra in the Southeast, was as historically associated with the populations in the unforgiving deserts of Sudan and Egypt as it was with the people of Cyrenaica.

Key Facts on Libya

AREA 679,359 square miles (1,759,540 square kilometers)

CAPITAL Tripoli

POPULATION 6,411,766; includes 769,413 nonnationals (2015 est.)

PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION UNDER 25 44.29

RELIGIOUS GROUPS (PERCENTAGE) Sunni Muslim, 97; other, 3

ETHNIC GROUPS (PERCENTAGE) Berber and Libyan Arab, 97; Greek, Maltese, Italian, Egyptian, Pakistani, Turkish, Indian, Tunisian, 3

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE Arabic; Italian and English widely spoken in major cities; Berber

TYPE OF GOVERNMENT Republic governed by UN-recognized interim transitional authority established in the 2015 Libyan Political Agreement

DATE OF INDEPENDENCE December 24, 1951 (from UN trusteeship)

GDP \$41.15 billion (2014); \$15,700 per capita (2014)

PERCENTAGE OF GDP BY SECTOR Agriculture, 2; industry, 45.8; services, 52.2

TOTAL RENTS (PERCENTAGE OF GDP) FROM NATURAL RESOURCES 41.52

FERTILITY RATE 2.05 children born/woman

Sources: Central Intelligence Agency, *CIA World Factbook, 2015*; World Bank.

Under the Ottomans, Libya—mainly Tripolitania and Fezzan—only experienced brief periods of stable, centralized, and coordinated governmental authority. Yet Istanbul's domain over Libya was marked by efforts to dismantle domestic networks of power, while the

growing machinery of modern governance (e.g., coercive taxation and land regulation) was either monopolized by foreign elites or hoarded by comprador classes. What periods of governmental stability Ottoman Libya experienced were frequently interrupted by global conflict, local revolutions, and other cataclysmic events that left new rulers essentially starting from scratch amid struggles to define the country's true political and geographical center(s) of power.

Having entered the great imperial game later than its competitors to the east (Britain) and west (France) of Libya, Italy's 1911 conquest of Tripolitania was an attempt to make up for lost time. In building its new colony, Rome treated Libya as a blank slate, importing its own political, social, and economic systems regardless of the meager recognition it had initially afforded indigenous leaders to win their support against the Ottomans. Direct administration and territorial annexation of *Libia Italiana* also went hand-in-hand with settler colonialism so as to accelerate its sociocultural incorporation into the Italian mainland from 1921 onward. These trends required mass dispossession of Libyan-held lands and therefore caused significant violent conflict that verged on genocidal levels of ethnic cleansing. Under Italian rule, the modern territory of Libya nonetheless began to take shape, as French and British concessions in the Fezzan and Kufra respectively demarcated the country's current borders. A controversial concession was the Aouzou Strip along the Libya-Chad border, which was then recuperated by the French after World War II and given to Chad at independence. Here, the territorial seeds of the Libyan-Chad war of the 1970 to 1980s were planted.

After World War II and the collapse of Italian fascism, there was almost no state for King Idris to inherit. Qualified civil servants were rare, and the country's limited physical infrastructure was in a dismal state after the war. Even the most basic prerequisites for strong state rule—such as taxation and monopoly of violence—were lacking. With little means to incentivize cooperation or to make credible threats of force, building a modern state in Libya faced steep challenges. As a dynastic order based largely in Cyrenaica, the

Sanusi monarchy did not enjoy support from all Libyans, notably in Tripolitania. As the regime grew increasingly suspicious of its opponents and dependent on the Anglo-American presence, it actively refused to build certain elements of a functioning state for fear of creating competent opponents in either the bureaucracy, the military, or civil society. This trend—regime-building at the expense of state-building—was amplified by the growing oil wealth in the 1960s. As petrodollars poured into the country, corruption became rampant and effectively routinized under the Sanusi regime’s systems of public and private patronage.

Independent Libya’s first constitution ostensibly created a federal monarchy with an elected bicameral parliament. The national government was given basic state functions: defense, diplomacy, currency, and resolving interregional disputes via a supreme court. The three regions otherwise enjoyed significant autonomy. Though federalism in the United Kingdom of Libya had aimed to counter the demographic and developmental advantages held by urbanizing Tripolitania, this trifurcated state inevitably reinforced regional tensions and impeded the efforts of the Sanusi regime to consolidate power through control over the country’s burgeoning oil wealth. With little popular opposition, King Idris declared the end of the “United Kingdom” of Libya in 1963, nullifying each region’s legislative and judicial systems. The country’s territory was reassigned into ten districts (*al-muqata’at*) with royally appointed administrators overseen by the Central Interior Ministry. This redistricting conveniently helped expedite oil concessions that would have otherwise been disputed between the three regions.¹

Meanwhile, the extended royal household (*Diwan*) of the Sanusis became the real center of power. As a neopatrimonial network penetrating the government, the bureaucracy, the military, markets, and the polity, the agents of the *Diwan* worked to enhance the uncontested supremacy of the monarchy within the political system. This was facilitated by the regime’s tendency to disperse national oil revenues on an increasingly *ad hoc* basis to appease clients, allies, and other constituents irrespective of previous national development

plans. Even in the realm of security, tribal militias were more central to the security of the Sanusi monarchy than the actual police and army. At the time of the 1969 coup, the national army numbered 6,500 men, whereas the royal guards—fighters donated from loyal Cyrenaican allies—were the most significant security force in the country, second perhaps only to the monarchy’s 1,600 British military advisors.²

Growing disconnect with Sanusi rule easily paved the way for the September 1969 coup. The years that followed under Al-Qadhafi can be divided in four periods of state development: the period of quasi-constitutional rule under a single party (1969–1977); the early years of the *Jamahiriyah* (1977–1988); the decay of the *Jamahiriyah* system from 1988 onward; and then the failed transition to a more open system in the first decade of the 2000s.

Similar to other revolutionary republics across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the leaders of the 1969 military coup, the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), envisioned Libya under a kind of single-party state. This party, the Arab Socialist Union (ASU), was heavily modeled after Nasser’s revolution in Egypt. Political debate, social grievance, and economic expectations would be channeled through the *internal* politics of the party rather than through the politics of party rivalry. And as in Iraq and Algeria, Libya’s control over plentiful oil revenues provided the party the wherewithal to resist civil challenges and meet constituent demands. An important task for the RCC was first to invent the ideological legitimacy and the popular basis of its domestic and international initiatives, a task that would largely fall on the shoulders of the charismatic leader of the coup, al-Qadhafi.

In order to reengineer state-society relations, redistricting was one of the first major policies of the RCC, one that targeted the social basis of Sanusi rule by fracturing the political geography of the unitary Kingdom. Though these changes seemed to constitute one of the first assaults of the RCC on “tribalism” and the Sanusi politics of personal and familial rule, it ostensibly paved the way for the

creation of a modern and impersonal bureaucracy. In reality, the revolutionary state was instead being purged of experienced administrators so as to be replaced by those who demonstrated the most enthusiasm for the revolution.

Yet not even the ASU—nor many of al-Qadhafi's colleagues in the RCC—would survive the thoroughgoing nature of the revolution outlined in al-Qadhafi's *The Green Book*, published in the mid-1970s. In this new phase of the revolution, governmental decision-making, administration, the economy, and ultimately sovereignty would be devolved to Basic Popular Congresses (*mu'tamar sha'bi 'asasi*) across the country. This new state, the *Jamahiriyah* (often translated as "state of the masses"), was formally declared in 1977, a year after the first General People's Congress (*mu'tamar al-sha'bi al-'am*), the annual meeting where the will of all the congresses was supposedly brought to the national stage. From this point onward, Libya operated without a constitution. "The revolution" was the polity's new compass, to be guided by the Revolutionary Committees, the RCC, and particular revolutionary personalities, al-Qadhafi chief among them, as a revolutionary "guide" (*murshid*). Given the absence of a constitution, administrative codes, and written laws (even some of the core institutions of the *Jamahiriyah* were not mentioned in *The Green Book*), Libyan lawyers and judges were often forced to look to Ottoman, Italian, and UN documents to find precedents or a textual basis for legal opinions and rulings.

On paper, the foundation of government and administration were the more than four hundred Basic Popular Congresses, convened every four months at the level of the municipality (*al-baladiyyah*) to discuss local affairs and national debates. All adult Libyans belonged to the Congress in addition to local worker associations. Local administration, drawn from the base congresses, was the purview of People's Committees (*al-lajnah al-sha'biyyah*). In 1988, twenty-six provincial-level districts (*al-sha'biyyah*) were added to this system to handle more regional-level issues, though these operated in the same way as the municipal-level congresses. The General People's Congress was the forum where the will of the base congresses was

brought to a national level, and its executive, the General Popular Committee (*al-lajnah al-sha'biyyah al-'ammah*), functioned as a kind of ministerial council. That the *Jamahiriyah* actually represented a real example of direct democracy was belied by poor participation rate, reportedly never surpassing 25 percent. The real state, as most Libyans knew quite well, was the parallel, and far more powerful, institutions of the Revolutionary Committees, the RCC, and ultimately al-Qadhafi and those close to him.³

Libya's once-feeble security sector initially benefited the most from the 1969 revolution, as the country went on an arms shopping spree in the 1970s. Other sectors of the bureaucracy also ballooned as government labor quickly became the dominant form of employment. The regime was nonetheless always careful to prevent the emergence of competent opposition from within the government or the military. In coordination with the widespread revolutionary bodies of the *Jamahiriyah*, the intelligence services ran an extensive network of informants inside the country (*mukhabarat*). Public executions and imprisonment for dissent (real and imagined) became commonplace from the 1970s onward. Though such overt signs of repression diminished during the final decade of the al-Qadhafi regime, it was also true that Libya's once-powerful military—shamed on the battlefields of Chad in the 1980s and starved by international sanctions in the 1990s—had been reduced to a mere shadow of its former Cold War glory in the 1970s. The most effective security forces in the years leading up to the 2011 Arab Spring were the elite guard units and intelligence services that catered exclusively to the al-Qadhafi family's interests and protection. Though the regime pursued efforts to address the bloated state bureaucracy, the derelict institutions of the *Jamahiriyah*, inefficient markets, and its own human rights failings, these piecemeal reforms only convinced many Libyans that they had no choice but to revolt against the regime in 2011.

The Political Economy of Development

As noted, the challenges of state-building and economic development in Libya have first had to confront the country's austere geography, which has historically only been able to support a relatively small population. Libya was in fact one of the world's poorest countries in 1951, and its prospects for development were abysmal before the exploitation of oil. As Libya's population grew rapidly in the wake of independence and the oil boom, the country became more and more dependent on imports, particularly food, to sustain its growth. According to the World Bank, Libya is only able to support farming on less than 9 percent of the land. By contrast, its North African neighbors—Morocco (68 percent), Sudan (47 percent), Tunisia (64 percent), and Algeria (17 percent)—boast a much stronger agricultural base. Though Egypt supports a population of over eighty million with less than 4 percent of its land being agriculturally viable, the key difference is the Nile. There are no perennial rivers in Libya, and rainfall patterns have become increasingly unpredictable over the previous century.

The extension of Ottoman control over Libya from the mid-sixteenth century onward not only facilitated the Empire's projection of military power in the southern and western Mediterranean, but it was also motivated by the economic benefits to be gained from taxing shipping and trans-Saharan trade, particularly its major downstream terminal like Tripoli. The burdens of rule—taxation, appeasing clients, suppressing revolts—were largely outsourced to local deputies, while the metropole enjoyed all the benefits. At the height of the trans-Saharan trade, largely propelled by slavery and gold, there were three major trade routes through the Sahara to the Libyan coast: two western routes through Fezzan to Tripoli (originating in the central and western Sahara) and an eastern route to Benghazi via Kufra, connecting Lake Chad and the eastern Sahel to the

Mediterranean. Yet the latter half of the 1800s then saw the end of the international slave trade and the emergence of European colonial possessions in sub-Saharan Africa, which further undermined the need for trans-Saharan caravans.⁴ The decimation of the trans-Saharan trade devastated Ottoman Libya. The traditional merchant classes of the coastal cities and Saharan way stations were particularly undermined by the decline, as were populations all along the established routes. By the end of that century, the Ottoman presence was criticized domestically and internationally for its economic mismanagement, if not outright neglect.

Rome's economic interest in Libya had almost nothing to do with providing Libyans with a better life. Instead, Libya was a place to send Italy's growing population, which would keep them in the Italian national market and thus provide a beneficial alternative to migration to North America. Though the new Italian rulers of Libya were quick to highlight the alleged benefits of their governance, colonialism entailed the wholesale destruction of communities and their traditional modes of economic survival. Yet Libya was never as important to the Italian economy as Algeria was to the French or Egypt to the British. Apart from Libya's symbolic geopolitical value, which ostensibly signaled Italy's standing as a major European power, the Italian government was pouring far more resources into Libya than it was getting out of it by the 1930s. Massive outlays were required to subsidize the settler population, the colony's infrastructural requirements, and to maintain a secure order in a territory nearly six times the size of Italy. By the end of the 1930s, there were some forty thousand Italian troops in Libya as the storm clouds of global war loomed. Indeed, one of the largest "development" projects was the great *Litoranea*, a highway connecting Tunisia and Egypt via Tripoli and Benghazi. Finished just in time for World War II, some decried the project as Hitler's highway to the Suez Canal.⁵

Upon Libya's independence, international financial institutions, along with Britain and France, frequently questioned the newly formed state's viability. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund

were keen to help jump-start the Libyan economy in the 1950s, but domestic expertise and institutions—both public and private—were sorely lacking. Libya's major export in the early 1950s was scrap metal from the battlefields of World War II.⁶ Italian-run plantations remained a cornerstone of the Tripolitanian economy, by far the wealthiest and most developed of Libya's three regions. The bloody insurgency of the 1920s and the battles of World War II had done much to set Cyrenaica even further behind. The lack of significant industrial production in Libya or migrant Libyan industrial labor in Italy inhibited the growth of indigenous economic classes beyond agriculture, merchants, rentiers, and the bureaucracy. Meanwhile, French and British aid to their Cyrenaican and Fezzani clients indirectly undermined progress by fueling corruption and the traditionalist patron-client networks that had historically ordered social, political, and economic life in Libya.

Further inhibiting coordinated development was the autonomy of the three regions; their individual development plans often trumped national ones. Regional governments would also operate on deficit spending and then look to the central government—the coffers of the Sanusi monarchy, enriched by foreign aid and, later, oil—to cover their shortfalls. Local government soon became the largest formal employer in Libya in the 1950s, yet this only accounted for less than 10 percent of the potential workforce. What little mineral and other natural resources had been explored in Libya by the 1950s were often considered economically unviable for a number of simple reasons: the distances between deposits and ports; the lack of basic infrastructure like roads, electricity, and telecommunications; and prevailing global market prices.

For these and other reasons, the Sanusi monarchy was obliged to live off the patronage of the British and, increasingly, the United States, both of which maintained military bases in Libya. In the mid-1950s, this aid was estimated to be US\$26 million per year (the equivalent of over \$200 billion in today's dollars). As the regime had done very little to develop Libya's potential since independence, it was fast becoming indebted to finance basic governmental activities.

This dependency on foreign aid actually became worse as the oil economy developed from the late 1950s onward. By 1963, oil accounted for over 98 percent of the country's exports, most of that being processed by British and US firms. The Sanusi regime was thus not only dependent upon London and Washington for direct economic and political support but also their oil firms' technological support as well. Though oil was a major source of industrial jobs in Libya (albeit indirectly more than directly), Libya's middle and professional classes were still minuscule. Oil did not result in a radical transformation of state-society relations as much as an amplification of political and economic arrangements already in place.

Just before the 1969 coup, a World Bank economist suggested that the rapid growth experienced in Libya in the 1960s would have been unbelievable if it were presented as a hypothetical or abstract case of national development. Per capita gross national product, for example, went from nearly \$40 at independence to \$1,018 in 1967; between 1960 and 1969, per capita income went from \$50 to \$2,000. Libya's exports in 1960 (dominated by agriculture) totaled \$11 million; in seven years, oil would push this figure to \$1.16 billion, placing Libya among the top-ten petroleum exporters worldwide. As a consequence of this rapid growth, the skyrocketing cost of living challenged average Libyans who had yet to benefit from increased general employment or a functional welfare state. Libya went from being one of the world's poorest countries to the host of the ninth-most expensive city in the world—Tripoli—in less than two decades. In light of this crippling inflation and rising inequality, Libya was viewed as a situation of economic growth without economic development.⁷

The context of the Cold War also helps to explain Libya's rapid economic transformation. The nationalization of oil production in Iran (1951) and the Suez Canal crisis (1956) prompted North Atlantic interest in hydrocarbon resources that were closer to Europe and easier to control, places like Algeria (before independence in 1962) and Libya under the Sanusis. Washington was likewise keen to

secure a stable energy base to sustain the reconstruction of Europe and the postwar economic boom. As an impoverished country, Libya could seemingly afford to sell its oil cheaply to nearby European markets and to offer acreage to international oil corporations (IOCs) at bargain prices. Of an exceptionally “light” and “sweet” quality, Libyan oil was also easy for refineries to process into high-demand transportation and heating fuels. Following the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and the closure of the Suez Canal until 1975, Libya’s distance from the Levant made its oil all the more attractive.⁸ The al-Qadhafi coup of 1969, however, would soon upend these efforts to find a stable source of oil and natural gas amid the growing chaos of the Cold War.

Oil transformed Libya by allowing the state and the society the ability to overcome its basic geographical and demographic challenges. The oil boom naturally saw an explosion in construction, which allowed for growth in personal and public transportation options, as well as rapid electrification. These trends drove the rapid urbanization of Tripoli and Benghazi; each saw 60 percent increases in their populations in the decade prior to 1964. In the countryside, agriculture stagnated as the government prioritized imports over domestic production, a strategy that only encouraged even more urbanization. In the early days of oil, Libya initially faced a labor shortage of highly skilled workers for most positions in oil, manufacturing, and other industries. Later, Libya faced a shortage of unskilled labor, which resulted in a significant influx of workers from neighboring countries in the Maghrib and Africa. At the same time, Libya suffered a kind of internal “brain drain” as competent, bureaucratic elites found better positions in the private sector, draining the government of important talent.⁹

The 1969 coup attempted to address the ills of Libya’s oil-based economy, particularly the inequalities and corruption that had developed under the Sanusi. Recuperating lost revenues followed by outright nationalization of oil production was just the first step in the process of bringing Libya’s immense natural resource wealth to heel. Al-Qadhafi’s *The Green Book* not only put forward a radical

image of unmediated democracy, but it also imagined the end of economic relations based on markets, wages, and private property. Putting this philosophy into action first required a massive expansion of the welfare state to provide basic goods such as food and housing in the early 1970s. In the latter half of the decade, this economic program became even more radical, as “the masses” (i.e., the regime) seized assets and redistributed agricultural lands; workers were compelled into associations; Libyans were tricked into depositing all their cash and savings into the national bank in 1979, only to have their cash seized in 1981; and all imports and exports were controlled by the state in the name of a planned economy, one in which goods and services would be allocated by central authorities. In this new financial and commercial environment, informal and illegal markets began to compensate for the economy’s obvious shortcomings.

If Libyans accepted these contradictions and the haphazard nature of the new regime being erected around them, this acceptance was eased by the fact that soon 75 percent of Libyans were employed by the state. Libya’s oil economy quickly outgrew the size of Libya’s population in the 1970s. Foreigners soon constituted 40 percent of the workforce, from simple laborers (60 percent) to skilled workers (30 percent) to professionals and the managerial class (over 50 percent). Bringing these classes into conflict was the fact that the economy eventually had a difficult time absorbing all the highly educated graduates the new school and university system was producing, resulting in an expulsion of foreign laborers in 1985 as oil prices began to fall. Though these decisions and their effects were ostensibly rooted in al-Qadhafi’s ideology, they also helped to displace or dislocate traditional classes—merchants, landowners, agricultural laborers, and the like—who had been central to Ottoman, Italian, and Sanusi rule.¹⁰

The sustainability of this economic order was called into doubt by several developments in the 1980s: the 1985 to 1986 collapse in oil prices; military confrontations with the North Atlantic powers; a disastrous intervention in Chad; growing international isolation,

especially following the Pan Am 103 and UTA 772 bombings; and the sheer absurdity of the *Jamahiriyah* economy, such as its chronically empty state-run supermarkets. All of these developments and many more forced the regime to reconsider its approach and initiate a new period of economic “*infitah*” (opening). Direct control over trade, commerce, and production were eased in many sectors (except oil and large industry), as were some the political mechanisms that seemed to exert an overbearing influence on the society (e.g., the Revolutionary Committees and Courts). These reforms helped the regime survive the 1990s, a decade in which there were UN sanctions, attempted coups, an Islamist insurgency, and other efforts to organize opposition to the regime domestically and abroad. That said, the regime continued to find the wherewithal to lavish its international allies with funding (for both development and conflict), to continue massive public works projects (e.g., the Great Manmade River), and to fund senseless white-elephant projects like the attempted transformation of Sirte—al-Qadhafi’s home city—into a kind of Libyan Brasilia.

The slow end of international isolation following the 1999 rendering of the Lockerbie suspects and the 2003 acquiescence to other international demands helped the al-Qadhafi regime promote Libya’s economic potential in the age of globalization. What the world found in Libya was a country entirely dependent on oil to subsidize a population largely employed, or otherwise supported, by the state. For the quarter of the population not employed by the government (mainly youths), options outside of informal labor and illegal markets were limited. The only advantage of the Libyan economy was the relatively low rates of poverty when compared to its African and Middle Eastern neighbors. Renewed efforts to liberalize the economy and privatize the oil sector were launched amid top-level changes in government that saw technocratic managers like Shukri Ghanem ascend. Foreign direct investment continued to gravitate entirely toward hydrocarbons as global prices picked up in the 2000s. This environment of rejuvenation was led by Libya’s heir apparent, Saif Al-Islam, the British-educated eldest son of al-Qadhafi who easily spoke the international *lingua franca* of human rights, open markets,

and democratic governance. The Arab Spring protests of February 2011 nonetheless revealed that the failures of the al-Qadhafi regime had been as much economic as they had been political. Even with significant cash reserves, the regime could not contain the economic shock of the late 2010 global food price spike, a shock that exploded polities across MENA.

Social Change

To understand the social basis of the current crisis facing Libya, as well as the patterns of rule and resistance that narrate its history, one must understand the various constituent elements that have come to make up the complex Libyan social mosaic. Though generally characterized as an Arab state, Libya is a multiethnic polity including large numbers of Imazighen (“Berbers”), notably communities in the Nafusa mountains and western coastal plain along with the Tuaregs of the southwestern Sahara regions. Additionally, there is a sizable population of Tebu (or Toubou) in the Chadian and Sudanese border in Libya’s south-central and south-eastern regions. While the Imazighen and Tebu are often described as Libya’s indigenous populations given the distinct nature of their languages, the waves of Arab conquests from the seventh century onward, which brought Islam and the Arabic language to North Africa, were perhaps more cultural than demographic in nature, as recent genetic studies have suggested. Moreover, Libya has been historically embedded in civilizational struggles across the Mediterranean and the Sahara for millennia: Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Vandals, Byzantines, Persians, Normans, Andalucians, Jews, Ottomans, and others have all left their marks on Libya and the Libyans, as did the Islamic empires of North and Sahelian Africa. Libya is also home to one of the great pre-Islamic civilizations of the Sahara Desert, Garamantes (ca. 3000–1300 BP), of the Fezzan region.

Though Libya is overwhelmingly a Sunni Muslim country at one level, there are notable religious differences at other levels (Sufis, Ibadis, and Ashraf families). The Turkish influence is particularly noticeable in the presence of the *Kulughli* or *Cologhli* population of Ottoman descent. The descendants of former slaves and mixed households, *shwashna*, are also present, as well as the lasting imprint of European, Christian (notably Coptic), and Jewish populations. Although the al-Qadhafi regime attempted to foster an environment of vicious anti-Semitism, there are those Libyans who

recognize the profound ways in which Jewish populations contributed to Libyan history before the Arab-Israeli wars and the al-Qadhafi regime made their presence untenable.

The al-Qadhafi regime was likewise antagonistic toward the Amazigh identity, even going so far as to deny the existence of such ethnic or linguistic differences among the populations in the North. With the growth of Arab nationalism in the twentieth century as a response to European imperialism, regimes across Northern Africa often downplayed or suppressed the Amazigh identity in an effort to create a homogenous political community. The Italian colonizers had, after all, attempted to exploit the various divisions within Libya, from the religious (Muslims and Jews) to the ethnic (Arabs and Imazighen), just as the French did in Morocco and Algeria.¹¹ The 2011 “Arab” Spring nonetheless revealed a strong Amazigh community in northern Libya, one that had helped lead the revolution against the old regime. Since then, Amazigh communities have struggled to force Libya’s interim authorities to recognize their cultural rights.

Tuareg communities, by contrast, have suffered since the 2011 due to their long association with al-Qadhafi, who had been a strong “supporter” of Tuareg Imazighen of the central Sahara, though this often meant his constant meddling in their affairs, across the states of Algeria, Niger, and Mali. Similarly, the al-Qadhafi regime had ambivalent relations with Libya’s “black” populations, whether indigenous (e.g., Tawerghans) or migratory. Though thousands of sub-Saharan Africans found work in Libya in the 1970s and 1980s during the oil boom, many were forced to leave when Libya’s economic and geopolitical fortunes turned for the worse. When the 2011 uprising erupted in February, al-Qadhafi claimed he would raise an army of African mercenaries to defeat the rebellion. Though he was unable to do so, Libya has been marked by a vicious racial politics since then, which has taken the form of an ongoing “citizenship” debate (i.e., who will benefit from the state’s wealth), as well as the ethnic cleansing of forty thousand Tawerghans from their home city in 2011 and rampant human trafficking in the context of the Mediterranean migration crisis of recent years.

Though race and racism are often overlooked elements of contemporary societies in the MENA region, the question of tribes and tribalism is not. Accounts of Libya's politics, or lack thereof, often focus on its putatively tribal nature in order to understand the durability (or lack thereof) of any given sociopolitical order. A nuanced understanding of the social basis of rule in Libya must first acknowledge the fact that functional governmental institutions have often been sorely lacking throughout the modern and postcolonial history of Libya. Libya's oil wealth tended to exacerbate this problem, allowing the Sanusi and al-Qadhafi regimes to rule through informal mechanisms rather than through continuous, robust, transparent, and accountable institutions. The absence of coherent national-level governance in Libya tends to be the primary argument for the allegedly tribal nature of the society. Yet the absence of one does not necessarily prove the existence of the other. The discourse of Libyan tribalism is, moreover, confused and contradictory and often orientalist in its assumptions. It is difficult to disentangle the ostensibly fixed basis of the tribe (rooted in notions of blood and land) with the tribe's changing function across the regimes of the Ottomans, Italians, the United Nations, Sanusis, al-Qadhafi, the 2011 revolution, and the failed transition. What is important to recognize, however, is that social relations *of various kinds*, including extended kinship networks (tribes), have been reinforced by the historical and contemporary absence of meaningful central authority.

Regionalism is also presented as one of the defining aspects of Libyan society. Historically, Libya's three main regions were largely independent from each other and socially and comically oriented toward other centers of culture, power, and trade: Tripolitania toward Tunis, Cyrenaica toward Cairo, and Fezzan toward Lake Chad and the Niger River. Modern regionalism in Libya was also the result of the Ottoman state's noticeable presence in Tripolitania and the *de facto* autonomy Cyrenaica and Fezzan enjoyed. Cyrenaican identity not only grows out of a sense of an independent destiny and the traditions of the *Sanusiyyah*, but also the extensive brutality of the Italian pacification campaign of the 1920s. Both the Ottomans and Italians engaged in massive population transfer schemes and

resettlement efforts that variously undermined and reinforced regionalism depending on the context of the relocation. The Sanusi monarchy, with its historical base of power in the East and the Sahara, tended to promote Cyrenaican interests (e.g., by promoting Benghazi as a co-equal capital), a trend that the al-Qadhafi regime somewhat reversed, though Tripolitania's demographic hegemony and Cyrenaican demands were balanced by al-Qadhafi's efforts to promote the region around Sirte as a new center of power. In contemporary Libya, Cyrenaican identity tends to be the most pronounced of these three regional identities, which can be witnessed in regional movements for autonomy, a return of the federalist system, and support for a restoration of the monarchy. Subregional identity groups are also important, such as the Arab and Amazigh communities of the Nafusa or the marginalized communities of the central oases whose lands sit between historical Tripolitania and Cyrenaica.

Undoubtedly, the most significant change the Libyan society has experienced during the modern period regards its size. In the early 1800s, Libya's urban population was miniscule. Cities like Tripoli and Misrata housed populations of no more than twelve thousand; smaller towns such as Murzuq, Benghazi, and Derna boasted little more than five thousand residents each. By contrast, Tunis and Cairo would have claimed populations an order of magnitude larger than Tripoli or Benghazi. Under direct Ottoman control from the 1830s onward, Tripoli's population merely doubled, as did the other key population centers, by the time of the Italian conquest in 1911. In other places, Libya's population declined with the slow end of the trans-Saharan slave trade. Fezzan was particularly hard hit, going from seventy-five thousand residents in 1789 to roughly thirty thousand in 1919. Cities like Ghadamis and Murzuq saw their populations respectively dwindle to a quarter (three thousand) and a fifth (one thousand) of their early 1800s peak. The Italians did little to change this; in fact, their occupation and colonization was, in effect, genocide. Libya's native population halved in the face of land expropriations for settler plantations and a counterinsurgency campaign premised on ethnic cleansing.

Libya's rapid growth, urbanization, and education after independence and the 1969 coup was matched by a steady rise in per capita incomes and wealth. During the early years of oil, the effects of the burgeoning welfare state were already manifesting in terms of illiteracy (dropping from 81 percent in 1954 to 56 percent in 1964) as school enrollment jumped from forty-five thousand in 1951 to three hundred thousand in 1968. These social gains continued during the al-Qadhafi years, despite the increasing political repression, economic mismanagement, and international isolation. Looking at the 2010 United Nations *Human Development Report* on the eve of the Arab Spring, Libya ranked fifty-third globally, well ahead of its neighbors Algeria (84th), Chad (163rd), Egypt (101st), Niger (167th), and Tunisia (81st), as well as the other states of the Maghrib—Mauritania (136th), Morocco (114th), and Sudan (154th). Based on a number of indicators (including life expectancy, schooling, and income per capita), the United Nations judged Libya's development in 2010 to be ahead of countries like Saudi Arabia, Mexico, Russia, Iran, Brazil, and Turkey in the *high human development* range. On average, Libya's 6.2 million citizens and residents lived in relative comfort despite the regime's other shortcomings. When gender was factored into these results (health, labor, education, and participation in government), Libya continued to perform well above its neighbors and Arab peers.¹² Though Libya's development index ranked as *high* in the years after the 2011 uprising, the social welfare systems began showing obvious signs of stress as the country headed into a new civil war in 2014 and global oil prices collapsed in early 2015.

Research on women in Libya is sadly lacking. This is often attributed to the austere and modest nature of the society, its long international isolation, and the socially conservative tendencies exhibited in both the Sanusi monarchy and al-Qadhafi regime. The country's first constitution even formalized this discrimination at the most basic level by not allowing women to vote. The al-Qadhafi regime, despite its progressive veneer (from promoting women's education to al-Qadhafi's personal squad of female bodyguards), nonetheless directly supported and unwittingly abetted social policies that saw

gender norms become increasingly regressive as the *Jamahiriyyah* system failed to revolutionize the society. Moreover, women's participation in the consultative structures of the government never passed 11 percent.¹³ According to some observers, this widespread and increasing embrace of Islamic "tradition" (notably in the high percentage of Libyan women who wear the *hijab*) was rooted in basic survival strategies. Social conservatism not only allowed average citizens to pass modestly and unnoticed by the expansive surveillance state, but it was a part of alternative modes of economic and social organization, religious networks in particular, that compensated for the failures of the *Jamahiriyyah*. Ironically, the poor performance of radical and reformist Islamist parties in Libya's first elections in 2012 was often attributed to the fact that the society had long ago adopted the major social practices that Islamists tend to advocate in other countries, especially those concerning gender and sexuality.

Political Institutions and Participation

It was only in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising, six decades after independence, that Libyans finally began to enjoy the freedom to form an independent civil society and to voice their political will in national elections and referenda. Where the Sanusi monarchy eventually abolished all parties, al-Qadhafi's *Jamahiriyyah* ostensibly implemented a form of direct democracy that negated the need for contested elections, nongovernmental organizations, and other checks on state power like an independent press. Despite its populist veneer, the *Jamahiriyyah* failed to engage Libyans who understood that power truly rested in the state's "revolutionary" organs and personalities. The explosion of dissent in 2011 nonetheless revealed a polity that was both yearning for significant change and quite capable of organizing, though not in ways that were always conducive to civil concord. Though there appeared to be a national consensus in late 2011 and early 2012, this soon dissipated as the business of leading the transition and writing a constitution became increasingly conflictual, eventually leading to a low-intensity civil war in 2014 and the birth of two rival governments.

The modern elements of political participation and civil society in Libya can be traced back to the failed efforts of the Ottomans to establish more local forms of governance in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica in the late 1800s. The proliferation of anti-imperialist ideologies across the Middle East and North Africa, whether taking the form of Arab nationalism or Islamic reform movements, began to take root among Tripolitanian elites as well. By contrast, Cyrenaica had a longer and different experience of associative life under the *Sanusiyyah*, a Sufi religious brotherhood that eventually transformed into a political dynasty. Unfortunately, the Libyan political forces that were amalgamated by the international community to govern the country from 1951 onward, notably the Sanusi monarchy, were often detached from the public at large and had little experience navigating

the distinct political traditions used in Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan.

The struggle to determine the postcolonial fate of Libya catalyzed the creation of a number of political parties representing the various regional and political tendencies. One of the few manifestations of “national unity” during this period was Tripolitania’s opposition to a return of Italian rule after World War II, which was visible in several large protests. The major political forces in Tripolitania, having declared the first independent Arab republic in the world in 1919, wanted self-determination and unification of the three regions, but only as much as that meant the definitive end of Italian rule. In Fezzan, the political elites had benefited from French protection and thus worried about their status in an independent Libya dominated by Tripoli or the Sanusis. Though Cyrenaica was only home to a quarter of Libya’s one million inhabitants, there was a palpable desire to pursue independent statehood without Fezzan or Tripolitania. “Libya,” for many Cyrenaicans, was a figment of the Italians’ colonial imagination.¹⁴ Making matters worse, Libya’s putative leaders during the post–World War II administration were not in complete control of the ten-member council charged with helping the United Nations formulate the first independent Libyan state once self-determination was mandated in 1949.

Libya’s first constitution, finalized in November 1950, proposed a federalist monarchy overseeing an elected bicameral government with annually alternating capitals (Tripoli and Benghazi). Sebha, the most populous city in southern Libya, would serve as the regional capital of Fezzan. The upper house balanced the three regions with eight representatives each, four of those being royally appointed and the other four being elected by provincial assemblies. The lower house allowed Tripolitania thirty-five deputies to flex its demographic advantage over Cyrenaica (fifteen) and Fezzan (five). A major concern for the Sanusis after independence was the possibility of a united Tripolitanian bloc using their majority to rewrite the constitution so as to dilute or end the federal system. Tripolitania was also well known for hosting the most vocal proponents of a

republican order. This did not come to pass in Libya's first elections in February 1951, which saw an urban-rural split divide the vote in Tripolitania. However, the national electorate at the time—all male, of course—was only one-seventh of the total population.

The opportunity for King Idris to institute a more absolutist monarchy presented itself in the form of protests by the Tripolitanian National Congress Party of Bashir Bey Al-Sadawi. This created the pretext for a crackdown that not only led to Sadawi's exile and the banning of his party but indeed a total ban on all political parties that effectively lasted until the 2011 revolution. Despite regular elections, the parliament effectively became a mechanism for the automatic legitimation of the monarchy's policies. Soon, all major government postings were royal appointees, as foreign aid (military base leases) and oil became the government's primary source of funding. Even in a context of rapid development following the discovery of oil, popular dissatisfaction had gotten to the point in the late 1960s that the military coup was accepted with little protest.

To describe the events of September 1, 1969, as a "revolution" would be accurate in the sense that one regime forcibly replaced another. Though the 1969 coup was well received, it was not built upon a popular movement for a republic nor did it bring together a front of clandestine revolutionary organizations. The 1969 revolution was popular in the sense that it was largely uncontested. Two years would pass, however, before the RCC created a proper institution, the ASU, for the society at large to engage in the political system. Participation in this one-party state was facilitated through local cells, which would later transform into the early structures of the *Jamahiriyah* in 1973 (the "people's revolution") and the formalization of the new system in 1977 (the era of "people's power"). All along, the institutions of the revolution (the RCC, Revolutionary Committees, and particular individuals) continued to act as the real power and source of law in Libya and would continue to do so alongside the "direct democracy" of the *Jamahiriyah's* congresses, committees, and associations.

Participation in the *Jamahiriyah's* basic consultative structures was never very strong and declined throughout the career of the institutions. The demands of these institutions (frequent meetings and travel) were often considered too onerous for the facade of democratic input they promised. More often than not, these structures became opportunities for particular groups to advance their own personal, familial, political, or economic agendas. Disenchantment with the *Jamahiriyah* was also rooted in the overbearing power of the revolutionary organs, which provided new institutional structures for sycophants and self-promoters to engineer their way into the corrupt patron-client networks of the al-Qadhafi regime. For most Libyans—the three-fourths who never participated—daily survival, particularly as the command economy faltered in the 1980s, was more important.¹⁵ That said, the *Jamahiriyah* and, more importantly, its revolutionary structures would not have survived for so many years had they not somehow cultivated forms of support and even devotion among enough constituencies to weather four turbulent decades.

The explosion of civil society following 2011 revealed a Libyan civil society that was already well organized, despite having had to maintain a subterranean existence for years, if not decades. Despite years of repression, the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups were some of the first to make a strong impression of organizational coherence in the lead-up to the July 2012 elections for the new parliament that would form a democratically elected transitional government. That said, the Libyan electorate, which turned out in strong numbers, showed a clear preference for technocratic expertise, ideological moderation, and political independence. Unfortunately, the leadership that emerged to govern the transition, headed by Ali Zeidan, proved incapable of coordinating and implementing effective national policies. Above all was the need to disarm, demobilize, and reintegrate the thousands of heavily armed militia fighters who had ousted the al-Qadhafi regime in 2011, which Libya's transitional authorities have so far failed to do. Elections in May 2014 to reconstitute a new interim legislature not only failed to turn out a fifth of the electorate, but the

contested results split the country between rival parliaments, governments, and military coalitions. In the years since, local-level governance, mainly at the municipal level, has been the only effective and responsive form of leadership in the country.

Religion and Politics

Though Libya has never been under the rule of an explicitly Islamist regime or political party, all of its modern rulers, with the obvious exception of the Italians, have viewed Islam as central to governmental authority and the cohesion of the polity. The Sanusi monarchy began in the nineteenth century as a Sufi brotherhood. Their approach to Sufi thought and practice stressed the role of learned interpretation (*al-ijtihad*) of Islamic law and practice (*al-shari'ah*) over scriptural literalism and other orthodoxies found in the established schools of Sunni thought.

The *Sanusiyyah* effloresced within the particular cultural milieu of eastern Libya by articulating their religious ideas and practices with a popular tradition, one found all across North Africa, of venerating local religious figures and community leaders who seemed particularly endowed by Allah with *al-barakah* (blessing). This could include spiritual intuition, natural leadership skills, healing abilities, and, most importantly, the demonstrated favor of Allah during trying times. Using these cultural traditions, the founder of the *Sanusiyyah*, Sidi Muhammad Al-Sanusi (1787–1859), who was from Algeria (though he studied in Arabia), used his alleged lineage to the family of the Prophet Muhammad to obtain a saint-like status during his lifetime, thus becoming the eponymous founder of one of the greatest movements of northern Africa.

Contrary to the Western image of Sufis as individualistic and pacifist mystics who seek to transcend the baseness of social and political life through quiet meditation, chanting, music, or repetitive physical exertion, Al-Sanusi denounced asceticism and solipsism within Sufi thought and practice. He instead stressed the need to accept the plurality of ways in which Muslims practiced Islam and the need to engage socially, as these were all paths to understanding Allah. The author of more than forty books, Al-Sanusi criticized the main Sunni schools of thought as overly divisive. He instead advocated for a firm

grounding in the Qur'an as opposed to its subsequent exegesis in the copious volumes that comprise the Hadith.

Though ostensibly living under Ottoman sovereignty, the *Sanusiyyah* went on to create quasi-governmental institutions that served the socioreligious, economic, and security needs of populations in Cyrenaica, as well as parts of Fezzan, northern Chad, western Egypt, and other areas where the Brotherhood was strong. These functions included courts, education, trade regulation, and law enforcement. The physical manifestation of *Sanusiyyah* commitment to social engagement was the *zawiyyah* (lodge), which functioned as a hub for spiritual practice, religious learning, and worship for adults and children, as well as the center of the community, a refuge for travelers, the residence of the *shaykh* and his family, the offices of his assistants who functioned as Sanusi administrators, and as the local armory. The location of *zawiyyahs* was not only determined by community need and enthusiasm but was often chosen in relation to the movement's commercial interests (mainly trans-Saharan trade), the need to unify particular social groups, and the *Sanusiyyah's* subtle political competition with the Ottomans. That Al-Sanusi had created much more than a personality cult was demonstrated in the continuing proliferation of Sanusi *zawiyyahs* after his death. From around fifty in 1859, the *Sanusiyyah* went on to add over ninety more by 1920. A third of these were located in Cyrenaica, and another fifth were in western Egypt; the remainders were primarily in Tripolitania, Fezzan, Kufra, and the central Sahel, with a small number in the Hijaz.¹⁶ The Sanusi's limited penetration of the urban core of Tripolitania had much to do with the fact that the new urban elites of Ottoman Tripoli often followed reformist (*al-islam*) and orthodox (*al-salafiyyah*) currents in turn-of-the-century cosmopolitan Islam, while the religious establishment (*al-'ulama*) in Tripolitania was already a central player in the Ottoman state's educational, judicial, and religious administration. In the Nafusa mountains, meanwhile, adherents of Islam's third major branch, *Ibadiyyah* (Ibadis), were to be found among the Amazigh population. Nonetheless, most Libyans would come to see Umar Mukhtar (1861–1931), who led the Sanusi

resistance to Italian occupation in Cyrenaica, as one of the country's most important national heroes.

After World War II, the traditions and institutions of the Sanusiyyah were allowed to come back to Libya during the international mandate period, though these were a shadow of their former glory. The robust political, social, and economic networks that had underwritten *Sanusiyyah* power had been greatly eroded by the long demise of trans-Saharan trade (the movement's main source of financing) and even more extensively damaged by the violent Italian pacification in the 1920s. For most of its ostensible reign over Libya, the Sanusi monarchy lived in exile under British protection. Upon his return, King Idris relied as much on Anglo-American patronage as the decayed networks of the *Sanusiyyah*. The political and religious elites of Tripolitania begrudgingly accepted Sanusi rule as the least-worst option for political leadership. Under the Sanusi monarchy, the *'ulama* was politically co-opted although its religious autonomy was respected.

The regime established after the 1969 coup made almost no room for either traditional religious elites or new Islamic movements. Al-Qadhafi's ideology was revolutionary but certainly not secular.¹⁷ The regime regularly used its coercive, coordinating, and ideational capacities to devolve religious authority to the masses by disabling traditional networks of religious power and by preventing the coalescence of underground Islamist movements. Al-Qadhafi, as the guide of the revolution, thus functioned as the country's leading religious authority as well, instituting rules ranging from the strange (instituting a new Islamic calendar with a different Year Zero) to the stringent (total prohibition on alcohol sales and consumption). The seizure of lands and properties held by the *'ulama* was one of the first such initiatives. When these initiatives were met with resistance, al-Qadhafi encouraged mobs to occupy them in the name of the *Jamahiriyyah*. Dissident Imams were also imprisoned.

When it came to new Islamic movements, the al-Qadhafi regime seemed to view the Muslim Brotherhood as a particularly dangerous

source of opposition. While the Sanusi monarchy had sheltered members of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood fleeing Nasser's repression, the Brotherhood also made important inroads into Libyan society as Egyptian migrant laborers poured into the country to meet the needs of the booming economy in the 1960s and 1970s. Controlling the ideational territory of religion was not an easy task for the al-Qadhafi regime, particularly as standards of living increased and more Libyans traveled abroad for employment and education. But as repression escalated in al-Qadhafi's Libya, the most dominant voices of organized Libyan Islamism were largely coming from exile. A noted figure to come out of the Libyan Brotherhood and associated dissident student movements was Muhammad Al-Magariaf, who helped found the National Front for the Salvation of Libya (NFSL) in 1981 with the help of other dissidents, the CIA, and the Chadian dictator Hissène Habré. Though the NFSL wanted to present itself as a nonpartisan "big tent" front organization of al-Qadhafi opponents, its membership was heavily influenced by the Libyan Brotherhood.

Inside Libya, the Brotherhood was able to develop clandestine structures and leadership uniting Cyrenaican and Tripolitanian members despite the oppressive environment of the *Jamahiriyyah*. Popular sympathy for the Brotherhood, if not Islamist politics in general, grew as al-Qadhafi's massive sociopolitical experiment began to falter due to the international pressure of isolation and the collapse of oil prices in 1985. Yet so total was the regime's control over the polity through intense surveillance and violent coercion that the Libyan Brotherhood could not even engage in the kinds of social welfare and charity programs that had generated mass support for Islamists in places like Egypt, Algeria, and the Gaza Strip.¹⁸

A more militant strain of Islamic resistance began to take shape in the 1990s, as Libyan veterans of the 1980s *jihad* against the Soviet Union, many of them affiliated with the early al-Qa'ida network, returned to fight the al-Qadhafi regime in the 1990s. Unlike similar organizations in Algeria waging widespread rural and urban guerrilla warfare by 1993, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) had to be much more circumspect about its activities just to establish cells

inside Libya. Only in 1995 did the LIFG make itself known through its efforts to organize an insurgency that never amounted to anything more than several brief skirmishes with the security forces and a botched attempt on al-Qadhafi's life. Even under UN sanctions and facing extreme international isolation, the al-Qadhafi regime proved quite capable and resilient in the face of this armed challenge, which was effectively stamped out by 1998. Following the events of 9/11, the al-Qadhafi regime then willingly offered its intelligence services to Washington and London, which included torturing suspected al-Qa'ida members for information.

As Libya slowly began to emerge from international isolation in the early 2000s, the regime set about trying to organize a reconciliation effort with its radical and moderate Islamist opponents, initiatives led by Saif Al-Islam. However, when the 2011 revolution erupted, Islamists were often split between those who had reconciled with the regime and those that remained in opposition, especially abroad. Large swaths of Libyan society were moreover skeptical about the new Islamist movements and parties that began to populate the postrevolutionary landscape, as some of these Islamists had seemed too willing to reconcile with the regime only years beforehand. The Libyan Islamist movement itself was split between moderate and radical elements, with former members of LIFG, including Abdelhakim Belhadj and conservative clerics like Ali Sellabi, coalesced under the banner of the *Hizb Al-Watan* (Homeland or National Party) for the July 2012 elections, as a Turkish- or Moroccan-style moderate Islamist party. Meanwhile, the more implacable Libyan elements of the transnational Islamist movement found outlets for their convictions in the battlefields of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, and the Sahara-Sahel region. The 2011 uprising and the 2014 civil war also provided openings for Libyan *jihadis* to return to their homeland under the banner of al-Qa'ida and, later, the Islamic State (see Domestic Conflict and Rebel Governance section).

Domestic Conflict and Rebel Governance

When Libyan activists decided to join the regional wave of protests that had already toppled the regimes in Tunis and Cairo in the early weeks of 2011, the date of February 17 was chosen to mark the fifth anniversary of protests in Benghazi that had been brutally crushed in 2006. The tricolor Libyan flag of the Sanusi monarchy, not seen since 1969, rapidly became the symbol of this revolt, as Cyrenaica quickly rid itself of the most nefarious structures and agents of the late *Jamhiriyyah*. Communities in the West, however, had a more difficult time shaking off the old state, while protesters in Tripoli were relentlessly persecuted through killings and detention. The rebellion was soon represented by the National Transitional Council (NTC), formed by a number of prominent dissidents in Libya and the diaspora, as well as ex-regime figures like its chair, Mustafa Abul Jalil, and its top military commander, Abdul Fatah Younis. In addition to courting international support from governments in the North Atlantic and the Middle East, the NTC drafted an interim constitution that plotted a course to an open parliamentary system. In the months that followed, proregime and revolutionary forces waged pitched battles in the eastern oil crescent, around the city of Misrata, and in the Nafusa mountains. With air support from NATO and the Arab League, the tide began to turn during the long summer of 2011, with the rebels taking control of Tripoli by September.

Though the summary execution of al-Qadhafi outside of Sirte in October should have formally brought the armed uprising to its end, the issue that would haunt the Libyan polity in the years to come was the revolutionary militias or *thumar*: countless heavily armed groups who refused to lay down their weapons in the aftermath of the 2011 revolution. Moreover, these militias, in an effort to bolster their power, went about seizing key state assets from hydrocarbon infrastructures to luxury hotels in order to use them as bargaining chips. The NTC

not only proved incapable of taming the militias, but the Council soon found itself unable to govern because of growing tensions within the postrevolutionary party. Though often depicted as a growing split between Islamists and secularists, the more salient division was between those seeking to create a political order that could accommodate former members of the ousted regime and those seeking a total revolution that would extirpate all vestiges of al-Qadhafi's rule. Though it was certainly the case that the former regime had committed massive abuses of human rights over the course of four decades, as well as war crimes and crimes against humanity during the 2011 revolt (as had many rebel militias), it was also the case that the rebellion had been made possible by widespread political and military defections from the old regime. There were, however, prominent voices in the new Libya suggesting that the revolution called for a clean-slate approach. Backing such demands were the prominent Islamist parties and organizations, notably the Muslim Brotherhood. In the absence of security and effective central governance from 2011 onward, thousands of Libyans with ties to the old regime fled to Egypt and Tunisia out of fear. Meanwhile, militias detained thousands of suspected collaborators in their privately run prisons all across the country. Loyalist strongholds like Bani Walid were subjected to siege-like conditions while the city of Sirte was effectively placed under occupation by revolutionary militias.

Photo 17.1 Revolutionary graffiti in Tripoli mocking deposed leader Muammar al-Qadhafi in which he says “Forward!” while mounted backward on a donkey.



Courtesy of Jacob Mundy

At the same time, some of these militias began to enjoy support from foreign sponsors. Unified by the collective suffering of the brutal siege it suffered in 2011, the city of Misrata, for example, parlayed a number of advantages—a city with deep historical ties to Turkish trade and industry, as well as a large and functional shipping port—into a dominant position within the postrevolutionary situation. The unified way in which Misratan militias and political leaders navigated the growing tensions of the transitional years of 2012 and 2013, notably in their alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood (and hence Turkey and Qatar), stood in sharp contrast with the lack of unity in major cities like Tripoli and Benghazi, where highly localized neighborhood militias often clashed with rival groups or rival towns. Libya's moderate Islamists, including members of the insurgency in the 1990s, found some support among the population but were often viewed suspiciously because of their sponsorship by states like Turkey and Qatar. Indeed, Libya's first elections in July 2012, which replaced the NTC with an elected (yet still interim) legislature, the General National Congress (GNC), saw overtly Islamist political parties perform poorly despite early and glitzy advertising campaigns.

With a strong turnout of two-thirds of the registered electorate, the most dominant party in the 2012 elections was the centrist National Forces Alliance led by Mahmoud Jibril El Warfally, a Western-trained technocrat who had only served in the al-Qadhafi regime during its final years. Jibril's party, with nearly half of the popular vote, won 39 seats out of the 80 reserved for parties. Though a moderate Islamist grouping associated with the Muslim Brotherhood, the Justice and Construction Party, came in second place, it only secured some 10 percent of the vote, resulting in 17 seats. All other parties failed to secure more than 3 seats each. The GNC, however, was dominated by the 120 seats held by individuals, which tended to represent provincial interests rather than coherent party agendas. As former al-Qadhafi officials were not allowed to hold leadership positions, a

human rights lawyer who had lived in exile for many years, Ali Zeidan, served as the country's first prime minister.

There were a number of major national issues facing the GNC during its limited tenure: security sector reform (integrating the militias into formal military and police structures), rebuilding neglected or destroyed infrastructure and resettling displaced communities, recovering Libya's significant financial assets held abroad, transitional justice (prosecuting former regime elites, processing the thousands of loyalist prisoners, and reconciling pro- and anti-al-Qadhafi communities), and the questions of citizenship and native Libyan status. Above all, the GNC was tasked with writing Libya's constitution, though it often seemed that vindictively "purifying" the government of any former regime collaborators was the priority for many of those in power and the militias backing them. The result was often that inexperienced exiles (e.g., Zeidan or intelligence head Salem El-Hassi) were the only candidates with backgrounds clean enough to be accepted for key government posts, while those tainted by the al-Qadhafi regime had to maintain lower profiles or live in exile. That Libya remained an essentially lawless country with weak central institutions and powerful local actors was vividly demonstrated when a US diplomatic compound was raided on September 11, 2012, killing several people, including the US Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens.

As the power of the militias grew, the ability of Libya's elected government to operate interpedently of them shrank. Moreover, the NTC and GNC had adopted laws that not only immunized all militias from prosecution for crimes committed in 2011, other indicatives—compensation and salaries for militia members who joined "state" forces—effectively incentivized more young men to join the armed groups. Libya's streets were soon controlled by countless postrevolutionary forces brandishing light arms and heavy weapons mounted on trucks coming from al-Qadhafi's pilfered armories or clandestine shipments from abroad. Though the GNC had almost no power to compel the militias to cooperate with the transition, the militias regularly exercised their power as spoilers to undermine the

transition through terrorism or economic sabotage. For example, a militia led by Cyrenaican federalists, having seized control of Libya's most important oil export facilities in the East of the country, regularly deprived the central government of vital revenues in order to have their demands met. Confronting these issues head on in the city of Benghazi, Khalifa Haftar, a former officer in al-Qadhafi's army before seeking exile in the late 1980s, launched a campaign in early 2014 to rid the city of militias, particularly the more violent Islamists. Haftar's so-called Libyan National Army and its Operation Dignity increased tensions in the country between revolutionary Islamists and moderate accommodationists, tensions that revealed themselves in the dismissal of Prime Minister Zeidan, who soon fled the country, fearing for his life.

In an effort to reconstitute a legitimate central authority, elections were held in June 2014 for a new House of Representatives. The vote, however, was widely boycotted and saw a dismal turnout of less than 20 percent. Contesting the result, various militias that had been occupying Tripoli went to war with each other, resulting in the newly elected House decamping to the far eastern city of Tobruk, where it fell under the protection of Haftar's Libya National Army. In the ensuing chaos, most foreign embassies closed, and the UN mission moved to Tunisia. What was left of the GNC attempted to press ahead with backing from the city of Misrata and allied Islamist militias, though the international community recognized the House as Libya's legitimate government. To the extent that the House and the GNC could be said to represent distinct constituencies, these two bodies came to be defined largely in relation to the question of political accommodation with some of the agents and institutions of the former regime. Whereas the House came to represent more "accommodationist" political tendencies (as did Haftar's Operation Dignity), the GNC, with its core of Muslim Brotherhood figures, tended to represent the country's more "revolutionary" Islamist political factions, those most opposed to political reconciliation or accommodation with the former regime. Though there were very few Libyan voices calling for the complete restoration of the al-Qadhafi system, the House and Operation Dignity more or less represented

those Libyans who felt that, one, former regime officials were being unfairly marginalized in the postrevolutionary order and, two, the country could no longer afford to turn a blind eye to the violent excesses of the radical Islamist militias. It could be argued that the passage of the Political Isolation Law by the GNC in 2013, which barred former regime officials from holding office, had set the country on a course toward civil war between prorevolution and proaccommodation camps.

Taking advantage of the new civil war that erupted in 2014, various *jihadi* militias in Libya, claiming affiliation with the Islamic State movement that had developed out of the civil wars in Iraq and Syria, eventually took over the city of Sirte in May 2015. Meanwhile, an explosion of human trafficking in Libya saw hundreds of African and Asian migrants leave Libya's shores in an attempt to reach Europe. Unwilling to let the situation deteriorate any further, the United Nations and the North Atlantic powers pressed for a peace agreement that would reconcile Libya's two governments. A new arrangement emerged in late 2015, when the Government of National Accord combined the House and the GNC into a new body headed by a Presidential Council. This proved hardly more effective, although its international legitimacy allowed Libya's new head of state, Fayeaz Serraj, to authorize foreign interventions against the Islamic State and other terrorist groups. Working with the US Marine Corps, Misratan militias finally drove the Islamic State from Sirte by late 2016. By then, Haftar's forces had taken Libya's key eastern oil facilities, extending the Libyan National Army's control over most of Cyrenaica and into Fezzan. With "liberation" of Benghazi in 2017, the stage seemed set for a final confrontation between Libya's warring sides, most likely in the streets of Tripoli. The United Nations, however, instead pressed for a constitutional referendum, as well as elections for a new government and head of state by the end of 2018. Yet it remains unlikely that those elections will take place in the near future. In March 2019, at the time of this writing, Libya was holding a series of municipal elections, the first in five years. Elections for national-level seats were yet to be scheduled.

Regional and International Relations

The majority of Libya's modern history over the last several centuries has been defined by its existence as a possession, colony, or protectorate of greater powers. Prior to the exploitation of oil in the mid-twentieth century, Libya likewise lived in the economic shadow of its regional neighbors, Cairo and Tunis. As one European traveler wrote in 1897, the land along the Mediterranean that would become Libya represented nothing more than "a buffer state of sand" nestled between Tunisia and Egypt (i.e., France and Britain).¹⁹ For the very same reasons that the Ottomans continued to prize Libya until the end of their empire (i.e., that Libya proved the Ottomans still had an empire), the Italians likewise coveted Libya (i.e., as a means to enhance Rome's imperial credentials and holdings in Africa). Inside Libya, native political forces were often finding common cause with the growth of Arab nationalism and modern Islamic political thought across MENA in the late 1800s and early 1900s. These networks would see Arab and Muslim volunteers come to Libya—from as far as Chad and India—in the name of fighting European colonialism and defending Islam when the Italians arrived.²⁰ Fezzan, as with most of the Libyan Sahara, continued to enjoy a kind of de facto independence from the intrigue of the North, though France's much more aggressive imperialism in the Sahel region began to affect populations in Libya's vast hinterland as well.

When it came to power in 1951, the Sanusi monarchy was highly indebted to its British and American patrons for liberating the country in World War II and helping establish independence under its rule. Yet the overbearing presence of Britain and the United States in Libya challenged the Sanusi monarchy when it came to some of the region's most pressing international conflicts: the Arab-Israeli wars; the occupation of the Suez by France, Israel, and England; the Algerian insurgency; and the Palestine question. Though King Idris backed the Arab armies in the 1967 war and provided logistical support, his conservative attitude toward pan-Arabism was one of

the major motivations driving the organizers of the 1969 coup that removed the Sanusis from power.

Ironically, it was al-Qadhafi's unmoderated enthusiasm for pan-Arabism, the Palestinian cause, and Third Worldism that not only helped to propel him to power, but it would also eventually alienate many of his early Arab and African allies. This revolutionary zeal likewise set his regime on the path of international pariah states. When not being accused of engaging in international terror directly, al-Qadhafi was more often than not being accused of supporting it through financing, arms, training, and bases.

Though the al-Qadhafi regime lavished billions of dollars of aid on the poorer nations of sub-Saharan Africa, many governments across the continent felt ambivalent. Al-Qadhafi's fingerprints were to be found on a number of African conflicts, including Uganda, Western Sahara, Congo, South Africa, Tuareg revolts, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. But it was the war in Chad that became a major preoccupation for the regime in the late 1970s and 1980s. Libya's involvement in Chad's civil war (and its later occupation of the North) was initially rooted in a territorial dispute over the Aouzou Strip, mistrust of French intentions in the region, and Libyan support for a rebel group, the National Liberation Front of Chad. This support dated back to the years of King Idris and was facilitated by the fact that the Saharan populations of the region, mainly Tuaregs and Tebu, had been divided by artificial colonial boundaries. To many, however, it became clear that al-Qadhafi's occupation of Aouzou in the 1970s was becoming a platform for larger territorial ambitions as joint Chadian and Libyan forces descended farther south. International opponents of al-Qadhafi like Saudi Arabia and the United States helped unite and support the anti-al-Qadhafi forces in Chad so as to roll back the Libyan intervention.

Libya's defeat in Chad in the mid-1980s came at a time of growing international isolation, even in the community of North African states. In the late 1980s, Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya formed the Arab Maghrib Union (UMA) to enhance regional

economic and political cooperation. While several summits were held to advance the union, it faltered for several reasons, though mainly because of the ongoing Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara, the Islamist insurgency in 1990s Algeria (with fears of a spillover into Morocco), and finally the unpredictable foreign policies of the al-Qadhafi regime. Though Moroccan-Algerian antagonisms over Western Sahara were frequently cited as the main reason for the UMA's failure, it was often suspected that this became a convenient excuse when the other states wanted to prevent al-Qadhafi from chairing the organization.

On the global stage, it was Libya's direct confrontations with the North Atlantic powers that drew the most attention, culminating in the 1986 US raid on Libya (a failed attempt at regime change) and the Libyan bombing of a US-bound flight over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988, that killed hundreds. Very early in its existence, al-Qadhafi's regime had taken issue with Western policies and was eager to see the closing of foreign bases on Libyan soil. A more important investment in Libya, from the perspective of London and Washington, was the oil infrastructure British and US firms had helped build and maintain. Nationalization of the hydrocarbon industry in Libya was a particular affront to Anglo-American interests because it established a precedent of "weaponized oil" that paved the way for the 1973 Arab oil embargo. Libya then used the massive windfall of profits during the 1970 oil boom to purchase large quantities of arms, much of it from the Soviet Union as al-Qadhafi's relations with the West faltered.

The bombing of Pan Am 103 and the French UTA flight 772 over Niger in 1989 allowed Washington to confront the Libyan regime's international terrorism activities through UN sanctions. Though nowhere near as devastating as the sanctions placed on Iraq in the 1990s, Libya's international isolation was painful enough to the regime that it soon began seeking ways to appease the West. The two key Lockerbie suspects, Abdelbaset Megrahi and Lamine Fhima, both believed to be Libyan secret agents, were finally handed over to international authorities in 1999. Negotiating the protocols for the

Megrahi-Fhima trial had been arduous, resulting in a conviction (Megrahi) and an acquittal (Fhima), an outcome that seemed to satisfy no one given the mysteries that continued to haunt the bombing and the trial.²¹ In the years that followed, al-Qadhafi nonetheless began to enjoy a kind of international renaissance in the 2000s; publicly condemning terrorism in the wake of 9/11 and dismantling Libya's nuclear and chemical arms programs recast al-Qadhafi as a progressive reformer in the eyes of British and American politicians.

Having been marginalized in MENA, the al-Qadhafi regime used its oil wealth to have more of a presence in the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the African Union (AU). Libya not only hosted an important meeting in Sirte that saw the transition of the OAU to the AU in 1999, but as chair of the AU in 2009, al-Qadhafi again championed the cause of bringing the states of Africa into a closer confederation like the European Union, if not a United States of Africa. Though such was viewed as a dream from a bygone era, parts of the continent remained the last bastion of support for al-Qadhafi in his final years. During the 2011 crisis, al-Qadhafi's last friends in Africa were some of the few voices calling for a negotiated settlement to the spiraling violence.

In the years before the Arab Spring, foreign investment, particularly in the oil sector, began to flood into Libya as the new face of the regime, Saif Al-Islam, seemed to balance his father's eccentricities with promises of economic and political reform. Further indications of Libya's rehabilitation came in 2008, when it joined the UN Security Council and, in the following year, became the president of the UN General Assembly. It thus came as a surprise to many that Saif Al-Islam did not respond pragmatically to the eruption of protests in February 2011 but instead used the same uncompromising and intimidating rhetoric his father was spouting. If there had been any hope that the regime could reform itself under Saif Al-Islam, it became utterly clear in the context of the early Arab Spring that those hopes had been disastrously misplaced.

Libya's 2011 revolution was eventually successful because of the significant military intervention NATO and the Arab League mounted to support the rebellion. At the same time, it could be argued that the failure of Libya's transition in 2012 and 2013, along with its collapse into civil war in 2014, could be attributed to the power vacuum that was created when the international community (i.e., the UN Security Council) refused to play a more robust peacekeeping role in post-Qadhafi Libya. While this is an important consideration, foreign powers often helped to exacerbate the growing tensions in the lead-up to the crisis in 2014 by supporting one faction or another in their struggles to dominate Libyan politics. For example, Turkey and Qatar have been widely accused of supporting political and military factions allied to the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood, whereas the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia have been accused of supporting the factions opposing them, with Russia as another potential ally in this struggle waiting in the wings. Meanwhile, the North Atlantic powers have been accused of prioritizing counterterrorism over political stability by collaborating with all sides in the ongoing civil war in Libya so as to contain the threats of transnational jihadism, the Islamic State, and illegal migration that have proliferated in Libya since 2014. The violent instability and political disarray Libya has experienced since 2014 has thus put the country at the mercy of others' agendas while the country's various governments attempt to define conflicting foreign policies. The one apparent area of consensus among the various factions in Libya today is the necessity of oil exports to keep the country from descending into a far-worse state of affairs.

Conclusion

For several decades, the lack of democracy and other basic freedoms in Libya has often been theorized in relation to the country's vast oil wealth. Those revenues allowed two regimes to rule without popular consultation. They simply created a robust welfare state to appease social and economic demands. Such rentier states are not only said to be corrosive to democracy, but they are also allegedly antithetical to the growth of civil society and a free press. What was interesting about the 2011 uprising in Libya, however, was the extent to which it revealed an already-existing democratic civil society hiding beneath the surface of the decayed *Jamahiriyyah*. Though the most visible forms of organization witnessed during the 2011 conflict were the armies of the regime and the militias of the rebellion, throughout the country local communities quickly organized councils, associations, and other kinds of networks for survival and support. In many locations, these networks had existed to provide goods and services otherwise unobtainable through the formal political and economic channels of the *Jamahiriyyah*. What this efflorescence of democratic organization and civil society action demonstrated was the extent to which it had long existed in an informal capacity that was invisible to the theories of the rentier state.

The predicament that Libya faces today—*how to organize a legitimate central government, one that has a monopoly over the use of force*—is tragic in the way it was produced by the failures of the *Jamahiriyyah*. At the same time, Libya's conflict today embodies the *Jamahiriyyah's* political ideals. The *Jamahiriyyah* oddly succeeded in devolving state power to small communities by failing to deliver the most basic functions of a state, thus forcing localities to organize on their own. With the outbreak of civil violence in 2011, these modes of survival transformed into armed resistance organizations, which were supported by an array of other networks. Today, these communities assert a right of veto over efforts to construct a central

authority. This veto power, exercised through the maintenance of local monopolies of violence, mimics the core ideal of the *Jamahiriyah*, the ideal of the sovereign masses. This was the ideal that al-Qadhafi was seemingly willing to die for but was never willing to turn into reality. In Libya today, the irony of the fierce competition over the future of the state is that all the major actors view themselves as the guardians of the 2011 revolution. In so doing, they have helped make the state of the masses al-Qadhafi never could.

Suggested Readings

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18 The Lower Gulf States

Michael Herb

The four countries of the lower Gulf share much in common. They are all monarchies in a world where ruling monarchies are rare. They are rich in oil. Their citizen populations are largely Arab in origin. Alongside these similarities, we also find some important differences. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has partly diversified its economy, making itself into a center for trade and tourism. Along with this has come a spectacular demographic imbalance: Emiratis (that is, citizens of the UAE) are only 11.5 percent of the total population of the country. Qatar is one of the world's richest countries and is set to be the improbable host of the 2022 World Cup: Its efforts at diversification have clearly been influenced by the UAE, and it has a similar demographic imbalance (the largest national groups in Qatar are Indians, then Nepalis, then Qataris). Oman is somewhat more conventional than the others: it is not quite so rich in oil, and citizens are a majority of the population. It has regular elections, but to a representative assembly with few powers. Finally, Bahrain has the most serious internal political problems of the four, suffering from chronic strife between the Sunni regime and the Shi'i citizen majority. In this chapter, I begin by discussing the factors that the four lower Gulf states share in common. I then examine each country individually, in order of total population size.

Common Themes

History of State Formation

Before oil, the agricultural economy of the lower Gulf consisted mostly of date plantations, fishing, and livestock husbandry. The land was not particularly fertile because the lower Gulf states are among the world's driest countries. The economy also depended on trade and pearling. These activities did not support a large population or complex state structures, and most local states were little more than towns along the shores of the Gulf, some of which occasionally grew into somewhat larger states built on trading routes.¹

The British brought the lower Gulf states under loose British control from the early nineteenth century, starting with the principalities of what is now the UAE.² The Gulf rulers, for the most part, did not oppose British influence, which made their rule more secure. The British supported the local rulers as long as they maintained the peace and avoided dealings with foreign powers. The British imposed their hegemony in the Gulf by means of a small group of warships and did not seek to rule the hinterlands. Britain based its warships at a naval base in Bushire (Bushehr, now part of Iran) and from 1935 in Bahrain. The base now houses the Fifth Fleet of the US Navy.

The lower Gulf states achieved their independence relatively late, in 1971, and reluctantly. The ruler of Abu Dhabi famously volunteered to pay the costs of a continued British presence if the British would agree to stay on.³ His offer was not accepted.

At independence, the British initially wanted all of the lower Gulf states except Oman to form a single independent state (along the lines of what happened in India and Malaysia at independence). Qatar and Bahrain demurred, preferring independence over union with their neighbors. Abu Dhabi and Dubai went under one flag, bringing with them the five poorer emirates. Thus, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE, and Oman each became an independent sovereign state, complete with a seat in the United Nations and all of the trappings of sovereignty. This owes much to oil, which allowed the rulers to convince the world their realms could be independent sovereign states.

Map 18.1 Lower Gulf States



Institutions and Governance

Ruling Families

Except in Oman, the four Gulf states are family regimes, though in recent years some Gulf rulers have increasingly broken away from the tradition of family rule. The chief characteristic of family rule—or dynastic monarchy—is that the leading posts in the state are held by members of the ruling family.⁴ These almost always include the post of prime minister (where it exists) and the heads of the ministries of defense and interior. Usually, though not always, the minister of foreign affairs is also a member of the ruling family, and other members of the ruling family are found in various roles in the states, as head of the national guard, ambassador, head of the central bank, minister of oil, and so forth. The monopoly of the ministries of defense and interior (responsible, respectively, for the military and the police) is not accidental: These are the core coercive arms of the state, crucial to maintaining the family's control over political power (see [Table 18.1](#)). These family regimes have proven to be very resilient; while monarchies have fallen elsewhere in the Middle East (in Iran, Libya, Egypt, Yemen, and Iraq), all of the Gulf family monarchies have remained in power through the salad days of Arab nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s, the Islamist challenge in the following decades, and since 2011, the Arab Spring.

In recent years, the family nature of these regimes has begun to erode, with individual rulers rising above their families and threatening the basic character of family rule. This is most obvious in Saudi Arabia where the current crown prince has pushed many of his relatives from power and imprisoned others. The Saudi example is likely to be influential in the rest of the Gulf, providing a road map for monarchs to use their constitutional powers—which have few formal limits—to circumscribe the role of their families.

Representative Assemblies

The Gulf-ruling families have not completely ignored demands for more modern forms of political representation. Two of the four states—Bahrain

and Oman—hold regular elections to a national-level representative assembly, while Qatar has an appointive body (along with an elected municipal council), and the UAE has a representative assembly whose members are elected by citizens selected by the rulers. In all four countries, the representative assembly has limited powers, and these assemblies cannot challenge the monopoly of political authority by the ruling families. Progress toward greater democracy in these countries requires more than just elections. These countries need to take four steps to achieve full democracy:

- First, the countries that do not hold elections need to do so.
- Second, the elections need to be free and fair.
- Third, elected parliaments need to have some actual authority over the executive branch; full democracy requires that elected deputies in the parliament appoint the prime minister and, through the prime minister, the rest of the ministers in the cabinet.
- Finally, authority must be lodged in the cabinet, not the ruler's palace.

None of the monarchies of the lower Gulf have moved very far along this path, and there is little prospect that most will do so any time soon, or perhaps ever. But it is useful to keep this yardstick in mind when measuring the actual impact of various gestures that the Gulf rulers have occasionally made toward including their citizens more in policymaking.

Political Economy

The economies of the lower Gulf states depend on the export of oil and natural gas, though in some, economic diversification away from oil has occurred, especially in the UAE and Bahrain. Two of the lower Gulf states—Qatar and the UAE—have among the very highest per capita levels of oil income. Oman and Bahrain have less hydrocarbon wealth per capita, though their economies still mostly depend on oil.

The first of the lower Gulf countries to discover oil was Bahrain, which started exports in 1934; Qatar followed in 1949, then the UAE in 1962, and Oman in 1967. The ruling families spent generously building modern state institutions. The states built schools, from the primary level to university level, and hired teachers from other Arab countries to staff the schools (in more recent years, citizens have replaced many expatriates as teachers). The states set up modern health care systems and built the physical infrastructure of first-world countries, including electricity, roads, airports, desalination plants for water, and the like. The regimes also spent a good deal of money on the police and the military and have extended the state's monopoly of coercion throughout their territories.

Labor Markets

From the very beginning of the oil age, Gulf states began hiring citizens into jobs in the state.⁵ The regimes employed citizens, in part at least, as a way of distributing the oil wealth. Foreign workers also came to the Gulf to take up jobs, especially in the private sector. Over time, this led to the emergence of two separate labor markets, one for citizens and the other for foreigners. We see this most clearly today in the two richer lower Gulf states. Qatar and the UAE receive enough oil wealth to provide a job, at a good wage, to virtually all citizen graduates. The wage rates for citizens in these public-sector jobs are higher than the equivalent salaries for noncitizens—a political logic drives hiring and wage decisions, not a market logic. The working hours at these jobs are not onerous, nor are the working conditions. As a result, citizens strongly prefer to work in the public sector.

Table 18.1 Ruling Families and the State in the Lower Gulf Monarchies⁶

Table 18.1 Ruling Families and the State in the Lower Gulf Monarchies⁶

	Bahrain	Oman	Qatar	UAE
Ruling family	Al Khalifa	Al Said	Al Thani	Abu Dhabi: Al Nahyan Dubai: Al Maktoum Sharjah & Ras Al Khaimah: Al Qasimi Ajman: Al-Nuaimi Umm Al Quwain: Al Mu'alla Fujairah: Al Sharqi
Ruler	Hamad bin Isa	Qaboos bin Said	Tamim bin Hamad	Khalifa bin Zayed (Effective ruler: Muhammad bin Zayed, the crown prince)

	Bahrain	Oman	Qatar	UAE
Cabinet posts held by the ruler		Prime minister Defense Finance Foreign affairs	Defense	

	Bahrain	Oman	Qatar	UAE
Major cabinet posts held by other members of the ruling family	Prime minister Finance Foreign affairs Interior Justice & Islamic affairs	Heritage & culture	Prime minister Economy & trade Foreign affairs Interior	Prime minister (Al Maktoum) Culture, youth, and community development (Al Nahyan) Defense (Al Maktoum) Development (Al Qasimi) Finance (Al Maktoum) Foreign affairs (Al Nahyan) Higher education (Al Nahyan) Interior (Al Nahyan) Public works (Al-Nuaimi)

Source: CIA, "Chiefs of State and Cabinet Members of Foreign Governments," <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/world-leaders-1/index.html>.

A market logic prevails, however, in the private sector. Foreigners typically come from much less wealthy countries and are willing to work

for much lower wages in more difficult conditions and for longer hours than are citizens. Sometimes states force private businesses to hire citizens, and occasionally, citizens have skills that expatriates lack. But as a rule, businesses in Qatar and the UAE hire foreign labor. [Figure 18.1](#) shows the relative number of employees in each sector, by citizenship, in Qatar and Bahrain.

Bahrain and Oman are not as rich and cannot offer all graduates a public-sector job. This, however, does not much change the private-sector preference for foreign labor, especially for less-skilled positions. The lack of public-sector jobs has led citizens to push foreigners out of the public sector (see [Figure 18.2](#)). The other result is unemployment, especially among less-skilled citizen labor.

Key Facts on Lower Gulf States					
	Bahrain	Oman	Qatar	UAE	
AREA	293 square miles (760 square kilometers)	119,499 square miles (309,500 square kilometers)	4,473 square miles (11,586 square kilometers)	32,278 square miles (83,600 square kilometers)	
CAPITAL	Manama	Muscat	Doha	Abu Dhabi	
POPULATION	1,501,116; includes 823,610 nonnationals (2016)	4,638,908; includes 2,092,459 nonnationals (2017)	2,617,634; includes 2,304,634 nonnationals (2016)	9,269,612; includes 8,203,000 nonnationals (2016)	

	Bahrain	Oman	Qatar	UAE	
RELIGIOUS GROUPS	Shi'a make up around 58 percent of the citizen population. The rest are almost all Sunni.	Around half of the citizen population are Ibadi; 3 percent to 4 percent are Shi'a, and the balance are Sunnis.	Citizens are mostly Sunni, with a Shi'i minority.	Citizens are mostly Sunni with a Shi'i minority, especially in Dubai.	
ETHNIC GROUPS	Sunni Bahrainis, and most Shi'i Bahrainis, are Arab. A minority of the Shi'i population is of Persian origin.	The Omani interior is very largely Arab. Citizens on the coast speak Arabic and come from a variety of backgrounds, including Arab, Baluch, and others, reflecting the orientation of the coast to the sea.	Qatari citizens are Arabs; some members of the Shi'i minority are Persian in origin.	UAE citizens are Arabs; some members of the Shi'i minority are Persian in origin.	
OFFICIAL LANGUAGE	Arabic; English is widely spoken, along with Farsi, Urdu, Hindi, and other languages.	Arabic; English, Baluchi, Urdu, and other South Asian and other languages	Arabic; English is widely spoken, along with Farsi, Urdu, Nepali, Hindi, and other languages.	Arabic; English is widely spoken, along with Farsi, Urdu, Hindi, and many other languages.	

	Bahrain	Oman	Qatar	UAE	
TYPE OF GOVERNMENT	Monarchy	Monarchy	Monarchy	Federation of seven monarchies	
DATE OF INDEPENDENCE	August 15, 1971 (from the United Kingdom)	1650 (expulsion of the Portuguese); effectively independent from the United Kingdom in 1971	September 3, 1971 (from the United Kingdom)	December 2, 1971 (from the United Kingdom)	
GDP (PPP)	\$70.94 billion; \$47,527 per capita (2017)	\$193.22 billion; \$41,675 per capita (2017)	\$333.82 billion; \$128,378 per capita (2017)	\$694.47 billion; \$73,879 per capita (2017)	
GDP (NOMINAL)	\$35.307 billion; \$23,655 per capita (2017)	\$72.643 billion; \$15,668 per capita (2017)	\$167.605 billion; \$63,506 per capita (2017)	\$382.575 billion; \$40,699 per capita (2017)	
PERCENTAGE OF GDP BY SECTOR	Agriculture, 0.3; industry, 38.2; service, 61.5	Agriculture, 1.7; industry, 45.2; service, 53	Agriculture, 0.2; industry, 50.3; service, 49.5	Agriculture, 0.9; industry, 49.8; service, 49.2	
TOTAL RENTS (PERCENTAGE OF GDP) FROM NATURAL RESOURCES	4.4	26.8	21.1	15.3	

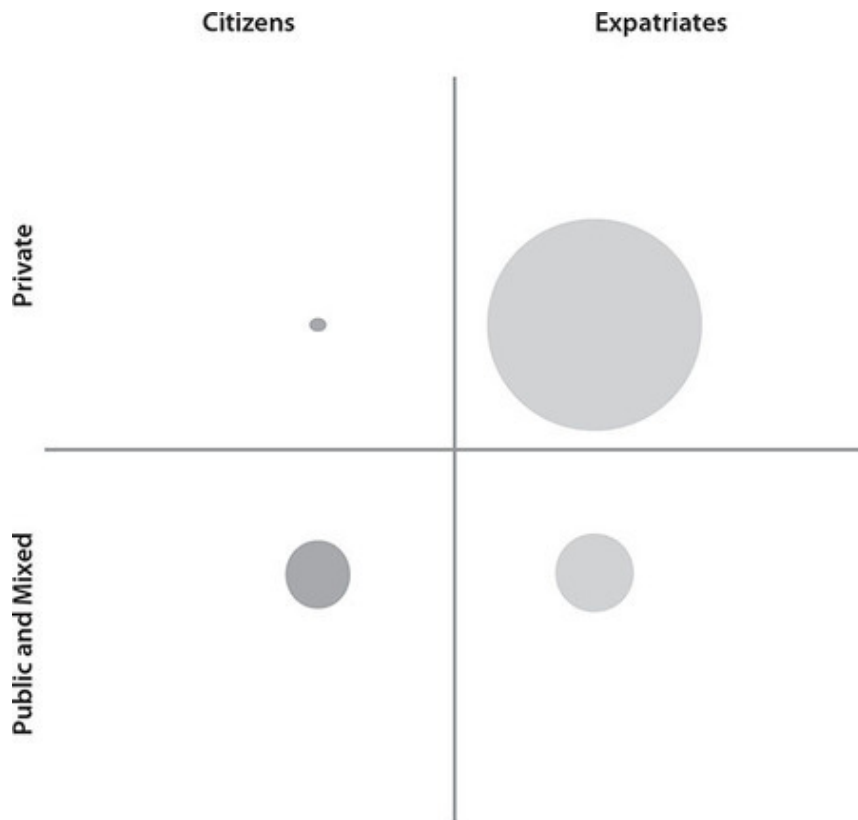
	Bahrain	Oman	Qatar	UAE	
FERTILITY RATE	1.73 children born per woman	2.80 children born per woman	1.89 children born per woman	1.73 children born per woman	

Sources: Central Intelligence Agency, *CIA World Factbook*, 2018; International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook Database, April 2018, Gulf Labour Markets and Migration, “Total Population and Percentage and of Nationals and Non-nationals in GCC Countries (latest national statistics, 2010–2014),” <http://gulfmigration.eu/gcc-total-population-and-percentage-of-nationals-and-non-nationals-in-gcc-countries-latest-national-statistics-2010-2014/>; Justin Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain and the Arab Gulf: Rethinking the Rentier State* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 9; and the World Bank database, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.TOTL.RT.ZS>; Marc Valeri, *Oman: Politics and Society in the Qaboos State* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Sultanate of Oman, National Centre for Statistics & Information, Data Portal, <https://data.gov.om/>; Priya DSouza Communications, Population of Qatar by nationality—2017 report, <http://priyadsouza.com/population-of-qatar-by-nationality-in-2017/>.

The Dubai Model

In recent years, Dubai has led the way in the Gulf toward diversifying its economy, with a focus on tourism, logistics, trade, and air travel. This diversification, however, is built on inexpensive foreign labor. This compounds the labor market distortions that emerged in the early days of oil and makes it extremely costly for the UAE to wean itself from foreign labor. Indeed, Dubai’s success raises the possibility that, in the long run, citizens could become a caste of state employees living off the taxes generated by noncitizens.

Figure 18.1 Qatari Workforce by Citizenship and Sector, 2007



Source: Michael Herb, *The Wages of Oil: Parliaments and Economic Development in Kuwait and the UAE* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 32.

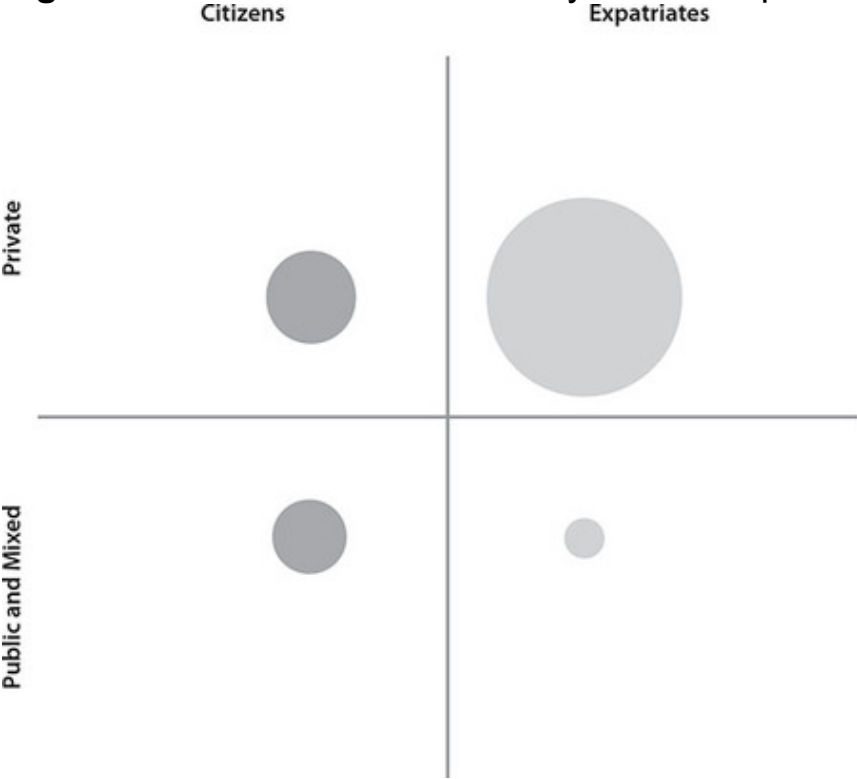
Note: Circle size is proportional to the number of workers.

The Dubai model, as it has come to be known, has had a wide influence on the rest of the Gulf.⁷ Qatar has built a national airline, seeks out tourists, and has a demographic imbalance that is almost as severe as that in the UAE. Dubai's economy relies on a vast pool of inexpensive labor, something that is possible because citizens can seek refuge in employment in the state. Qatar can be similarly generous with state jobs for citizens. Oman and Bahrain, however, are not so rich. The influence of the Dubai model in these countries thus gives rise to political and economic challenges as citizens compete directly with low-cost foreign labor for private-sector jobs.

Social Structure

By far the most important social cleavage in the lower Gulf societies is that between citizens and noncitizens. This distinction is important in employment, education, treatment by the police, and in many other aspects of life. The distinction is clearly visible: Citizens often wear a distinctive national dress specific to their own country (and when they do not, it can be difficult to distinguish citizens from foreigners). Female dress styles are somewhat less nationally distinctive, though it is usually not difficult to distinguish female citizens from female expatriates. In the Gulf, the term *national* is widely used instead of *citizen*. In this chapter, I prefer the term *citizen* because it keeps the focus on the crucial legal difference between nationals and nonnationals, which is the possession of citizenship by nationals. Residents who lack citizenship are typically called *expatriates*, especially those with an education or those from the West.

Figure 18.2 Bahraini Workforce by Citizenship and Sector, 2009



Source: Michael Herb, The Wages of Oil: Parliaments and Economic Development in Kuwait and the UAE (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 31.

Note: Circle size is proportional to the number of workers.

Citizens

The demography of the citizen population of the Gulf today owes much to its trading past. The small trading cities and towns of the pre-oil Gulf were diverse and cosmopolitan. They were ruled by families descended from the inland Najdi tribes. Residents were Arab (from Najd and elsewhere) and of Persian, Baloch, Iraqi, African, Indian, and other origins. Those who arrived before oil by and large became citizens when the states decided, after oil, to formally designate who was a citizen and who was not.

The lower Gulf states do not release public figures on the ethnic or sectarian composition of their citizen or expatriate populations. It appears that in Bahrain, the Shi'a compose around 58 percent of the citizen population, and in Oman, the Ibadis are around half of the citizen population.⁸ Qatar and the UAE have Sunni majorities.

All four lower Gulf states have citizen populations with large Arab majorities. Many are descended from the Arab tribes of the Arabian Peninsula, including most of the ruling families. Some Arabs are of nontribal origin. The most important non-Arab citizen group in the lower Gulf states is of Persian descent; they are also typically Shi'i. Persians are important in Dubai especially. Other non-Arab citizen groups include Balochis, from what is now Pakistan and Iran, along with a variety of migrants from all around the Indian Ocean and the Middle East. Many Omanis trace their origins to the African parts of Oman's empire, including a sizable number who migrated back to Oman after the revolution in Zanzibar. Slavery was common in the Gulf before the oil boom, especially in Omani date farming and Gulf pearling, and many citizens are of African origin.⁹ In modern times, many Gulf men have married foreigners, increasing the diversity of the citizen population.

When citizen women marry foreigners, however, their children usually do not receive the citizenship of their mothers.

Expatriates/Noncitizens

Gulf regimes rarely grant citizenship to the many foreigners who work in the Gulf. This is the result of a straightforward economic fact. Citizens, by virtue of being citizens, receive jobs, educations, health care, and many other benefits from the state. These benefits are paid out of their country's finite oil wealth, not out of tax revenue. Adding a new citizen does not increase the amount of oil that pays for citizen benefits. In a developed non-oil economy, by contrast, a new citizen—on average—generates additional economic activity and additional tax revenue.

Gulf states do not publish data on the national origins of expatriates in the Gulf, though it is clear that most hail from South Asia, and especially India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Bangladesh. Many others come from non-GCC Arab countries, including Yemen, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and elsewhere. There are many Filipinos in the Gulf and expatriate communities from elsewhere in Asia, Africa, and other parts of the world.

Foreign workers, especially those with little education from poor countries, are vulnerable to mistreatment. A foreigner who wants to work in the Gulf states typically needs a sponsor, or *kafeel* (thus, the *kafala* system, as it is known). In the classic *kafala* system, still more or less in effect across much of the Gulf, the *kafeel* secures the visa, and once in the country, the worker's permission to work is dependent upon the sponsor (though the person who provides the visa, the legal sponsor, and the eventual employer may not be the same). In many cases—though certainly not all—those who want to work in the Gulf pay a fee to labor recruiters to secure a visa. Thus, when they arrive in one of the Gulf states, many are already in debt. Workers typically cannot transfer to a different employer, cannot leave the country without their employer's permission, and often have their passports held by their employer. The overall effect of the system is to make the immigrant worker dependent upon their sponsor and employer.¹⁰ This dependence opens the door for abuse. Health and safety regulations are not always followed closely, and workers frequently die on the job in the lower Gulf states. Employers

sometimes withhold wages. Women who work and live in their employers' houses as household servants are vulnerable to abuse.

The governments of the lower Gulf states, and especially Qatar and the UAE, are increasingly sensitive to criticism about their treatment of foreign workers and have taken some steps to try to improve the lives of foreign workers. States have sometimes punished employers who withhold wages. Regulations—not always enforced—limit outside work in the middle of the day in the summer. Bahrain and Kuwait have partially reformed the *kafala* system in some respects and for some expatriates. While the reforms have helped, the vast imbalance in power between citizens and noncitizens leaves abundant room for abuse.

While the negative aspects of foreign labor in the Gulf deserve abundant attention, the positive aspects must also be kept in mind. Millions of people from poor countries come to the Gulf to work, sending home vast sums of money used to educate children, build businesses, fund retirements, and improve the lives of people who often have few good choices in their lives.

Gulf citizens are not the only rich people who benefit from cheap labor. So too do the citizens of the United States, Europe, and other rich countries, who import vast amounts of clothing, toys, electronics, and other goods manufactured by people earning very low wages and often working in poor conditions. What makes the Gulf countries different is that they import not just goods but also labor. By doing so, they make unmistakably visible the vast gulf between rich and poor in the modern world economy. The juxtaposition of enormous wealth and deep poverty is unsettling to the visitor to the Gulf who is accustomed to a society that profits from the labor of poor foreigners only at a distance.

Actors, Opinion, Participation

None of the lower Gulf regimes are democracies. Before the Arab Spring, they might have been described as velvet-glove authoritarianisms, though in recent years the glove has come off, especially in the UAE. And it was never really on in Bahrain. Political parties are not allowed in any of the four lower Gulf states, though in Bahrain political societies act as political parties. In Qatar, the UAE, and Oman, those who are elected to representative assemblies are elected as independents and do not have party affiliation. In most cases, in practice, they do not have an affiliation with a formal interest group of any sort. Instead, most of those elected in practice represent their family, clan, or tribe. This tends to exacerbate the division of society by tribal or clan group and inhibits the formation of non-clan-based interest groups and political associations.

Although the constitutions provide for freedom of association, in practice the governments impose serious limits on civil society groups. Thus, formal human rights organizations in the lower Gulf states are linked to the governments and are not independent NGOs (nongovernmental organizations). Informal, nonpolitical charitable organizations are often dealt with more tolerantly by the regimes, and ascriptive organizations—such as tribes—are usually encouraged. Generally, the capacity of formal civil society actors to contribute to the political discourse in the lower Gulf states—not to speak of participation in decision-making—is minimal.

All four lower Gulf states severely restrict press freedoms. Two satellite television stations, Al Jazeera, based in Qatar, and Al Arabiya, based in Dubai, influence Arab public opinion, and Al Jazeera helped lead the Arab Spring revolutions. These stations, however, do not criticize their own regimes. On occasion, they will criticize the politics of other Gulf monarchies, and this contributed to the recent rift between Qatar and its neighbors.

Across the Gulf, a great deal of politics occurs on social media, including Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and other social media services. The Gulf states have among the highest per capita Twitter usage in the world. Before the Arab Spring, and for a while afterward, the regimes did little

to curb the use of social media to express opposition. In the past few years, however, they have begun to crack down, sometimes jailing those who send tweets against the regimes.

Avoiding Demands for Participation

How have the regimes avoided pressure for greater political participation? In Bahrain, there is a lot of plain repression. In the other three lower Gulf countries, however, rulers have maintained what appears to be a substantial reservoir of support from their people.

One explanation for how rulers maintain public support is that they consult a great deal with their citizens, or at least give the impression that they do. The traditional form of this consultation is the *majlis*, an open meeting in which citizens can meet the ruler and ask for help. Yet the traditional *majlis* imposes no institutional constraints of the sort that a parliament might on the ruler; it is a forum for asking for the ruler's favors. Actual consultation typically is reserved mostly for the elite. That said, many Gulf rulers have managed to sell the idea to their citizens that they are connected to their societies and pay attention to citizen opinion.

Oil wealth helps the Gulf rulers stay in the good graces of their citizens, though its ability to make rulers popular should not be overstated.¹¹ Not so long ago, Qatar, the UAE, and Oman were abjectly poor. Today, they are well off, or rich. While the ruling families are not primarily responsible for this, the ruling families nonetheless benefit from the general sense of good fortune. But oil wealth alone is not responsible for political quiescence in the lower Gulf. The citizens of Kuwait, a country as rich as the UAE or Qatar, have a long tradition of protest (though there is little support for actually deposing the ruling family). Nor does it quite make sense that rulers can simply buy the support of their citizens; most citizens think it is their money in the first place, and buying off opposition tends to create more of it.¹²

The Gulf rulers benefit from comparisons with neighboring states, the condition of which allows the monarchs to argue that their citizens could have it a lot worse. Former monarchies in the Middle East include Libya, Iraq, Egypt, Yemen, and Iran. That is not a list that inspires Gulf citizens

to go to the barricades. The civil war in Syria is also not an argument for republicanism. To be sure, not all citizens think along these lines, but many do, and this creates a constituency for stability and order.

The rulers also use nationalism to their advantage, as do most authoritarian rulers. In Qatar, the threat from the Quartet (see the Regional and International Relations section) has boosted the amir's popularity, while the rulers of the UAE have used the country's foreign adventures to build support. This, of course, is a strategy that can backfire if foreign adventures go wrong in a way that reflects badly on the rulers.

Finally, in Qatar and the UAE especially, citizens are a small and very privileged minority. The status quo provides many benefits to this minority, while true democracy—that is to say, democracy that includes not only citizens, but long-term residents of these countries—threatens the basic sources of citizen privilege.

Religion and Politics

The lower Gulf regimes and most citizens view the protection and promotion of religion as an appropriate use of state power. Political leaders refer to Islam frequently in their public pronouncements and make public shows of their piety. Each state formally acknowledges in its constitution or similar document that Islam is the religion of the state—though none specify a specific interpretation of Islam.

The dynasties that rule the lower Gulf states (with the partial exception of Oman) did not rely on their religious establishments in their rise to power, and as a result, the religious establishments are not as politically influential as in Saudi Arabia. The firm grip of the ruling families on political power has also limited the influence of political Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood.

Perhaps the most important political role of religion in the lower Gulf states is as a source of political identity. The central cleavage in Bahraini politics, for example, is between Sunnis and Shi'a—and the political tension between the two communities is all about the division of power and wealth, not about the theological points that divide the two sects.

Domestic Conflict and Rebel Governance

None of the Gulf regimes has suffered a regional rebellion since the 1970s in Oman (in the southern region of Dhofar). Like much else in the Gulf, this is a consequence of the combination of oil revenues and monarchism. Oil revenues provide the revenues necessary to build and maintain an effective state apparatus that effectively governs the national territory. Monarchism—and especially the Gulf variant of dynastic monarchy—provides political stability at the top of the regime and inspires loyalty among more traditional-minded citizens.

The Arab Spring largely skipped over Qatar and the UAE. In Oman, citizens protested in some cities, but the protests were relatively mild. In Bahrain, however, Shi'i citizens took to the streets to demand the fall of the regime, an episode that has much to do with sectarian tensions and is discussed in the section on Bahrain.

Regional and International Relations

In the summer of 2017, the rulers of the UAE and Saudi Arabia, joined by Bahrain and Egypt (often referred to as the anti-Qatar Quartet, or just the Quartet), imposed a blockade on Qatar, cutting economic ties and closing its only land border. This development marks a surprising change of direction in Gulf politics. One would think that small, oil-rich Sunni monarchies in the Gulf, facing threats from all sides and resembling each other in so many ways, would get along with each other. But it is perhaps their similarities that breed conflict, which has the feel of a family squabble.

Until recently, the Gulf monarchies have been viewed by the world, and have largely viewed themselves, as weak but rich countries in need of protection from their neighbors. Until 1971, Britain provided this protection for the lower Gulf states. When Britain left, the United States worked with Saudi Arabia and the shah of Iran to stabilize the Gulf. This worked well enough up to the Iranian revolution of 1979, after which it did not work at all. When Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, the United States was drawn into the Gulf in full. Today, the US Fifth Fleet is based in Bahrain. Qatar hosts the forward headquarters of the US Central Command outside Doha at the Al Udeid Air Base, and Jebel Ali in Dubai is sometimes said to be the port most visited by the US Navy outside the United States itself. The Americans have kept a large military presence in Kuwait since liberation in 1991.

While the United States maintains a robust military presence in the Gulf, its political influence has been on the decline. George W. Bush invaded Iraq in 2003 against the advice of the Gulf monarchs, who feared an expansion of Iranian influence. The Obama administration angered the Gulf monarchs by staying out of the Syrian civil war (mostly) and making the nuclear deal with Iran. And the Trump administration's lack of policy coherence has further weakened the US position in the Gulf.

The Quartet's Blockade

During the Arab Spring, the amir of Qatar had fancied himself the leader of a regional power—albeit one thin on people but with plenty of cash.

This deeply annoyed his neighbors, even after he stepped down in favor of his son Tamim in 2013. Shortly after imposing the blockade, the Quartet issued a set of thirteen demands to Qatar that sums up, more or less, its problems with Qatar.¹³ The list leads with a demand that Qatar curb its relations with Iran, a country with which Qatar shares a giant gas field that is the source of much of its wealth. Saudi Arabia and the UAE view Iran as their chief international threat, while Qatar does not (though, to be sure, neither do Oman or Kuwait).

The heart of the Quartet's complaint against Qatar seems to be found, though, in the demand that Qatar cut its relationships with international terrorist groups, a demand that Trump echoed in his tweets supporting Saudi Arabia and the UAE (yes, there were tweets). The Muslim Brotherhood was first on the list, followed by ISIS, al-Qaeda, and Hezbollah. This is a disparate group of organizations, most of which Qatar has no sympathy for at all and no more business with than the other Gulf monarchies.¹⁴ But Qatar has long been associated with the Muslim Brotherhood in a way that makes it stand out from its neighbors. The other Gulf monarchies were frightened by the fall of Mubarak in Egypt, while Al Jazeera—the Qatar-based satellite television station—encouraged it. Qatar supported the Muslim Brotherhood regime in Egypt led by Morsi, while the Saudis and Emiratis supported Sisi, who made the coup that overthrew Morsi. This concern with the Muslim Brotherhood seems to animate several additional items in the Quartet's list. The Quartet demanded that Qatar close Al Jazeera, with its Muslim Brotherhood links. And it demanded that Turkey, whose regime is Islamist, shut down its military base in Qatar.

The Quartet further demanded that Qatar turn over to them any opposition figures who lived in Qatar and cease giving any sort of opportunity for opponents of the neighboring regimes to speak their minds while in Qatar. Some of these opponents were Islamists, but this probably goes beyond the fixation on the Muslim Brotherhood. In the eyes of Saudi Arabia and Abu Dhabi, Qatar sought to undermine their efforts to squelch dissent among their own citizens, and this could not be endured.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE had complained about Qatar's foreign policy for some years. In 2014, the two countries, along with Bahrain, pulled

their ambassadors from Doha shortly after Amir Hamad, who had led Qatar's international activism, resigned in favor of his son Tamim. The new amir cut back Qatar's foreign-policy adventurism, and for a time, it appeared that Qatar had mended fences with its neighbor. If Qatar did anything to trigger the renewal of the crisis in 2017, it was the massive ransom it paid to a variety of groups—some linked to Iran—to secure the release of a hunting party kidnapped in Iraq that included members of the Al Thani ruling family.

The timing might also be related to the new Trump administration in Washington, which, unlike its predecessors, did not recognize the value of keeping America's Gulf allies from each other's throats—or at least the new president did not. The Gulf monarchs welcomed the Trump administration amid early indications he would be hostile to Iran and would not harangue them about democracy and human rights. And early on, Jared Kushner, the president's son-in-law, developed strong connections with the crown princes (and effective rulers) of Saudi Arabia and Abu Dhabi, Muhammad bin Salman and Muhammad bin Zayed.

Trump made his first international visit to Saudi Arabia (rather than the traditional choices, Canada or Mexico), and the Saudis captivated him with pomp and circumstance. Before Trump had even left the region, the UAE kicked off the crisis by hacking the main Qatari government news site, planting a fake speech in which Qatar's amir purportedly praised Hamas, Iran, and others. This provided a pretext for the imposition of the blockade, which came less than two weeks later. The US defense establishment and the state department tried to contain the rift between traditional US allies in the Gulf on the grounds that it threatened long-term US interests in the region, as it did. The US air base in Qatar, after all, is integral to US war efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq. This might explain why Trump himself is said to have discouraged the Saudis from actually invading Qatar when they considered the idea early in the crisis.

As of mid-2018, the blockade had failed to achieve its political goals. Saudi Arabia closed Qatar's only land border, and Qatar Airways lost access to Saudi, Emirati, and Egyptian airspace. The myriad economic ties between the nations were largely severed, at great cost. Families were divided and careers disrupted as Gulf citizens and expatriates were forced to choose one side or the other. Qatar, however, rejected the

demands of the Quartet, and its wealth allowed it to absorb the economic shock. Qatar's ruler, Amir Tamim, benefited from a wave of public support as he stood up for Qatar's sovereignty.

Qatar improved its standing with the Trump administration before the blockade reached its second year. This perhaps reflects efforts by professionals in the US government to fix the damage. It might also have something to do with Qatar entering into talks to invest millions in Newsmax, owned by one of Trump's friends.¹⁵ And it might have had something to do with Qatar's involvement in a planned bailout of the Kushner family's disastrous investment in a midtown Manhattan office building.¹⁶ So as the crisis entered its second year, the Qataris appeared to be not only surviving the blockade but also mastering the art of gaining influence in Trump's Washington.

A year after the imposition of the blockade neither side looked willing to compromise. Short of a Saudi invasion of Qatar, which was not out of the question, it did not appear that the leaders of Saudi Arabia and Abu Dhabi would accomplish their maximalist goals of bringing Qatar to heel permanently. And neither side appeared willing to stand down any time soon, despite the cost of the dispute and the dim prospects that they will achieve their objectives.

The GCC

All of this, not surprisingly, crippled the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the regional organization set up by the Gulf monarchies to promote cooperation among themselves. The monarchies formed the GCC in 1981 in response to the outbreak of the war between Iraq and Iran; the idea was to eventually create a union capable of defending the monarchies from the neighbors. It never turned into that, but there were some useful efforts to coordinate regulations and promote the movement of goods and people among the six monarchies. There even developed something of a sense of common identity among GCC citizens, one that does not compete with (much stronger) national identities, but which does serve to distinguish Gulf Arabs not only from non-Arabs and the many expatriates in their own societies but also to some degree from the citizens of other Arab states.

Ultimately, the GCC's problem is that the current crown prince of Saudi Arabia acts like the GCC is a vehicle for Saudi hegemony in the Gulf. Bahrain goes along because it has little choice, and the UAE seems to see itself as a partner of Saudi Arabia. The other three Gulf states, however, have no reason to submit to Saudi hegemony. Kuwait and Oman do not want to provoke the Saudis, for sure, just as they do not want to provoke other regional powers. But vassals they are not.

The United Arab Emirates

The United Arab Emirates is a federation of seven emirates, each with its own territory, ruling family, and eponymous seaside city. Six of the emirates are along the Gulf shore: from the south, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al Quwain, and Ras Al Khaimah. The seventh emirate, Fujairah, faces the Gulf of Oman, which opens to the Indian Ocean.

History of State Formation—the UAE

The history of state formation in the coastal shaykhdoms revolves around control of trade in the Gulf. The British, as part of their effort to reduce “piracy” and thus to control trade, in 1819 destroyed the fleet of the Qasami state based at Ras Al Khaimah and induced rulers of the area’s shaykhdoms to sign a treaty prohibiting piracy. Additional treaties followed, and as a group, the principalities came to be known as the Trucial States, or the Trucial Coast, until independence in 1971. The British brought together the emirates in a common institutional framework when it set up the Trucial States Council in 1952.

At independence in 1971, the poorer emirates of the UAE had little option but to join with Abu Dhabi, which possesses the vast majority of the UAE’s oil wealth. Ras Al Khaimah held out until 1972, when it became clear that oil would not be found in commercial quantities on its territory. Dubai’s more oil reserves and its preindependence commercial success allowed it to enter the federation as a partner of Abu Dhabi.

Institutions and Governance—the UAE

The leading political institution in the UAE is the Supreme Council, composed of the seven rulers of the constituent emirates of the UAE. The Supreme Council must approve all legislation, the appointment of the prime minister, all treaties, the annual budget, and any changes to the constitution. Decisions require a supermajority of five of the seven members. Abu Dhabi and Dubai, alone, each have a veto. The Supreme Council elects the president of the UAE for a five-year term. The rulers have always elected the ruler of Abu Dhabi to fill the post.¹⁷

The president appoints the prime minister, who has always been a member of the Al Maktoum ruling family of Dubai. The cabinet includes members of the ruling families of Abu Dhabi and Dubai, members of some other ruling families, and Emiratis from outside the ruling families. The government initiates legislation that then goes to the Supreme Council for approval. Its powers are thus both executive and legislative.

The Federal National Council (FNC) is what passes for a representative assembly at the national level in the UAE. It has forty members, eight each from Abu Dhabi and Dubai, six each from Sharjah and Ras Al Khaimah, and four for the rest. The FNC has few formal powers; it cannot remove ministers from office, and it cannot prevent the passage of legislation or force legislation through against the opposition of the Supreme Council. Half of its members are appointed, and the other half are elected. The electorate, however, is itself appointed by the rulers of each of the seven emirates. For the first elections in 2006, the electorate was a mere 6,689 (from a citizen population above twenty years of age of around 400,000). In the elections of March 2011, the electorate was expanded to 130,000 and to 224,000 in 2015. Turnout, however, was a dismal 28 percent in 2011 and only marginally better at 35 percent in 2015, suggesting citizens did not think much of the exercise.

Each of the seven emirates controls its own oil wealth, and Abu Dhabi has the vast majority of the oil. As a result, the federal government depends on the willingness of Abu Dhabi to fund its operations. The recent imposition of a VAT (value-added tax), collected by a federal tax authority with 30 percent of the proceeds going to the federal

government, gives the federal government an independent source of revenue. This is unlikely, however, to diminish the outsized voice of Abu Dhabi in the politics of the UAE. The Defense Ministry, for example, is nominally headed up by a member of the Al Maktoum but is headquartered in Abu Dhabi, paid for by Abu Dhabi, and is understood to be wholly under the control of the ruling family of Abu Dhabi.¹⁸ The foreign policy of the UAE, similarly, is set by Abu Dhabi.

In the past, Dubai has been jealous of its independence within the UAE. This led to a long-running constitutional crisis in the 1970s when Abu Dhabi sought to strengthen the federation (with itself in the lead) at the expense of the other emirates. Dubai resisted, in part to retain the freedom to pursue its economic growth policies, which were not (and are not) that popular among Emiratis in general. Dubai won the battle over the constitution in the 1970s but was reined in by the economic crisis that started in 2008 and that led to the insolvency, for a period, of the Emirate's government. Abu Dhabi bailed out Dubai; the symbolic price was the abrupt renaming of the world's-tallest building, which had been known as Burj Dubai after the ruler of Abu Dhabi: It is now Burj Khalifa. More substantively, it is widely understood that the bailout reduced Dubai's independent voice in the federation. The bailout, however, has not led to an appreciable change in the economic growth policies pursued by Dubai, likely because these policies now have the support of the ruling family of Abu Dhabi.

Political Economy—the UAE

In per capita terms, the UAE is one of the world's richest oil exporters. Yet defying the predictions of many scholars who study oil exporters, the UAE has partially diversified its economy away from oil, led by the emirate of Dubai. The rulers of Dubai, with limited oil wealth, sought to avoid falling into irrelevance by making Dubai into a major entrepôt, tourist destination, logistics hub, and business center. In 2017, eighty-eight million visitors passed through Dubai's international airport, which made it the third-busiest airport in the world (not far behind the world's busiest, Atlanta, with 104 million). The container port is the ninth busiest in the world. The value of non-oil exports (mostly reexport, as part of the UAE's role as a trading center) rivals the value of the UAE's oil exports. The real estate crash in Dubai triggered by the world financial crisis of 2008 did not stop Dubai's entrepôt economy, which continued its growth in some key respects straight through the world recession.

Photo 18.1 The Palm Jumeirah project in Dubai.



NASA/Commander Leroy Chiao

Dubai's rulers run the emirate like a private business (which is why it is sometimes called Dubai, Inc.). The boundaries between the finances of the emirate of Dubai and the ruler himself are not particularly clear. In many ways, the ruler can be understood as a real estate developer. He owns a great deal of real estate and controls undeveloped land. He and the Dubai government both profit from economic and population growth in Dubai. The massive land reclamation projects (namely, the creation of

the “palms” that project from the coastline into the Gulf and which are so prominent when flying into Dubai and on satellite images) are controlled, ultimately, by the ruler, and companies associated with the ruler and the emirate’s government profit from them. The ruler himself personally owns one of the largest real estate companies in the emirate, Dubai Holding, and this company receives free grants of land from the emirate. The ruler and companies partly or wholly owned by the emirate government control a dizzying array of businesses, including Emirates Airways, hotels, port operators, and the like.

Dubai’s insolvency in 2009 resembles, more than a little, the sort of bankruptcies suffered by real estate developers. The emirate borrowed heavily to fund growth, and market enthusiasm led to a real estate bubble. When the bubble burst, the emirate’s government and its associated companies were overextended and could not make payments on their debt. Abu Dhabi provided the loans necessary to keep Dubai, Inc. solvent.

Social Structure—the UAE

While the government of the UAE does not release data on the nationalities of expatriates in the UAE, it appears that there are roughly twice as many Indian citizens in the UAE as there are Emirati citizens. Pakistanis also outnumber UAE citizens: the top-five nationalities are Indian, Pakistani, Emirati, Bangladeshi, and Filipino.¹⁹ The number of expatriates from a single Indian state, Kerala, approaches the number of Emirati citizens. Many expatriates live in the UAE for a few years only and then go back home. A significant number, however, are longer-term residents. Statistics on births illustrate the permanence of the foreign community: Among those under the age of fifteen, there are more foreigners in the UAE than there are citizens.

Abu Dhabi has more citizens than any other emirate; Dubai and Sharjah are probably next in population size (exact figures are not available). The federal government distributes a good deal of Abu Dhabi's oil wealth to the citizens of poorer emirates (via the federal government), but the citizens of Abu Dhabi are nonetheless notably better off than those of the poorer emirates. This is in part because of the distribution of real estate to Abu Dhabi citizens by the emirate government. Those from the poorer emirates often must find work in government offices in Abu Dhabi or Dubai, and this can require long commutes. Passports distinguish among the citizens of different emirates, and an Abu Dhabi "family book" confers extra benefits on the citizens of the emirate.²⁰ Despite this, over four decades of independence has produced a strong sense of national identity among UAE citizens, a sense of identity reinforced by the presence of so many foreigners in the UAE.

Actors, Opinion, Participation—the UAE

Citizens of the UAE have expressed relatively little political dissent over the past several decades. In the 1970s, disputes between Abu Dhabi and Dubai opened up a space for the expression of more political opinions by Emirati citizens, and there were demands for a stronger federation, more political participation, the distribution of Abu Dhabi's oil wealth more equitably throughout the federation, and for limits on Dubai's growth—including the influx of foreigners associated with that growth. The leaders of the two emirates, however, resolved their differences, and citizen demands for political change faded.

Emiratis remained largely quiet during the Arab Spring; the main expression of dissent took the form of a petition signed by 133 Emirati intellectuals, activists, and others. The regime responded with repression focused on the Emirati branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. Prosecutors accused the organization of seeking to overthrow the regime, a claim that most outside observers found hard to believe. Nonetheless, ninety-four members of the Brotherhood were put on trial, and sixty-nine were found guilty. International human rights organizations did not find the trials to be free and fair, and the convictions marked a serious turn toward repression by the regime.

Religion and Politics—the UAE

The UAE population as a whole is religiously diverse, and the government tolerates the free practice of a wide variety of religions. While the regime is tolerant of religious diversity, it abhors political Islam, and the Muslim Brotherhood specifically. Most Emirati citizens are Sunni Muslims, as are the rulers of all seven emirates. A substantial Shi'i minority is found in the northern emirates, especially Dubai and Sharjah. The state funds most Sunni mosques, pays the imams, and maintains close control over sermons. Control over Shi'i mosques is less stringent, though the state apparently does provide some financial support to Shi'i religious institutions. The curriculum in public schools (where citizens are educated) is Sunni. The governments of the emirates regularly provide grants of land for the construction of non-Muslim houses of worship. Thus, there are seven Coptic Orthodox churches in the UAE, along with Hindu temples, a Sikh temple, a worship center for the Church of Latter Day Saints (Mormons), and others.

Regional and International Relations—the UAE

Over the past decade and more, the UAE has emerged as a potent military power in the region, dubbed by the American military a “little Sparta,” despite the small size of the citizen population.²¹ The UAE developed its war-fighting capacity in close cooperation with US forces in regional conflicts. More recently, the UAE has adopted a more independent policy, moving out from under the US umbrella.

The UAE is currently fighting a war in Yemen with Saudi Arabia against the Houthis who controlled, as of summer 2018, the northern part of the country. The UAE and its allies hold the port city of Aden and most of the surrounding territory, and its efforts in Yemen have generally been thought to have been more effective than those of the Saudis. The war is part of a larger regional struggle with Iran, which the UAE sees as sponsors of the Houthi movement, though the initial level of Iranian support to the Houthis was modest.

Beyond Yemen, the UAE is engaged for a struggle for influence in the Horn of Africa, with military bases in Eritria and Somaliland and investments in ports in the region. This grows from an effort to participate in the burgeoning economies of especially Ethiopia, which is landlocked, and competition with Turkey. Because Qatar is allied with Turkey and is more sympathetic to political Islam, the complex competition in the Horn of Africa (which includes Egypt and China also) reflects the intra-Gulf divide between Qatar and the UAE, and between those opposed to political Islam in the region and those who generally favor it.²²

The UAE’s new foreign policy activism raises questions similar to those raised by Qatar’s interventions in the region under its former amir. While the UAE is larger than Qatar, neither is of the size that would make them regional powers but for their oil revenues. Their countries’ narrow security interests would arguably be best served by keeping their heads down and making friends. Dubai has commercial interests in the Horn of Africa, but it is not clear that these interests are best served by the UAE’s military investments in the region.

Muhammad bin Zayed, the crown prince of Abu Dhabi, is clearly animated by a hostility toward the Muslim Brotherhood. But it is far from clear that the Muslim Brotherhood ever posed a real threat to him at home. And his efforts to eradicate Muslim Brotherhood presence elsewhere in the region has had very mixed success. Qatar remains unbowed, though the investment in Sisi's regime seems to have paid off, at least so far. Yet one can wonder, about both Muhammad bin Zayed and Qatar's former amir, just how much the ambitions of rulers serves the security interests of their citizens.

Oman

Oman has a larger land area and citizen population than the other lower Gulf states. It is one of two GCC countries (with Saudi Arabia) in which citizens outnumber noncitizens. A well-populated coastal plain, Al-Batinah, runs from the UAE border almost to Muscat, the capital and historical center of the Omani trading empire. The Hajar mountain range runs inland behind the coast; Nizwa, the former capital of inner Oman, lies on the other side of the mountains behind Muscat. The city of Salalah is found much farther south, toward Yemen, in the Dhofar region.

History of State Formation—Oman

Oman's rulers adhere to the Ibadi sect of Islam, which is practiced almost exclusively in Oman and is distinct from both Sunni and Shi'i Islam. The distinctive political doctrine of Ibadism is the requirement that the ruler—called the imam—gains office through a sort of election by notables and religious scholars. In practice, however, a series of dynasties have ruled Oman over the past centuries.²³ The current ruling family came to power in the mid-eighteenth century; its rulers dropped the title of imam in favor of sultan and focused on building a maritime trading empire that ruled territories from what is now Pakistan to Zanzibar. In 1861, the empire split, with a sultan in Muscat and another in Zanzibar. The Muscat sultanate went into economic decline and also lost control over the Omani interior, where a contending Ibadi imam emerged. A war in the 1950s united the country under the Muscat sultanate.

The modern period in Oman started abruptly in 1970 when the current sultan overthrew his father, Taimur, who famously spent little of Oman's new oil revenues on development. He viewed modern education in particular as a threat to his rule. In 1970, Oman had no secondary schools, one real hospital, and six miles of paved road. The bloodless palace coup that brought Sultan Qaboos to power ushered in an era of development as Qaboos invested Oman's oil resources in education, health, and public infrastructure.

Institutions and Governance—Oman

The Monarchy

Qaboos seized power in 1970 with the help of the British and nonroyal Omanis, but not his family. Rather than parceling out the leading posts in the state to his relatives, Qaboos reserved most of these posts for himself: He is the prime minister, the minister of defense, the minister of finance, the minister of foreign affairs, and the governor of the Central Bank of Oman. This is quite different from the practice in the other GCC states, where rulers share power more widely with their families.

In the summer of 2018, Qaboos was widely thought to be seriously ill and had been for several years. In contrast to the practice in other GCC monarchies, Qaboos has not appointed a crown prince (that is to say, a successor). Instead, he has said that his family will meet after his death and select a successor from among themselves. If they cannot come to an agreement, a group of senior state officials (the Defense Council, members of the judiciary, chairmen of the two houses of the Majlis Oman) will meet to confirm Qaboos's previous choice of the new sultan, which he says that he has written down and placed in two different locations in the Sultanate.²⁴

Stable authoritarian regimes have predictable succession mechanisms. Oman's succession mechanism, by contrast, generates uncertainty. Can the family select a successor? If they cannot, can the successor selected by Qaboos establish his authority? What sort of coalition will the new sultan rely on to rule—his family, the military, prominent merchant families? What role will Majlis Oman have? These questions will be answered after Qaboos dies; until then, Oman waits.

Majlis Oman

Oman's Basic Law, issued by the sultan in 1996, makes official what was already clear: Oman is an absolute monarchy with no real constraints on the power of the monarch. The law (as amended) calls for elections to the lower chamber of a bicameral parliament that, as of yet, has few powers. The lower chamber is called the Consultative Council,

or *majlis al-shura*, and it currently has eighty-four members. The upper council is the State Council (*majlis al-dawla*); the sultan appoints its members by decree. The appointed chamber cannot be larger than the elected.

Oman holds higher-quality elections than any Gulf monarchy except Kuwait. Earlier elections had a very limited suffrage, but the elections held in 2003, 2007, 2011, and 2015 were thought to be technically fair, in the sense that the government did not stuff the ballot boxes. However, political parties are illegal. Candidates do not have the freedom to adopt clear policy positions, and as a consequence, the elections are mostly about tribe and clan loyalties.²⁵ In a sign of some progress, three deputies who participated in Oman's Arab Spring protests were elected to the Council in 2011.

The Consultative Council has only very modest powers. Majlis Oman must pass laws before they come into effect, but if the two houses disagree, the differences are resolved in a joint session by majority vote, which dilutes the weight of elected deputies. The Council cannot remove confidence in ministers, a key power enjoyed by the Kuwaiti National Assembly. Some ministers—those leading “service” ministries, such as the Ministry of Health—can be questioned by the Majlis. Further democratization in Oman requires not so much better elections but instead a more powerful elected assembly.

Social Structure—Oman

Although the Omani government publishes no data on the sectarian affiliations of Omani citizens, Marc Valeri estimates that Ibadis make up 48 percent to 53 percent of the citizen population, Shi'a 3 percent to 4 percent, and Sunnis the balance (that is, just under half). The ruling family, of course, is Ibadi. Interior Oman is more Arab and Ibadi, while the coast—the Batinah and Muscat—is more oriented to the sea and more varied in origin. Slave labor was common in the Batinah date plantations, which flourished in the nineteenth century and first decades of the twentieth century, and this has influenced the demography of the coastal areas.²⁶

In recent years, sectarian conflicts have torn apart several Arab countries. In Oman, by contrast, we find little sectarian strife. It helps that Ibadis are found almost only in Oman so that there are no larger regional dimensions to the sectarian difference. And it helps more that Ibadis and Sunnis have little history of directly sectarian clashes over political power, economic resources, and the like. The war between interior Oman and the coastal sultanate of the 1950s was fought between two Ibadi rulers.

Omanis are divided by region as well as by sect. The Dhofaris rebelled in the 1960s and 1970s, and there remains a sense of Dhofari regional distinctiveness that may reassert itself. There has always been a divide between the more ethnically diverse coast (the Batinah and greater Muscat) and inner Oman. Observers of Omani politics will closely watch to see if, and how, these regional and sectarian divisions become more visible in the post-Qaboos era.

Actors, Opinion, Participation—Oman

Unlike Qatar and the UAE, Oman experienced street protests during the Arab Spring. These started with protests in Muscat, then spread to the industrial town of Sohar in the North, where protests took on a more working-class nature. Demonstrators did not call for the fall of the regime but instead professed their loyalty to the sultan. They complained about competition from foreign laborers, corruption in the government, unemployment, and the like.²⁷

In response to the protests, the Sultan shuffled the cabinet several times, announced the creation of tens of thousands of new jobs, and announced changes to the Basic Law mentioned earlier. He also fired the chief of police. As in other Gulf countries, however, this burst of reform was followed by reaction: As the Arab Spring turned to chaos elsewhere, the regime tightened down on civil liberties and jailed several dissenters—including a member of the Consultative Council elected in 2011. The physical decline of Qaboos added to the sense of unease and the general unwillingness of the state to tolerate dissent.

Religion and Politics—Oman

The Omani state promotes a “generic” Islam that elides the doctrinal differences between Sunni Islam and Ibadi Islam. Nonetheless, in official appointments observers find a tendency to favor the ruler’s Ibadi sect: ministers of Justice and Religious Affairs have been Ibadi, as have been the sultanate’s muftis. This Ibadi favoritism is tempered by the fact that historically the Al Said dynasty has been a dynasty of the (predominantly Sunni) coast and Muscat more than the Ibadi interior, so the dynasty has succeeded in avoiding the perception of siding entirely with one religious community or the other.

Islamist political groups, like other political organizations, have little public presence in Oman. The Muslim Brotherhood was blamed for organizing a coup conspiracy in 1994, and the Brotherhood was said to have had a role in the protests in Sohar in 2011.²⁸ Should the political system open up, perhaps after Qaboos dies, we would expect a more public presence of Salafi and Brotherhood groups among Oman’s Sunni population. Omani history also suggests that there is the potential for Islamist dissent among the sultanate’s Ibadis—in 2005, the security forces arrested a group of Ibadis accused of conspiring to reestablish the Ibadi imamate.

Political Economy—Oman

Oman has only a fraction of the oil of its neighbors (5.5 billion barrels of proven reserves, compared to 98 billion for the UAE) and has a larger citizen population. Oman needs to build a non-oil economy that productively employs citizen labor but, unfortunately, has made only modest progress in this direction. In recent years, following the Arab Spring, the regime hired even more Omanis into government jobs, and today, most Omanis who are employed for a wage work for the state. The private sector hires only a few Omanis. Sooner rather than later, Oman will need to build a productive, job-generating, non-oil economy with citizen labor. There are some grounds for optimism. Oman is spectacularly beautiful and is a natural destination for high-end tourism. The neighboring UAE is a rich market for Omani goods and services. Oman is politically stable—at least thus far. Even in the best scenario, however, a fall in per capita incomes in the sultanate is likely as oil revenues eventually decline. Oman faces serious economic challenges.

Regional and International Relations—Oman

Oman has long pursued an independent foreign policy, which in practice means something akin to neutrality. In the spring of 2015, Oman declined to support Saudi Arabia and the other members of the GCC in their military campaign against the Houthis in Yemen. Earlier, in March of 2011, Oman declined to send forces to Bahrain to support the Sunni ruling family against Shi'i protesters. And Oman has not joined Saudi Arabia and the UAE in their campaign against Qatar. This careful foreign policy has arguably served Oman's national interests well, as it has solid relationships with a variety of regional and world powers. The risk is that someday a regional power might try to force Oman to take sides, raising the costs of its current neutrality. Or the successor of Qaboos, following in the footsteps of the new leaders of Saudi Arabia and Abu Dhabi, might abandon Oman's tradition of caution in foreign policy. Thus far, however, Oman's careful foreign policy has kept it out of the many conflicts in the surrounding region.

Qatar

History of State Formation—Qatar

Until oil, Qatar was at the periphery of the periphery, a scarcely populated peninsula jutting into the gulf and ruled by the Al Thani clan. In 1872, the Al Thani came under Ottoman suzerainty, a situation that lasted until the Ottoman withdrawal, after which Al Thani dynasty entered into direct treaty relations with Britain in 1916. Oil was exported from 1949, and in the subsequent decades, oil revenues brought prosperity, rapid immigration, and social change.

Institutions and Governance—Qatar

Qatari amirs have a tradition of abdication, which is not common elsewhere in the Gulf—three of the last four amirs abdicated, and the fourth was deposed by his son (in 1995). The current amir, Tamim, came to power when his father abruptly stepped down in 2013. Despite this turnover at the top, Qatar remains very much a family regime, with the family firmly in control of state institutions. Although Qatar works actively on promoting its international image as a forward-thinking and liberal state, Qatar lacks any sort of elected national representative assembly, apart from a municipality. Since 1999, Qatar has held five elections to its municipal council, the most recent in 2015. The municipal council, however, has little authority. Qatar has an appointive Consultative Assembly, and the 2005 constitution calls for elections to this Council, but the regime has repeatedly postponed these elections. Even if the Assembly was to be elected, the constitution gives it few effective powers.

Political Economy—Qatar

Qatar has the third-largest natural gas reserve in the world, after only Russia and Iran. Qatar's hydrocarbon revenue comes mostly from natural gas, not oil, and its natural gas resources will last for at least one hundred years.

What has Qatar done with its wealth? Like other rich Gulf states, much has been invested in a sovereign wealth fund—that is to say, it has been invested (mostly abroad) for the future. At home, Qatar has adopted elements of the Dubai model, at least in the sense of building an internationally known brand (Gulf countries are self-conscious about branding) and developing an entrepôt and tourist economy. Al Jazeera is one of the leading Arabic-language satellite channels; Qatar Airways competes with other Gulf airlines and attracts millions of visitors yearly to Doha's airport. World-famous architects (including I. M. Pei) have designed museums in Doha. Education City features branch campuses of six US universities (along with one French and one British university). And Qatar won (or, by some accounts, purchased) the right to host the World Cup in 2022. This pell-mell development has resulted in a demographic imbalance in Qatar that rivals that in the UAE. Unlike the UAE, however, it is not clear that the Qatari economy has substantially diversified beyond hydrocarbons. The rift between Qatar and its neighbors makes it that much more difficult for Qatar to develop its economy into an entrepôt along the lines of Dubai.

Social Structure—Qatar

Many Qatari citizens are members of Sunni tribes that resided in Qatar and the Arabian Peninsula before oil. The country also has a fairly sizable Shi'i minority of Persian descent, though specific numbers are not available. At the height of the pearling boom earlier in the twentieth century, many African slaves were brought to Qatar to work in the pearling industry, and their descendants are Qatari citizens. Remarkably, the government has built a museum of slavery in Doha.

The Qatari government does not release figures for the total number of citizens in the country (which gives a sense of just how sensitive the subject is), but it appears that citizens numbered around 300,000 in 2015, while the total population of the country was at least 2.3 million, making citizens a minority of at most 12 percent to 13 percent of the population. The Qatari government also does not release information on the national origin of expatriates, though it appears that the most populous national groups in Qatar are from India, Nepal, Qatar itself, the Philippines, Egypt, and Bangladesh—in that order.²⁹

Actors, Opinion, Participation—Qatar

There are no organized opposition groups in Qatar and hardly any organized political groups of any sort whatsoever. The Muslim Brotherhood, which Qatar has supported internationally and which is associated with the Al Jazeera satellite station, had a branch in Qatar but disbanded in 1999 because its former leader later said the state was carrying out its Islamic responsibilities.

One small expression of dissent surfaced in 2012 when a Qatari citizen, Ali Khalifa Al Kuwari, published an edited book with the title *The People Want Reform . . . in Qatar, Too*.³⁰ Despite the lack of opportunities for political participation and the regime's thoroughgoing authoritarianism, Qataris expressed less dissent during the Arab Spring than the citizens of any other Arab nation.³¹ And the Quartet's blockade seems to have boosted Amir Tamim's popularity via a rally-round-the-flag effect.

Religion and Politics—Qatar

Qatar's ruling family adheres to the Wahhabi school of Islamic jurisprudence, as do the Al Saud of Saudi Arabia. The Al Thani's interpretation of Wahhabism, however, is not nearly as strict as that of the Al Saud: Women in Qatar can drive (as they can in all of the lower Gulf states), alcohol is sold legally, and social norms, while not as free as Dubai, are much freer than in Saudi Arabia. Occasionally, however, the regime does emphasize its Wahhabism, at least in symbolic ways—the new national mosque is named after Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab, the founder of the Wahhabi movement. Mehran Kamrava, in his book on Qatar, attributes this to the balancing strategy of the Al Thani: While the ruling family embraces globalization, the ruler makes occasional gestures to the beliefs of Qatar's more conservative citizens.

Regional and International Relations—Qatar

Qatar is currently at the center of a major political dispute with its neighbors. That dispute includes the important aspects of Qatar's foreign relations, and it is discussed in detail earlier in the section on the shared international and regional politics of the Lower Gulf states.

Bahrain

History of State Formation—Bahrain

Bahrain is a tiny island nation that lies in the Gulf between Qatar and Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province; since 1986, a causeway has linked it to Saudi Arabia. It is ruled by the Al Khalifa, a Sunni ruling family that conquered the island in 1783, subjugating the island's Shi'i Arab population, the Baharna.³² This history of conquest colors the relations between the ruling family and Bahraini citizens to this day.

Despite its small size, Bahrain was a major trading port in the Gulf before oil, rivaling Kuwait and more important than Dubai. Great Britain moved its main Gulf naval base to Bahrain in 1935, and from 1946, the chief British political figure in the Gulf was based in Bahrain. Before independence in 1971, the shah of Iran revived Iran's claim to Bahrain. A United Nations team visited Bahrain and concluded that independence had overwhelming support among Bahrainis. The shah dropped his claim, and Bahrain won its independence in 1971.

Institutions and Governance—Bahrain

Following independence in 1971, Bahrain adopted a constitution modeled on Kuwait's, the most liberal in the Gulf. Elections were held in 1973, but the amir dissolved the chamber in 1975. The Al Khalifa ruled for the next several decades without an elected parliament of any sort.

The current king, Hamad bin Isa, initiated a political opening after coming to power in 1999. He invited political exiles to return to Bahrain and held a national referendum on the need for a new constitution that would introduce a new upper house of parliament (he also promoted Bahrain from an emirate to a kingdom, and himself from amir to king). Yet the new constitution, drafted after the referendum, disappointed the opposition.³³ It gave the elected deputies much less authority than did the 1973 constitution. The elected lower house under the new constitution requires a majority of two-thirds of its members to withdraw confidence in a minister, a very high hurdle. Legislation must pass both the elected Council of Representatives and the appointed upper house; if there is a disagreement between the two, they meet as a single body to vote—and both houses have an equal number of members. Constitutional revisions became a central demand of the opposition in the following decade.

Social Structure—Bahrain

The Shi'a compose around 58 percent of the citizen population of Bahrain. Most Bahraini Shi'a are Arab and come from a group known as the Baharna; they share much in common with the Arab Shi'a of Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province.³⁴ Other Shi'a are of Persian descent. Some Bahraini Sunnis come from the Persian side of the Gulf but are of Arab descent, while others, including the ruling family, are tribal and come from the Arabian Peninsula.

Relations between the Shi'i majority and the Sunni ruling family are not good—the Shi'a resent the oppression of the ruling family, and the Sunnis fear the consequences of a revolution. The ruling family holds most of the cards (it has the support of Saudi Arabia, and it controls the military and police in Bahrain), so the future is likely to feature continued repression rather than any revolution. The Shi'a are almost entirely excluded from positions in the security services or the military.³⁵ The electoral law, through gerrymandering and malapportionment, ensures that the Shi'i deputies win fewer than half the seats in the Council of Representatives (the main Shi'i political group, Al-Wefaq, participated in the 2006 and 2010 elections but boycotted those of 2002 and 2014). While educated Shi'a receive state jobs at a rate similar to that of educated Sunnis, less-educated Sunnis are far more likely to hold positions in the public sector than are less-educated Shi'a, many of whom are unemployed. The state tends to neglect infrastructure in the Shi'i villages.

Bahrain's regime has given citizenship to many foreigners in recent years, almost all of them Sunnis. The goal appears to be to change the sectarian balance in the population. Many have been employed in the security services; they receive state jobs while native Bahraini Shi'a must make do in the private sector. Noncitizens make up a majority of the population, at a bit over 50 percent. This is a less severe population imbalance than is found in Qatar or the UAE, but Bahrain also has much less oil wealth per capita. Many Bahraini citizens, especially less-educated Shi'a, cannot find jobs in the public sector and are often unemployed.

Actors, Opinion, Participation—Bahrain

The Arab Spring brought many Bahrainis, mostly Shi'a, out onto the streets in massive demonstrations. While the main Shi'i opposition group, Al-Wefaq, demanded reform rather than the overthrow of the ruling family, calls for revolution became more prominent as the protests continued.³⁶ The crown prince, with American support, sought to negotiate a settlement with the Shi'i opposition, while hardliners in the ruling family argued for repression. The hardliners won when Saudi, Emirati, and Qatari troops crossed the causeway in support of the Sunni regime. This brought Bahrain to a political dead end. The regime, and much of Bahrain's Sunni population, views the political struggle with the Bahraini Shi'a as a zero-sum game: The Sunni win everything, or the Shi'a win everything. The Sunni regime is the winner now and feels no need to make concessions to the Shi'a. The dominant figures in the regime see no alternative between this and a Shi'i regime that would turn Bahrain into an Iranian satellite state with no place for Sunni citizens.

This logic, of course, has a self-fulfilling nature: Unrelenting repression tends to drown out the moderate voices among the repressed. In the summer of 2015, the regime sentenced Ali Salman, the head of Al-Wefaq, to a four-year prison sentence; he led the moderate Shi'i opposition group that has long sought a middle ground with the regime. The regime jailed a prominent human rights activist for the crime of "disseminating false news, statements and rumors . . . that would undermine [Bahrain's] prestige and status."³⁷ It was convincingly accused of torturing protesters. The regime dissolved the main secular and Shi'i opposition groups and prohibited their members from running in the parliamentary elections to be held in late 2018. Several hundred Bahrainis were stripped of their citizenship, rendering many stateless. The regime declared that expressing "sympathy" for Qatar could result in a prison term of up to five years. Having blocked all hopes for political participation for the country's Shi'i population, the regime invites radicalization. It then uses this radicalization to justify further repression. The regime cannot be removed, given its iron control over the security forces, which are completely Sunni, and its support from Saudi Arabia. The result is a bitter, endless stalemate.

Religion and Politics—Bahrain

Bahrain, unlike the other lower Gulf states, allows the formation of political societies that function much like political parties. Some of these societies compete in elections to Bahrain's parliament. Almost all of the electorally successful societies are organized on sectarian grounds. Al-Wefaq wins most Shi'i seats when the Shi'a are not boycotting the elections, and its leader is a cleric. Among the Sunnis, the most prominent political societies have been those of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafis, though in the 2014 elections, all political societies fared poorly.

Political Economy—Bahrain

Bahrain has the smallest oil reserves in the GCC, and most of its revenues come from the Abu Safa oil field. This field lies in an area in the Gulf under Saudi sovereignty, but Bahrain receives half the revenues of the field as a result of a 1958 border agreement. In periods of low revenues, Saudi Arabia has given Bahrain all of the revenues from the field. Saudi Arabia also sends crude oil to Bahrain for refining, supporting a key industry. And the causeway to Saudi Arabia feeds the Bahraini tourism industry, also crucial to its economy. In short, the Bahraini economy relies heavily on Saudi Arabia, creating an economic dependence not seen elsewhere in the Gulf.

Bahrain's economy is somewhat diversified, with a large banking sector and some heavy industry. Yet Bahrain, unlike Qatar and the UAE, does not have enough oil wealth to offer a job in the public sector to all citizen graduates. As a result of the sectarian divide, the government focuses less than it otherwise might on employing Bahrainis who are unable to secure public-sector jobs—these citizens are mostly Shi'i Baharna. Business owners, many of them Sunni, have hobbled labor market reforms that would have favored citizen labor.

Regional and International Relations—Bahrain

Bahrain's regional and international relations are driven by its dependence on Saudi Arabia and its fear of Iranian influence over its own population. The moderate Shi'i opposition in Bahrain understands the dangers of being associated with Iranian influence in the Gulf and has declared that it does not seek to overthrow the ruling family. The ruling family, however, blames domestic dissent in Bahrain on Iranian influence, despite abundant evidence that the opposition of the Bahraini Shi'a has vastly more to do with a long history of Al Khalifa repression than Iranian instigation. The Bahraini ruling family misses few opportunities to claim that Iran wants to make Bahrain into a satellite state, and it portrays itself as the defender of Sunni Arabs against Iranian Shi'a. The GCC Sunni ruling families—and especially the Al Saud—deeply fear a Shi'i revolution in Bahrain that would create an Iranian satellite state on the southern shores of the Gulf, next to the oil-rich Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. Bahrain's foreign policy in the region reflects its dependence on Saudi Arabia: Its policies on Yemen, Qatar, and Iran hew closely to those of Saudi Arabia.

Conclusion

The four lower Gulf states, for all that they share in common, face very different challenges in the future. Bahrain's dilemma is easy to diagnose, though very difficult to overcome: Sunni and Shi'i Bahrainis must learn to share political power in a way that preserves the security and dignity of both communities. Of the four, Oman is the one with the best prospects for democracy—which is not to say that those prospects are particularly good but that the prospects in the other three lower Gulf states are not good at all. In Oman, elections are held regularly and honestly, and the upcoming succession might (or might not) trigger political change. Oman's economic task is straightforward, though difficult: It needs to start transitioning away from oil by building a diversified economy that puts citizen labor to productive use in the private sector.

The UAE has diversified its economy, but only through the use of inexpensive foreign labor. Qatar appears to be following in that same path. There is much that is positive about the economic growth in these countries: They create wealth and give many expatriates a chance at a better life. But these are also countries in which citizens are becoming a small, if privileged, caste of government employees living off oil revenues and, perhaps someday, tax revenues, while the bulk of the population—and virtually everyone working in the private sector—lacks citizenship. These systems are stable, but nonetheless have created a model of economic and political development that is found nowhere else in the modern world, and one not in tune with modern sensibilities concerning democracy. The long-term future of these states will be all about the clash between their economic success, political authoritarianism, and denial of citizenship to their residents.

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19 Morocco Institutions under Monarchical Dominance

Saloua Zerhouni
Driss Maghraoui

Morocco is very often viewed as a state that has historically combined both traditional and modern concepts into a general synthesis of organization about society and politics. While the religion of Islam remains an important source of political legitimization, new values and institutions associated with the modern secular state have been introduced. Morocco's monarchy, which is the main component of the political system, grounds its legitimacy on Islam and, at the same time, proclaims its attachment to democracy and modernization. The late king, Hassan II, accumulated the roles of *amir al-muminin* (commander of the faithful) and the supreme representative of the nation. Since the early phases of independence, he was able to create a regime resonant with Islamic traditions and colored with democratic and secular values. The Moroccan regime has over the years played a crucial role in the ideological construction of this political hybrid.

The globalization process as well as the internationalization of the discourse of democracy and human rights have pushed the monarchy to look for ways to adapt itself to this new era of rapid economic, technological, political, social, and cultural changes. The constellation of these forces has combined not only to shape in positive ways the political landscape of Morocco but also to flush out the inherent inconsistencies of the political system. In many ways, the weight of the Moroccan past comes back to haunt the pressing issues of the present, while concerns for political survival impose new strategies of adaptation for the future. It is this relationship among the past, the present, and the future that this chapter seeks

to address when dealing with the ambiguities and contradictions of the Moroccan political regime.

Indeed, while a number of countries in the Middle East were going through a series of revolutions and social upheavals in the year 2011, the Moroccan regime, through well-planned constitutional reforms and through the election of an Islamist party to government, was able to avoid in a very astute way some of the violent outcomes that framed the reactions of other authoritarian regimes in the region. An important component of achieving this goal was ultimately the role that the Islamist Party of Justice and Development (PJD) was allowed to play by the regime in order to achieve what some Moroccan analysts called the “second *alternance*.”¹ What made this scenario possible were not only the astute political maneuverings of the monarchy and its state machinery, as well as its well-established strategies of segmentation and various forms of co-optation, but also the presence of the PJD as an alternative to other predominantly discredited Moroccan parties. Since the year 2012, the PJD has emerged at the forefront of formal politics of government institutions, but it is not exactly within formal institutions that real political power resides in Morocco.

When looking at the nature of political authority of the Alawite dynasty in Morocco, we are very often confronted with two competing paradigms. On the one hand, cultural interpretations insist on the charismatic role of the Moroccan sultans and their ability to accumulate religious symbols of authority (*baraka*) based on sharifism or the claim of descent from the Prophet Muhammad.² The *bay'a*, or the oath of allegiance to the ruler, was very significant because it sustained a sense of political belonging and facilitated a communal and territorial entity of the medieval Moroccan state.³ From this angle, the *bay'a* to the Moroccan king by different dignitaries of the state has continued to play an important performative role as a symbol of the monarch's dominance and as an act of obedience to him. Therefore, legitimacy in postcolonial Morocco has revolved around the ways in which the monarchy has been able to draw upon an enduring cultural heritage of authority

and a rich field of symbolic language of politics in order to maintain and reinvent its political power.⁴ To this end, the Moroccan king as the center of power can be viewed as being politically very potent.⁵

On the other hand, some analysts of the Moroccan political scene have tried to bring attention to the political strategy and historically coercive, if not violent, nature of the *makhzen*. The *makhzen*, which literally means “storage,” was historically used to mean the sultan’s court, the regional and provincial administration, the army, and all individuals connected with these institutions. One of the most important functions of the *makhzen* was the collection of taxes. When different social groups refused to pay, the *makhzen* often resorted to coercive measures.⁶ From this angle, the strength of the monarchy is therefore interpreted as part of the ability of the *makhzen* to rule through the control of the modern coercive apparatus of the state.⁷

Map 19.1 Morocco



Western Sahara is under Moroccan control but is being contested.

It is stressed that although the monarchy makes use of a cultural mechanism of power, it had historically relied on a combination of administrative control and, most important, armed forces to sustain its hold over political power. In this line of interpretation, the purely cultural facets of power in Morocco cannot be fully grasped if they are not examined with other factors such as force and fear.⁸ Under Hassan II, more specifically, the monarchy was able to establish its power by making use of the civilian and military elite who had proven themselves to be easily amenable and ready to be co-opted. With a few exceptions, the army has been proroyalist and very loyal, and it has in return benefited from the financial opportunities and social privileges that are associated with a well-entrenched system of patron-client relationships that has so strongly characterized the Moroccan regime. Under King Mohammed VI, repression has been part of the tactics used by the state to silence peaceful protest movements such as the February 20 Movement or Hirak al-Rif, a movement that emerged in a marginalized mountainous region in northwestern Morocco.

Key Facts on Morocco

AREA 172,413 square miles (446,550 square kilometers)
CAPITAL Rabat
POPULATION 33,322,699
PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION UNDER 25 43.83
RELIGIOUS GROUPS (PERCENTAGE) Muslim, 99; other, 1
ETHNIC GROUPS (PERCENTAGE) Arab-Berber, 99; other, 1
OFFICIAL LANGUAGE Arabic (official); Berber dialects; French often the language of business, government, and diplomacy
TYPE OF GOVERNMENT Constitutional monarchy
DATE OF INDEPENDENCE March 2, 1956
GDP \$109.2 billion; \$7,600 per capita
PERCENTAGE OF GDP BY SECTOR Agriculture, 14; industry, 24.9; services, 61.1

**TOTAL RENTS (PERCENTAGE OF GDP) FROM NATURAL
RESOURCES 3.17**

FERTILITY RATE 2.13 children born/woman

Source: Central Intelligence Agency, *CIA World Factbook, 2017*, and the World Bank.

Historical Overview

The Moroccan state formation dates back to the medieval period, when it was associated with a politico-religious movement under the leadership of Idris ibn Abdallah. It experienced the rise of the first major Islamic state in the eighth century. The subsequent rise of what became known as the Idrissid state (788–959) created a pattern of political organization that made political power dependent on a combination of religious legitimacy, coercive authority with the effective support of religious and tribal leaders, and, eventually, control over regional trade networks. This historical pattern of political development characterized much of the history of medieval Morocco and has continued to be relevant in different forms and scenarios even in the modern era.

Having come to power in 1666, the current Alawite monarchy is one of the oldest regimes in the world. The centrality of the monarch in this system is constant. The centrality of the monarchy in the political landscape makes the Moroccan case almost unique. Neither Algeria nor Tunisia nor Libya has a political system and a reigning monarchy that dates back to the seventh century, and no Middle Eastern state has similar structures. Compared with Algeria, for example, the monarchy in Morocco was able to use the army and simultaneously mobilize the language and symbols of nationalism that the powerful nationalist Independence Party (Istiqlal) had initially monopolized in its own struggle against colonialism. It is evident, therefore, that the Moroccan state or the nature of its political system is not static and that there have been changes that have constantly pushed the monarchy to adapt itself to a changing historical environment with new challenges. Political authority in Morocco is the result of a combination of precolonial forms of political structures and of the colonial administrative and military apparatus that was created under the French. Morocco has also been able to develop a well-established party system with more or less regular elections.

Since independence, therefore, the establishment of some form of democratic legitimacy has always been necessary for the regime. Morocco's claim to being a democratic state started with the first constitution of 1962, which stipulates that Morocco is a "democratic, social and constitutional monarchy." This constitution established a multiparty system and guaranteed the citizens a number of individual liberties. The constitutional initiative was largely the work of Hassan II, who designed the first constitution and those that followed in 1970, 1972, 1992, and 1996.⁹ The different stages of the constitutional dynamic took into account the modernization of the traditional institutions, but it constantly aspired to give the impression of liberalization of political life. Conscious of the importance of the democratic legitimacy for the continuity and the stability of his family's reign, Hassan II after 1972 accumulated the status of "supreme representative."¹⁰ Over the years, the monarchy surrounded itself with a number of institutions that could not claim a "sovereign legitimacy" because their credibility, existence, and continuity depend on another authority that is superior to them. The monarchy deployed this strategy in order to retain its position as the only vital institution for the functioning of a political system in which the persona of the king constantly remains at the center.

By establishing himself as an arbiter, the king determined to a large extent not only his relationship with other political actors but also among them. The king also used repressive measures in response to the opposition's demands concerning power sharing. Over the years, Hassan II succeeded in perpetuating elite *immobilisme* and creating a clientelist network in which economic self-interest became part of the elite's shared values.¹¹

In the 1990s, the search for democratic legitimacy became even more pressing for the regime, which needed to constantly reinvent itself. The 1990s symbolized a new era in the political history of Morocco as the monarchy started to engage in a process of political liberalization. Different measures were taken in order to consolidate the rule of law. Following the 1992 constitutional revision, administrative tribunals were established as well as a council

responsible for the control of the constitutionality of laws (1994). The local and legislative elections of 1993 and 1997 were held under relatively transparent conditions, and opposition newspapers and a number of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and political parties flourished. Various measures were taken in order to improve the country's human rights record.¹²

In addition, the king was involved in negotiations with the opposition parties in order to form a new government. After an unsuccessful attempt in 1994,¹³ Hassan II succeeded in convincing Abderrahmane Yousoufi, the leader of the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP), to build a government of *alternance*.¹⁴ Formed in 1998, this government was largely drawn from opposition parties (the USFP and the Independence Party), which were excluded from power during a long period of Hassan's reign.

The regime also tolerated the participation of moderate Islamists in political life. The inclusion of moderate Islamists, notably the Justice and Development Party (PJD) and the socialists, was part of a strategy to contain potential challengers to the regime. As it functions in the Moroccan system, co-optation is mainly about absorption. The opposition in Morocco is often co-opted by the political system and eventually absorbed by it. Once integrated into the *makhzen* system, any potential challenger becomes a de facto supporter of that same system. Once common interests are developed between the central power and opposition groups and once opposition groups have access to privileges, the prospect of challenging the system becomes very limited. In the last ten years of his rule, Hassan II was portrayed as a protector of human rights and a promoter of reforms, thus providing the right conditions for a smooth succession.

With the ascendance to power of King Mohammed VI in July 1999, there was continuity in the discourse of "constitutional monarchy."¹⁵ Mohammed VI initiated genuine reforms in various fields. To improve women's rights, he appointed a royal committee to reform the *moudawana* (the legal code and the set of laws relating to families and family issues). This initiative culminated in the adoption of a

family code that is one of the most progressive by regional standards.¹⁶ He established a Moroccan commission for truth and justice in 1999 in order to compensate the victims of the “years of lead,” a reference to the years of human rights abuses and illegal detentions and imprisonment of opposition leaders.¹⁷ The press witnessed more freedom than it had under Hassan’s rule. Mohammed VI called for a fight against poverty and established the National Initiative for Human Development. In the educational field, a National Charter for Education and Training was initiated.

Despite the positive changes and the more liberal style of Mohammed VI, no constitutional reforms have been aimed at establishing a balance of power among different political institutions. The system of *alternance* was reversed with the appointment of a technocrat as prime minister in 2003. The process and pace of reforms in Morocco have continued to be monopolized and decided upon mainly by the monarchy. Most of the reforms were designed by the king and his closest *makhzen* entourage. Priority is given to social and economic reforms, while the debate on political reforms has been marginalized. Despite the 2011 constitutional reform, currently there is an executive monarchy with a shadow government of advisers and royal committees in charge of strategic issues asserting a monopoly control over key matters.¹⁸

Social Transformation and Challenges

Historically, colonialism and the gradual integration of Morocco into the world economy were the most important forces behind major social transformations. To a large extent, the liberalization of the economy and the structural adjustment programs from the 1980s until the present day are a different version of the same historical phenomena that in the early twentieth century set in motion the forces of capitalism and modernity, with their complex and drastic social and cultural transformations throughout the developing world. As in other countries in the Middle East, there have been different facets to the social transformations that affected Moroccan society. Probably the most important transformations manifested themselves through the increasing waves of immigration, the rural-urban divide, change in labor formation, and education. All of these social effects were, in fact, interrelated.

Since independence, Morocco's economic policy has concentrated on growth. Although the country was able to improve the standard of living of small segments of Moroccan society in the 1960s, the social condition of the majority did not necessarily change. From a geographical point of view, the immediate postcolonial period perpetuated the colonial distinction that existed between *al-maghrib annafi'i* (useful Morocco) and *al-maghrib gayr annafi'i* (useless Morocco), as economic growth was limited to the northwestern and central areas, while the southern parts, the Rif area, and some parts of the Atlas remained unaffected if not marginalized. More significant concern for social development started to emerge in the 1970s, especially with the 1973 to 1977 development plan that involved more spending in the social field and in the educational sector. Between 1970 and 1975, public spending on education went from 3.5 percent to 5 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). From the 1980s to 2000, spending on education remained relatively constant, at an average of 5.7 percent of GDP. Income per capita in Morocco remained one of the lowest in the Middle East and

North Africa (MENA) region. In 1975, it was estimated at \$2,186, while in the mid-1980s, it reached \$2,805. Between 1990 and 2001, it went from \$3,096 to \$3,374.

Adult literacy has remained relatively low, even though it has improved over the years. There has been a steady increase in the literacy rate, from 19.8 percent in 1970 to 28.6 percent in 1980, and from 43.9 percent in 1995 to 49.8 percent in 2001. Women were comparatively less affected by this improvement, as we see positive but slower changes taking place. In 1970, the female adult literacy rate was 8.2 percent, and it reached 20 percent in 1985. Between 1990 and 2001, the literacy rate for women went from 24.9 percent to 37.2 percent. But social and educational problems were too deep, and overall, the condition of large segments of Moroccan society did not improve. Organized very often under the umbrella of trade unions and leftist parties, social movements intensified and were therefore a permanent feature of the 1970s and 1980s. While social unrest remained part of the Moroccan landscape, it became less consolidated and more spread out and dispersed in the 1990s and in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

Statistics about internal migration reveal the kind of social transformations that over the years have affected Moroccan society. Between 1907 and 1955, Casablanca, for example, went from having a Muslim population of twenty thousand to having one of four hundred thousand. During the same period, Fez doubled its population from eight thousand to sixteen thousand.¹⁹ By the mid-1980s, the old medina of Fez had a population of 250,000, far exceeding the one hundred thousand people it was supposed to sustain. In some areas, the density was as high as ten thousand people per hectare.²⁰ The concentration of the population in old cities like Fez has contributed to some alarming health conditions and a deteriorating infrastructural urban environment. Overall, urban dwellers in Morocco made up 27.7 percent of the country's population in 1955 and 31.9 percent in 1965. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the urban population grew steadily, moving from 34.6

percent in 1970 to 48.8 percent in 1990. By 2017, 59.6 percent of Morocco's population lived in urban areas.

One of the immediate effects of the massive waves of immigration that started to take place in different cities was not simply the metamorphosis of the architectural and urban landscape but also the social transformations that resulted. Cities in Morocco became attractive destinations for poor peasants who were territorially displaced from their tribal context and gradually integrated into a kind of lumpen proletariat associated with a growing, market-oriented economy. In the 1950s and 1960s, between 5 percent and 10 percent of the landholding families owned more than 60 percent of the land in Morocco, 50 percent to 55 percent owned less than 40 percent, and about 40 percent owned no land at all.²¹ This created a situation whereby the lure of economic opportunities became the main factor driving landless peasants to migrate to cities. It was not by coincidence that the majority of migrants came from areas with the most meagre resources, areas such as the Sous, Draa, Tafilalet, and Figuig in the southern part of Morocco. The mountainous areas of the Anti-Atlas, High Atlas, and Rif were also major sources of rural migration.²²

One of the immediate gender effects of structural adjustment programs is the transformation of the workforce. Morocco's industrial labor force increased from 223,000 to more than one million between 1975 and 1990; and garment manufacturing, which started to employ women, has been most important. Women by 1993 made up 25 percent of the ninety-five thousand Moroccans who were working in the manufacturing labor force. The rapid growth of the garment industry contributed not only to the transformation of the Moroccan economy but also to the country's social and cultural fabric.²³

The fact that Morocco began to increase its exports of manufactured products in such sectors as garments and canned fruit and vegetables facilitated the conditions for opening up the industrial labor force for women. The focus on labor-intensive manufacturing for export had as a consequence the large-scale incorporation of

women into the Moroccan workforce. Following the 1980s and the economic readjustment programs that removed taxes and favored exports, we see a major expansion of the Moroccan garment industry. Almost all who work in garment factories are now female.²⁴ This has been a drastic change in a generally patriarchal society where women in the 1960s and 1970s were not supposed to participate in public enterprises or be incorporated in industry. Before the 1980s, private garment industries employed mainly men or limited women to low-paying and unskilled labor. The Moroccan garment industry has been a major factor contributing to the transformation of the labor force.

In the long run, however, women workers have started to feel occupational instability and insecurity as the garment factories, in the face of the recent economic downturn, started to shut down. The competitive aspect of the garment industry and the economic crisis of 2008 to 2010 have created for these women constantly unstable economic conditions. For Moroccan workers in general and women more specifically, employment has turned out to be increasingly insecure and short lived. Workers are confronted by new situations in which they might be hired for only a short period of time before they are laid off. As Moroccan workers have moved into the twenty-first century, they are suddenly finding themselves confronted with the difficult realities of a consumer society, the elusive nature of labor legislation, and the economic ups and downs of an economy that is increasingly market oriented. More and more workers, including women, are employed in industries and factories without basic labor rights and without protective regulations concerning minimum wages, working hours, or benefits. While liberalization in Morocco is providing jobs for some, it is simultaneously widening the gap between the rich and the working poor and contributing to the creation of a feeling of alienation not only among the workers but in the middle class as well.²⁵

Political Institutions

Morocco is one of the first countries in the MENA region to have established modern political institutions. However, this system came hand in hand with the elaboration of a constitutional arsenal that was designed to limit the establishment of democratic institutions and guarantee the political supremacy of the monarch. The first political parties were created before or soon after independence. The Party of Independence (PI; 1944) gained its strength and legitimacy during the colonial period. The fragmentation of the PI gave rise in 1959 to the left-wing National Union of Popular Forces (UNFP), which was itself later displaced by the emergence of the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP, 1974). The bifurcation of political parties has gradually led to the creation of an assortment of pro-royalist political parties of various ideological stripes, such as the National Rally of Independents (RNI, 1978) or the Constitutional Union (UC, 1983). This started to pave the way for the establishment of a fragmented partisan scene largely manipulated by and under the control of King Hassan II.

Over the years, the main political parties have gradually lost their credibility and have been subject to further fragmentation. In the 1990s, new political parties were created as a result of a split from existing political parties, such as the Front of Democratic Forces (FFD), whose leading figures were members of the Party of Progress and Socialism (PPS). Other parties were created as a result of the integration of or fusion with existing political parties; such is the case for the PJD (1998). Since the ascendance to power of King Mohammed VI, there has been a growing tendency to create small political parties organized around issues related to environment, liberalism, and Islamism. During the past eighteen years, twenty-three political parties were created.

Despite the 2006 party bill, Morocco continues to have a growing number of small political parties that are not necessarily based on

competing “societal projects” but are rather the outcome of “personal projects” of an opportunistic elite aiming at taking advantage of their position as leaders of political parties to approach the inner circle of power (Maghraoui and Zerhouni 2014).²⁶

The fragmented party system in Morocco was supplanted by a whole range of trade unions. This contributed to additional segmentation of the political scene and subsequently to the reinforcement of the centrality of the monarchy.²⁷ In the more recent past, unions have gone further in terms of deepening their internal divisions. As has been the case for political parties, most of the trade unions have lost their power and ability to mobilize significant numbers of people.

As for the parliament, despite its establishment since 1963 and the reinforcement of its prerogatives from one constitution to the other, it remains weak and subordinate to the monarchy. Its primary role, as its history shows, is to serve as an institutional framework that contributes to the stability and continuity of the political system. Between 1963 and 2018, Morocco had ten legislatures. The parliament has continued to exist on a permanent basis despite a short period during which it was dissolved.²⁸ From one legislature to another, the constitutional powers of the parliament have been reinforced but without giving it the necessary tools to have an impact on political outcomes.

With the 2011 constitution, more powers were given to the parliament in the fields of lawmaking and government oversight. The domain of the law has been enlarged to cover different sectors of political, economic, and social life (Article 71). The power to initiate laws concurrently belongs to the head of government and to members of the parliament (MPs; Article 78).²⁹ In the field of government oversight, the current parliament reserves one meeting per year to evaluate public policies (Articles 70, 101). One meeting per month is reserved for the head of government to respond to general policy questions (Article 100) and for a report on the government’s activity (Article 101). The new constitution makes it easier to create fact-finding committees; one-third is required instead

of the majority of the members of one Chamber (Article 67). Another important change in the 2011 constitution is its condemnation of parliamentary transhumance.

Despite the relative strengthening of the parliament's constitutional powers and the change in its composition, the legislative body still confronts limitations imposed by the constitutional provisions. The parliament remains relatively inaccessible to civil society organizations; the constitutionalization of the secrecy of committee meetings (Article 68) contradicts the principle of access to information and transparency of parliamentary work. The parliament remains subordinated to the government. In terms of parliamentary oversight powers, the control of the budget is still limited by the constitutional rule to maintain macroeconomic balance (Article 77). The head of government can dissolve the Chamber of Representatives (Article 104). This is a new provision that gives the government more control over parliament. Some sectors, such as the security services, escape parliamentary control altogether.³⁰

The monarchy maintains its predominance over the parliament, which allows it to orient and influence the parliament's work. The king addresses messages to the parliament when presiding over the opening sessions of the legislative year. These messages, which cannot be the object of any debate, set the political and parliamentary agenda for the year and serve as a reference for MPs in their debates. The king can demand that the two chambers proceed to a new reading of any draft or proposed bill, and the parliament cannot refuse (Article 95). The king maintains the power to dissolve one or both chambers (Article 96). Finally, the king signs and ratifies treaties. Parliament does not have the power to approve treaties that have a political or military dimension or those that can result in a law being either abrogated or modified.³¹

Besides constitutional limitations, the Moroccan Parliament is constantly confronted with the challenge of translating its new constitutional powers into practice. Seven years after the promulgation of the 2011 constitution, the process of implementing

some provisions has been very slow. In terms of adopting the nineteen organic laws stipulated in the 2011 constitution, only five were adopted by mid-2014. Some important organic laws such as the one on introducing the Amazigh language have taken longer to be enacted.

Additional measures should be undertaken in order to guarantee the conditions for more efficiency and greater autonomy in parliamentary work. The Parliament suffers from its tarnished image³² and a crisis of representativeness: The right to vote is not guaranteed to all Moroccans, including those who live outside the country. The new constitution recognizes their right to vote; however, the organic law of the Chamber of Representatives introduced the procedure of proxy voting. There is also a tendency among Moroccans to vote less, which is very much indicative of the present crisis. During the last two legislative elections, the rates of abstention were very high compared with previous elections (37 percent in 2007, 45 percent in 2011, and 43 percent in 2016). The electoral system and districting (gerrymandering) do not favor the emergence of a strong parliamentary majority. During the last two legislative elections, even though the PJD won a majority seats, the party leader had to negotiate with ideologically different political parties to be able to build a majority.

Photo 19.1 A supporter of the Islamist Justice and Development Party (PJD) shouts slogans during a campaign rally ahead of the communal and regional elections in the city of Tinghir in southeastern Morocco on August 31, 2015. The local elections were the first since King Mohammed put forward a new constitution.



REUTERS/Youssef Boudlal

Political Economy

When Hassan II came to power in 1961, he was able to acquire large amounts of land that were previously under the control of the colonial settlers. Granting positions in the 1970s to senior administrators in the public and private sectors became part of what provided the monarchy with powerful leverage for constantly rotating its elite, segmenting and subsequently controlling them. Hassan II was able to concoct different political and economic strategies to maintain a permanent factionalism of the elite.³³ The use of economic power for political maneuvering and the use of politics for economic gains were possible through the control of key sectors such as banking, industry, and agriculture.

In its modern structure and with more sophisticated means, the *makhzen* has been able to have a stronger hold over the economy.³⁴ With the economic policies of structural adjustment programs since the 1980s and an overall shift toward a more market-oriented economy, the *makhzen's* use of economic power, which started under Hassan II, has in fact been much further elaborated and more accentuated under the current king, Mohammed VI. It has become part of what has been termed an *economization* of the strategies of legitimization.³⁵

The most frequently cited example of the monarchy's hold on economic power is Omnium Nord African, commonly known among Moroccans as ONA, an industrial conglomerate that has gross revenues that exceed 5 percent of Morocco's GDP. Thanks to a close circle of elites who are well trained as technocrats and financiers, ONA was able to diversify its investment in order to include such varied sectors as commercial banking, supermarkets, telecommunications, real estate, and agro-industry. Overall, the policies of economic liberalization have resulted in a greater concentration of wealth and have therefore accentuated the

historical power of the monarchy's well-entrenched patronage system.

The systematic push for structural adjustment programs during the past three decades has encouraged a free-market economy, foreign investment, private education, employment in the private rather than public sector, and more flexible labor policies. Service-sector industries like marketing, finance, education, tourism, and the media have been promoted. With these reforms, the rate of urban employment among the young and educated rose significantly by 2000, to reach close to 30 percent of the active urban labor force. Wealthy businesspeople have been able to adapt themselves to structural adjustment. Morocco's most famous professional organization, the Confédération Générale Economique Marocaine, has often worked in harmony with palace politics. The monarchy is therefore immune to any form of pressure from business leaders.³⁶ The elite social classes that have been able to integrate the different networks of this new economic environment are able to benefit from it. The children of these elite have access to capital and to power to help them find jobs, facilitate business deals, and accumulate more wealth.

From a macroeconomic perspective, the programs of structural adjustment gradually weakened the traditional role of the state to generate jobs, provide services for the people, and satisfy their various demands. This situation has led to increased poverty in major cities and in the countryside. Neighborhoods such as Darb al-Sultan, Hay al-Mohamadi, Sidi Ma'arouf, and Sidi Othman in Casablanca; Taqadoum and Douar al-Doum in Rabat; and similar areas in other cities have some of the highest levels of poverty and unemployment in the country. According to reports by the World Bank, one Moroccan in five currently lives below the poverty level. Morocco is now known for what are commonly called *les barques de la mort* (the death boats), which illegally carry young people in search of a better future across the Mediterranean Sea to Europe; many die during the journey. Economic changes have also brought about more social problems, job insecurity, social melancholy,

alienation, and a general sense of disconnection and detachment from social and political practices.³⁷

Whether it is expressed by the young people who are crossing the Strait of Gibraltar in the death boats, members of the Moroccan association of the unemployed, factory workers in Casablanca, or small farmers in the Souss and the Atlas, there is in Morocco a growing social dissatisfaction with the state and its inability to deal with pressing social issues. Hence, the traditional social role of the state has started to be gradually replaced by the rise of an active Moroccan civil society, supported most often by international NGOs. Representatives from Moroccan human rights associations, women's solidarity groups, and many local civil society groups are trying to capture the attention of a growing number of marginalized youth who are easily attracted by Islamist discourse or by radical religious ideologies.

The Islamists of the PJD and the Monarchy

In March 2011, the king of Morocco announced the reform of the constitution. The Party of Justice and Development (PJD) was at the forefront of the supporters of the constitutional reforms orchestrated by the palace. The PJD clearly found the new regional and national context to constitute an ideal opportunity to finally convince the regime that it could be trusted and relied upon. They called upon Moroccans to vote yes on the project of the constitution that was submitted to referendum on July 1, 2011. The PJD's secretary general, Abdelilah Benkirane, declared repeatedly that he supports a monarchy that reigns and governs. For him, a monarchy following the Spanish or British model is not a convenient alternative for Morocco because of the role of the monarch as arbiter and as *amir al mouminin*.

On November 25, 2011, the PJD was able to win a historical election by winning most seats in the parliamentary elections. The Interior Ministry announced that the PJD took 107 out of 395 seats, a position that gave the Islamists the right to lead the Moroccan government. As a result of the new constitutional reforms, King Mohammed VI had to appoint the head of government from the party that had the majority of seats in the parliament. The success of the PJD in these elections was, in a way, good news for both the party and the *makhzen*. For the PJD, this was what they had been looking for since their integration into the political system. The PJD was able to progressively move from winning 9 seats in 1997 to 42 seats in the 2002 election. While in 2007 they were able to win 47 seats, in 2011 they scored a significant victory with 107 seats. From the official state's perspective, the voter turnout was 45.4 percent, which was an increase in comparison to the 37 percent from the 2007 parliamentary elections. It is important to mention that eligible voters numbered more than twenty million, and only thirteen million of them were registered for the polls. Only six million voters actually cast their ballots, among which 22.3 percent cast invalid ballots.

Regardless, the Moroccan state capitalized on the success of the PJD. Another positive outcome for the regime was that the elections could be seen as a continuation of the strategy of adaptation and the ability to defuse the more recent social and political tensions that had started with the reform of the constitution. These had naturally resulted with the election of a new parliament and the establishment of a new government drawn largely from the PJD and three other parties, including the communists. Meanwhile, political life seemed to have been resuscitated in the sense that elections are regularly held under a veneer of democratic procedures under the effective control of the monarchy. It is clear that the Moroccan political scene continues to provide us with a peculiar context whereby democratic practices and the techniques and procedures associated with democracy help sustain an undemocratic system of rule.

During the 2011 election campaign, the PJD had announced that it would create about 240,000 jobs, cut poverty in half, and raise the minimum wage by 50 percent. On December 3, 2011, ten PJD members became ministers as a result of a coalition government that included the conservative party of the Istiqlal as well as the Popular Party and a left-wing party known as the Party of Progress and Socialism. The PJD managed to have its members be the heads of key ministries such as the Ministry of Justice and the Foreign Ministry. The establishment of the PJD government was, however, confronted with a major crisis when five of the Istiqlal ministers resigned from the coalition government in July 2013, a situation that threatened to dissolve the government. However, in the long term this political move of the Istiqlal party proved to be more damaging to the Istiqlal than to the PJD, as members of the Independent Party, who were in the opposition, decided to join the coalition government of the PJD. In a matter of months, the Moroccan people were confronted with a situation whereby the political party who was in the opposition became part of the government and an Istiqlal party that was in the government became part of the opposition.

This kind of political behavior is clearly revealing not only of the incoherence of political parties in Morocco but also of the fact that

regardless of the changing and illogical composition of the government, power resides not in the government but in the “deep state” of the *makhzen*. Ministers of governments in this political context act out as managers and implementers, and they can be replaced regardless of their programs or ideological backgrounds. The fact is that the PJD head of government was limited in terms of initiatives and freedom of action because most of the ministers are not responsive to him but to the “deep state.” The ambivalence of this became political reality during the election of the head of the second chamber of parliament, with the members of the Independent Party voting against their PJD “allies” in the government.

The PJD has managed to implement some reforms in the field of justice. It has also managed to deal with thorny economic issues and put forward more liberal economic policies that cut government subsidies for basic goods in order to reduce budget deficits. The government attempted to reform the retirement plan and raise the age of retirement to sixty-three, a move that is more likely to be confronted with a strong opposition from labor unions. The long-term success of the PJD Islamists in the Moroccan political scene will depend first on their ability to make things change for Moroccans as far as social and economic realities are concerned. It also would depend on their ability to carve out an independent political space vis-à-vis palace politics and the *makhzen*. This is unlikely to happen, as the PJD seems to be strongly attached to its strategy of normalizing its presence in the Moroccan political scene and be further blessed by the monarchy. In the long term, the PJD is more likely to gradually lose credibility, as has been the case of the USFP.

By the end of 2015, it was evident that the palace did not want Abdelilah Benkirane to remain the head of government. It was also time to think of new strategies to curb the popularity of the PJD leader in gradual ways without necessarily removing Benkirane’s Islamist party from the government. The signs of this strategy started to appear during the election campaign, which incited Moroccans against Benkirane and his party. This included a well-orchestrated but obscurely organized rally against the so-called “Islamization of

the state.” However, the results of the 2016 parliamentary elections showed that the PJD continued to be an important winner in the electoral battle. Indeed, the PJD increased its number of seats in parliament from 107 to 125, while the Party of Authenticity and Modernity (PAM) succeeded in reaching only 102 seats. Benkirane’s charisma was an important factor for the party’s win in the October 2016 elections.

As Benkirane was lacking a comfortable majority, he had to look for partners to form a coalition government. Behind the scenes, political maneuvering and the instrumentalization of other political parties were sufficient to block the formation of a coalition government headed by Benkirane. Winning the battle of the election did not mean that the PJD and more specifically Benkirane would win in the process of forming the government. The potential coalition parties were clearly more attuned to palace politics rather than the electorate. Following six months of this deadlock, Benkirane was displaced and replaced by El Othmani, who was finally appointed by the king to form a new coalition government. Since his appointment, El Othmani has been a weak head of state, and the PJD has witnessed internal divisions.

Women's Movement

One of the characteristics of the women's movement in Morocco is that it goes beyond gender issues in order to push for political, legal, and educational reforms. Hence, the women's movement has become intertwined with other pressing issues, such as human rights, social and economic equality, parliamentary politics, and religious and educational reforms. The movement has brought together women who were activists in the women's sections of political parties and in associations. Their experience within political parties made them aware of their marginalization within what they often perceived as men's clubs. For many years, political parties have used the pretext of religious and cultural constraints in order to keep women's issues outside of their political agenda and to limit women's visibility and their impact in public life. Many women started to organize themselves into separate associations within which they could easily express their points of view, be heard, and defend their common interests. Women's associations started to emerge in the mid-1980s with the aim of developing a gender-based agenda and engaging in actions that defended their specific interests.

The culmination of the success of the Moroccan women's movement was the passing of the new family law in 2004. Known commonly as the *moudawana*, this family code resulted in new reforms meant to improve the roles and relationships between men and women within the family. Between the late 1950s and 2004, when the new family law was passed, there was not much change in the status of women under civil law. Under the laws of the 1950s, women were legally considered minors, and their access to divorce was limited. Under the new civil law, women are considered equal to men, but under the *moudawana*, they were required to have the consent of their fathers and husbands to open a business or obtain a passport. Women also had only limited property and inheritance rights. The reform of the family code was therefore a major achievement after a long struggle by various associations of women.

Since the early 1990s, reform of the legal system has become the most important issue for the women's movement. One of the main groups promoting women's rights, the Union de l'Action Féminine, organized a campaign to collect one million signatures in order to urge King Hassan II to reform the *moudawana*, the family code. The women's associations had very specific goals: first, to raise to eighteen the minimum age for women to marry; second, to require a judge's authorization for polygamy; third, to have the right to divorce their husbands; fourth, to have new rights to assets acquired during marriage; and finally, to reinforce children's rights. King Hassan II agreed to hear the women's concerns, and he called on a council of religious leaders to look into the matter. By 1993, the women had gained some success in the reform of the *moudawana*,³⁸ but it was very limited. The most important effect of the reforms was the fact that the *moudawana* was opened for the first time to change and, hence, began to be perceived as something less than a sacred legal text.

Under Mohammed VI, the women's movement has gained more ground, and the demands for reform of the *moudawana* became more pressing. Women activists were able to make the reforms part of a national debate. The fact that some of the dispositions in the reform plan touched upon the shari'a (Islamic law) raised the eyebrows of different segments of Moroccan society. More specifically, the Islamists of the PJD, in collaboration with other factions such as Abdessalam Yassine's Al-adl wal-Ihsan (Justice and Spirituality Movement), organized mass rallies against the proposed plan of action. On March 13, 2000, the Islamists launched a large rally in Casablanca, which brought together approximately three hundred thousand demonstrators.³⁹ Simultaneously, some of the more liberal women's NGOs organized a demonstration in Rabat, but it was less successful, at least in terms of the number of people who participated. Their rally drew an estimated one hundred thousand demonstrators.

In October 2003, in a speech before the nation, the king announced important reforms aimed at improving the situation of women and

elevating their subservient status in marital laws. The new family code dealt with some of the grievances that had been formulated by the women's movement since the beginning of the 1990s. It gave women equal rights over the custody and welfare of their children and restricted the practice of polygamy. The legal age of marriage was raised from fifteen to eighteen, and the new code stated that the family is legally under the responsibility of both husband and wife. Wives now could also seek divorce in the same way as husbands, and divorce could be obtained only by mutual consent, which was a change from the former practice of repudiation that did not require the involvement of the court. *Wilaya* in marriage—tutelage, a practice that considered an unmarried woman to be a minor under the law regardless of her age—was abolished. In the new legal text, women can make decisions based on their own free will, choice, and consent.

Although the reforms of the family code have been applauded by feminists in Morocco and abroad, the women's movement is still very actively dealing with the obstacles that are in the way of their implementation and advocating more legal changes.⁴⁰ The Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc is working hard through different campaigns, such as the Equality without Reservation campaign, to press the government and legal institutions to respect the rights of women and to call for equal status in social and economic fields. The women's movement brought the reform of the family code into the public debate while it succeeded in politicizing women's issues and creating more space for their political participation. Women in Morocco have been able to achieve much in comparison with other Middle Eastern and developing countries.

In the local and legislative elections, there have been some signs of improvement as more women are being included. In 1976, no women were elected in the local elections, but by 1983, women comprised 43 out of 15,000 locally elected candidates. The numbers of elected women in 1992 and 1997 were, respectively, 77 and 83. In legislative elections, no woman was elected between 1977 and 1984. In 1993, 2 women were elected. In 1997, 4 women out of 595

members of parliament were elected. In 2002, their number increased to 30 in the lower house and 4 in the upper house as a result of a quota system that was introduced to the Moroccan parliament. There were still 30 women in the lower house as a result of the 2007 elections. In the 2011 legislative elections, there were 66 women out of 395 in the lower house. In the 2016 legislative elections, 81 women were elected in the lower house, thus reaching 21 percent of the composition of the chamber.

The debates over the status of women and their gradual involvement in political participation in the public sphere should be viewed in the broader context of the efforts by the Moroccan state to move ahead with some forms of liberalization and also to contain the social and political forces unleashed by the rise of political Islam. More recent debates about rape, sexual harassment, and equal rights for inheritance have surged in the public sphere, and it is more likely to be on the agenda of women's rights for the years to come. In 2016, the parliament adopted a law on violence against women. Despite its limits, it provides a legal framework to protect women's rights, especially when it comes to domestic violence.

Amazigh Movement

The rise of the Amazigh movement within the past two decades can be considered one of the most important forms of cultural discourse and will likely reshape the cultural map and politics in Morocco. Amazigh refers to the cultural identity of the original inhabitants of Morocco, and *Imazighen* means literally “free people” or “noble people.” The Amazigh label came to replace Berber, which is believed to be pejorative and part of a colonial construct.⁴¹ Since independence, the social movement for Amazigh identity has been more often marginalized, if not repressed. The gradual emergence of civil society in the 1990s has, however, given new life to the movement as a significant expression of identity. Amazigh associations have proliferated in Morocco and today total more than one hundred, with varying degrees of influence.⁴² Although these associations have different foci and political agendas, they all agree on the necessity to safeguard Amazigh culture and defend the linguistic and cultural rights of the Amazigh people.

To avoid the setbacks of the Amazigh problem as it was manifested in Algeria, the Moroccan monarchy reacted to identity politics in a gradual and calculated way. The initial reaction to the emerging influence of the Amazigh issue came from Hassan II. In his speech on August 20, 1994, the late king insisted on the necessity for preserving Amazigh culture and for introducing the Tamazight language into schools. Four days after the speech, national television started to broadcast the news in Tamazight three times a day. King Mohammed VI has continued the same kind of policy. The monarchy has sought to appropriate the Amazigh cause and make it part of its own field of politics.⁴³ On October 17, 2001, Mohammed VI created the Institut Royal de la Culture Amazighe (IRCAM). In addition to promoting Amazigh culture and art, one of the main goals of the institute is the introduction of the Tamazight language into the Moroccan educational system. In March 2010, a special Amazigh television channel was launched. In the 2011 constitution, the Amazigh language was recognized.

Like the Islamist movement, the Amazigh movement is by no means homogeneous. The heterogeneous nature of the movement was revealed in a more pronounced way around the issue of introducing the Amazigh language into the educational system because the realization of this objective was surrounded by much controversy. The various Amazigh associations had different views concerning the choice of the linguistic character and transcripts of Amazigh writing. Three systems of transcription have been suggested: the Arabic alphabet, the Latin alphabet, and the Tifinagh alphabet. Those who advocated the use of Arabic argued that the Amazigh language has always been written in Arabic and identified with Islam. Composed mainly of Islamist associations, the proponents of Arabic transcripts rejected the use of Latin characters. Latin was considered an expression of Western hegemonic values that would ultimately be threatening to the preservation of Amazigh identity.

In contrast, the promoters of the Latin alphabet argued that since most of the scholarly work related to the Amazigh language (e.g., dictionaries and grammars) had been done in the Latin alphabet, it would make more sense to retain the Latin alphabet, as it is familiar to a much wider audience. In their view, this would contribute to spreading the language. This group generally emphasizes the fact that there are large numbers of publications, including reviews, literature, and books, that will facilitate the task of preserving the culture.

Finally, those who support the Tifinagh alphabet argue that it is the original Amazigh script, which dates back more than three thousand years. It is important to note that the royal institute, IRCAM, recommended the use of Tifinagh, and King Mohammed VI approved its use. Thus, in February 2003 a communiqué of the Royal Cabinet announced the adoption of the Tifinagh script because it was believed to be meeting the requirements of upholding the integrity of the Amazigh language in its historical and cultural aspects.

As the decision reflects the king's will, most of the political actors did not attempt to criticize it. Protest came more from some Amazigh associations, which considered the king's decision as part of the "domestication of the Amazigh cause." For instance, the TADA association (whose name means "body" in the Amazigh language) strongly denounced the "hypocrisy of the Moroccan monarchy" in dealing with the demands of the Amazigh movement. For TADA, by introducing the Amazigh language into schools the monarchy is only trying to "appropriate, be in control and weaken the cause by emptying it from within."⁴⁴ For the members of this confederation, the government was not providing the necessary means for the introduction of the Amazigh language, which had already officially started in some schools in September 2003.

The Amazigh cultural awakening has been a significant challenge to Moroccan political and cultural life. Although the introduction and officialization of the Amazigh language is seen by some as a positive sign of cultural diversity within Moroccan society, others do not appreciate the utility or pragmatic function of introducing a language that is not widely spoken in the international and global economic context. At the national level, the Amazigh awakening is going to continue to significantly affect the Moroccan political scene. The movement is more likely to strengthen its position in the future as more associative networks beyond borders organize themselves to defend their cultural rights (the Réseau Amazigh pour la Citoyenneté, 2004).

Protest Movements

During the past fifteen years, more and more Moroccans have gone to the street to ask for their rights. It is in the context of weak labor unions and highly discredited and politically impotent Moroccan political parties that the February 20 Movement was able to lead the calls for nationwide protests that demanded economic equality as well as major political changes, including the reform of the constitution. It was referred to as the February 20 Movement because on that date in 2011, approximately 150,000 to 200,000 Moroccans in fifty-three cities across Morocco went to the streets and called for major democratic reforms, chanting the popular Arabic phrase of *al-sha'b uridu dusturan jadid* ["the people want a new constitution"]. The February 20 Movement was undoubtedly inspired by the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt and used similar kinds of Internet and communication means such as Facebook, which made it possible for thousands of young Moroccans to join the movement and subsequently become active in the protests. But it would be misleading to perceive the February 20 Movement simply in terms of its relation with what has happened as a result of the Arab Spring. For a while, the Moroccan context had started to witness a dynamic civil society that became gradually more active in the recent past.⁴⁵ What is important to note is that the Arab Spring has clearly given more momentum to the movement, which itself has energized a Moroccan political field that over the years had become depoliticized.⁴⁶

The February 20 Movement was not mainly the result of economic problems and the critical unemployment situation, nor was it a continuation of the famous "bread riots"⁴⁷ of the 1980s. While the youth called for more social and economic equality and better social welfare services in the fields of health, education, and housing, their demands were more specially focused on political issues. What united the movement was a set of grievances that addressed very clearly the major structural problems that historically characterized the Moroccan political system. Some of the main demands related

the principle of establishing a more democratic constitution with the principle of popular sovereignty as the basis of rule in Morocco. The protestors called for an independent judiciary and the separation of powers.⁴⁸ The people in the streets called for the freedom of the press and an independent media. Prominent in the demands of the February 20 Movement was an end to despotism, the system of corruption, and the trial of key officials who were believed to be involved in the mismanagement of public funds. One of the main slogans in the marches was “*achaab yurid iskat al istibdad, achaab yurid iskat al fassad*” [“the people want the fall of tyranny; the people want the end of corruption”].

Like the different political forces that played themselves out in the context of the 2011 dynamic of revolts in the region, the February 20 Movement was a combination of different ideologies and politically varied social groups united mainly by their opposition to *makhzenian* rule in all its different manifestations. Many young people would typically not want to associate themselves with any political party or association, and the members of the February 20 Movement did not want to claim any form of ideology. From its inception, the movement did not have any formal leadership. In many cities, there was the so-called *tansikiyat*, which were a kind of coordination committees assembling representatives of some left-wing political parties such as the Unified Socialist Party and the Democratic Way (Annahj Demmocrati), human rights associations such as the AMDH, and representatives of Al-Adl Wa-l-Ihssan. These *tansikiyat* were involved, to a certain extent, in giving advice to the youth and coordinating political actions and protests. In many ways, the movement was the initiative of the youth, but it gradually was able to attract all sorts of people and ages.

The regime combined different strategies in its reactions to the demands of the protestors. Reform, co-optation, repression, and intimidation were all used at different moments of the first months of the life of the February 20 Movement to weaken it and discredit it in the eyes of the Moroccans. The regime was able to maintain its reign in the face of popular protests by appropriating the main demands of

reform. In March 2011, the king announced the constitutional reform and its willingness to establish a parliamentary monarchy. It has organized early legislative elections in November of the same year. In addition, the regime has successfully bought off opposition by bringing in figures from the former opposition Justice and Development Party (PJD) to lead the government. Since May 2011, some of the marches of the movement have been violently repressed by the police. The regime tried to co-opt some of the leaders of the movement, such as Oussama Lakhlifi. The latest became a member of the PAM. Besides that, most mainstream political parties established a distance vis-à-vis the movement in order to keep their cozy political positions with the Moroccan regime. While they have appropriated the demands of reform to mobilize during legislative elections, they did not ally themselves with the movement.

With hindsight, the weakening of the movement has been the result of the regime's reactions vis-à-vis the demands of the protestors. It has also to do with internal and regional factors. In terms of internal factors, the movement was not very well organized and ideologically scattered. With the withdrawal of the movement of Al-Adl Wa-I-Ihssan in December 2011, its capacity to mobilize large numbers of protestors has been reduced. In terms of regional factors, the instability and violence that characterized most of the countries in the region, such as Libya and Syria, influenced the capacity of the movement to mobilize around its demands. Moroccans were in a position of "wait and see" and did not want to go to the streets because there was the fear of losing stability.

More importantly, the regime has been successful in weakening the movement; however, it was not able to address major issues that mobilized Moroccans in 2011, such as fighting corruption, establishing social justice, and dealing with youth unemployment. Thus, since 2011 protest and discontent have continued. Besides this, most of the youth of the movement keep their activism in the virtual sphere or by reinvesting the public space through informal initiatives that aim at sensitizing Moroccans to their rights and

exerting more pressure on the regime for more openness and more political reform.⁴⁹

Up to 2018, the movement of protests continued in different regions and forms. The most important protest, known as *al hirak* in Morocco, took place in 2017 as the people in the Rif region, known for its symbolic capital of resistance, went to the streets to claim social and economic rights. The Rif is one of the areas that has been historically marginalized by the monarchy. The demands of the *Hirak* protests were mainly associated with economic hardship and the lack of infrastructures such as a university and a hospital. These social demands were expressed in peaceful ways and became part of new contentious politics that started to take place in other peripheral regions, such as Jerada in the northeastern part of Morocco. The Moroccan state has reacted with an iron fist to these demands, as many of the protestors were arrested and received prison sentences. The leader of the movement, Nasser Zefzafi, was sentenced to twenty years in prison. These recurrent protests suggest that Morocco is in the long term very likely to face major social upheavals that could contribute to more political instability.

In 2018, Moroccans started to engage in new forms of action associated with economic boycott through the use of social media. A major “people’s campaign” took place to denounce the high prices of milk, mineral water, and fuel. The campaign represented a new form of social movement “from below” against the rising costs of living. Using Twitter and Facebook and establishing pages to raise awareness, different individuals managed to create a momentum of an unprecedented social solidarity that started to have a major economic effect. The Moroccan government initially downplayed the impact of the boycott, but it became more serious as the boycott started to bring to the public sphere debates about social inequality, the predatory behavior of the private sector, the relationship between business and political power, major socioeconomic problems, and the inability of the state to deal with these social issues. While the boycott campaign managed to reduce the prices of a number of products, such as dairy, mineral water, and fuel, it has also

exacerbated the lack of confidence that Moroccans have about their political institutions.

Regional and International Relations

Morocco's external policy mirrors its internal policy; its functioning reflects the institutional hierarchy characterized by the predominance of the monarchical institution. The influence of other state and nonstate actors (for example, the government, the parliament, and civil society organizations) has been relatively limited. These actors fulfill a complementary role by carrying out the royal directives concerning specific issues. Geographical factors, strategic interests, and the personality of the late king, as well as his vision of Morocco's role in the MENA region, have played crucial roles in defining the country's regional and international policies. Morocco has often succeeded in striking a balance in the conception of its foreign policy.

Before 1990, Morocco played the "East" card in order to put the West under pressure whenever its interests were not taken into consideration. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, Morocco has used its relationship with the United States as a way of defending its interests in the Euro-Mediterranean basin. Indeed, Hassan II was skilled at establishing good diplomatic relationships even with opposing sides. In the Middle East conflict, he was a trusted mediator while having a relatively good relationship with the state of Israel.⁵⁰ In terms of his relationship with the West, he was courting simultaneously both the United States and Europe. King Mohammed VI's succession to the throne in 1999 brought fresh air in terms of the monarchy's approach to and conception of foreign policy. Since 2000, relations with sub-Saharan countries became a priority in Morocco's foreign policy. Different initiatives were undertaken by the king in order to strengthen Morocco's position in the African continent. In January 2017, Morocco made its request to return to the African Union after thirty-three years of absence.⁵¹

Actors in Morocco's Foreign Policy

The conception of foreign policy is part of the king's *domaine reserveé*. The king's supremacy has been enshrined by different constitutions, which granted him substantial prerogatives in the field of foreign affairs.⁵² Besides the king's constitutional powers, the elaboration of foreign policy in Morocco is dependent on

subjective parameters relative to the king who evaluates, strictly according to his personal convictions, the pace and tactics of any diplomatic enterprise involving Morocco, defines the criteria guiding the designation of national diplomatic operators, determines the scope and limits of alliances and translates priorities.⁵³

Hassan II's charismatic personality and the close relations he entertained with several heads of state accounted for the success of the foreign policy of the kingdom during his reign. Since Mohammed VI has been in power, there have been no changes in the constitutional powers of the monarchical institution, but the new king differentiated himself by consulting a number of political actors and prompting them to formulate suggestions on certain strategic matters such as territorial integrity.⁵⁴

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, one of the so-called *ministères de souveraineté* (ministries of sovereignty),⁵⁵ plays a key role in providing the king with technical facts concerning specific foreign policy issues and in coordinating the activities in this field. The ministry also negotiates international treaties and supervises the work of Morocco's diplomatic missions abroad. The governmental structure mandates that several other departments are also indirectly involved in foreign policy, notably the prime minister, the minister of interior, the minister of finance, and other ministries that are regularly called on for specific missions depending on their competencies and

domains.⁵⁶ Depending on the politico-diplomatic situation, the king may designate the actors in charge of a specific issue. The most significant case is the Western Sahara conflict; the handling of that issue reflects the diversity of the actors involved. The issue was monopolized by the palace and the interior minister during the reign of Hassan II, although political parties and civil society representatives have been more involved under the new ruler.⁵⁷

Despite the fact that the parliament has little room for maneuver in the field of foreign affairs, since the 1980s there has been an increasing role for parliamentary diplomacy.⁵⁸ The parliament has established friendship associations with several countries and has regularly received diplomatic delegations. These friendship groups cooperate in different areas of activity such as the promotion of investments, cultural dialogue, peace, human rights, and democracy. The parliament's diplomatic activity has been instrumental in relation to at least three different issues. The first issue relates to the promotion of the image of a "new Morocco" on the international stage, mainly through international forums and conferences. The second issue relates to the parliament's role in the Western Sahara problem and the defense of territorial integrity. As a result of the parliament's diplomatic activities, recognition of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) has been withdrawn or frozen several times.⁵⁹ The third issue is with regard to reinforcing regional cooperation, particularly in the Mediterranean basin.⁶⁰ The increasing role of parliamentary diplomacy is, however, still disregarded by the text of the constitution, which acknowledges only the parliament's classical functions—namely, legislation and control of the government. So far, parliament's diplomatic function has not been regulated by the Moroccan legislature.

Other actors whose role has become increasingly more visible in foreign affairs are the civil society organizations. Their involvement in Morocco's foreign policy ties in with a broader vision of Morocco's diplomatic actors. This new vision of diplomacy is grounded in the diversity of foreign policy issues, the scope of international cooperation, and the process of societies opening up to each other.

This fact is best captured by the words of King Mohammed VI: “The involvement in diplomatic activities of new actors such as the parliamentary assemblies, local communes, non-governmental organisations, companies and even individuals like performers, intellectuals, artists, [and] sports champions” is essential for the success of diplomatic activities.⁶¹

This new concept of diplomacy also complies with the European Union’s (EU) declared aim of encouraging Mediterranean civil society actors to multiply initiatives and exchanges in order to build mutual understanding among the peoples of the region. Their active involvement has the potential to contribute to a revival, if not reinvention, of the Euro-Mediterranean project. The Moroccan case is significant in this respect. The commitment of the associative actors in the Mediterranean basin as well as their participation at different forums reinforces Morocco’s position and its relations with the EU. Although Moroccan NGOs are not directly involved in the conception of foreign policies, they have a de facto influence and can contribute to their implementation. Civil society actors are the necessary partners of international NGOs. Projects supporting the reforms undertaken by Morocco (human rights and rights of women, immigration, local development, and the fight against poverty) are realized through partnerships with local associations. The network of associations is also active in the organization of conferences aimed at deepening reflection on issues related to foreign policy.⁶²

Determinants of Morocco's International Relations

Morocco's regional and international relations have been determined by at least three interrelated factors: its history and geographic position, its strategic and economic interests, and the Western Sahara conflict. The geography and history of Morocco have made it a bridge between the countries of the MENA region and the West. Its borders with southern African states have also made it a bridge between Arab Africa and sub-Saharan Africa. As Hassan II stated in one of his speeches in 1976, "Morocco is like a tree whose nutrient roots reach deep into the African soil and whose leaves breathe in the winds of Europe." It is not by coincidence that Morocco's geostrategic position has determined to a large extent its politics at the regional and international levels. It has played a considerable role in the development of a number of constant characteristics related to the conception and implementation of Moroccan foreign policy.

Geographically, Morocco is part of five nonhierarchical concentric circles: the Euro-Mediterranean circle, the Maghreb circle, the Arab circle, the Muslim circle, and the African circle. Which circles are given priority in Moroccan foreign policy varies according to the interests of the actors involved. It depends also on whether one refers to these circles as circles of cooperation or circles of identity.

Currently, governmental actors accord great importance to the first two circles. Relations between Morocco and the EU are crucial for the kingdom's economic interests. Thus, the Euro-Mediterranean space constitutes Morocco's first circle of cooperation, predominated by bilateral relations with France, Spain, and Italy. Priority is also given to the Maghreb, whose unity is of political and economic importance. Solving the Western Sahara issue is both a determinant factor and an objective of Morocco's foreign policy in its relations with its immediate neighbors on the southern and northern coasts of the Mediterranean.

As for the last three circles, it is clear that Morocco's foreign policy also relies on keeping its ties of solidarity with the Arab and Islamic world. Hassan II was keen to play a major role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.⁶³ Morocco's African relationships have also been important for the monarchical institution. It seems that with the ascendance of Mohammed VI to power, more interest has been given to cooperation and investment in sub-Saharan Africa. Various agreements have been signed in the fields of commerce, investment, transportation, and telecommunications. The metaphor of the tree is significant. Morocco is first and foremost an African country; its alliance with Europe has strategic purposes, but the kingdom does not neglect its ties with the Maghreb, the Arab region, and the Islamic world.

Morocco's opening to the West is certainly a strategic choice. Starting with simple agreements on trade cooperation in 1969, Morocco has progressed considerably in its relations with its northern Mediterranean neighbors. Whether during the reign of Hassan II or Mohammed VI, Morocco has always searched for a status that exceeds mere association with Europe. Despite their considerable scope, the past agreements between Morocco and the EU do not meet Morocco's ambitions to gain a higher status.

The economic situation of Morocco has also been a determining factor for conducting its foreign policy. Following the comprehensive economic liberalization undertaken in the past fifteen years, Morocco's strategic focus lies in multiple alliances with economic actors on the African, Asian, and American continents. Taieb Fassi Fihri, then minister delegate of foreign affairs, stated that the free-trade agreement signed with the United States ties in with royal directives for a liberal and preferential policy capable of "mobilizing all opportunities for diversifying our partnership, serving the interests of our country and reinforcing the position of the kingdom on the regional level in order to create a platform for attracting investments." Several theses have been advanced to explain Morocco's motives for a free-trade agreement with the United States. Some saw it as a strategy to put pressure on the EU in view of obtaining "advanced

status,” something that Morocco managed to achieve. Others considered the agreement as a part of Morocco’s European vocation.

Strategic Role of the Euro-Mediterranean Policy in Morocco's International Relations

Morocco's Euro-Mediterranean policy has been crucial in its overall regional and international relations. It is the only state among the southern Mediterranean countries to have succeeded in constructing a Mediterranean policy that openly aims at membership in the EU. Since the 1960s, Morocco has continuously cooperated with the northern Mediterranean countries in different fields.⁶⁴ The policy aiming at a special status with the EU was first expressed in 1984 with a solemn demand by King Hassan II for accession to the European Economic Community (EEC), an initiative that proved Morocco's interest in a new relationship with Europe in the form of a political and strategic alliance. Moreover, it was a clear demand for differential or preferential treatment of the Moroccan case over the EEC's other partners with regard to economic, financial, and commercial cooperation. Apart from its objective to extend cooperation on the basis of a special status, the request for membership was clearly connected to the problems concerning the possibilities of modernizing Morocco.

Morocco's accession to the Barcelona Process in 1995 confirmed Morocco's wish to join the EU. The conclusion of the Association Agreement in 1996 (which became effective in March 2000) was another step forward in the cooperation between Morocco and the EU. In addition, the kingdom was the first beneficiary of the MEDA I (1996–1999)⁶⁵ and MEDA II (2000–2004)⁶⁶ programs that deployed financial aid to countries that encouraged reforms in various domains.⁶⁷ Through that process, cooperation was extended to include not only sectors relevant to the country's economic and social development but also further cooperation at the political and security levels.

With King Mohammed VI's succession to the throne in 1999, the state reinforced its ambition for lasting cooperation with the EU,

centering on the economic aspect.⁶⁸ Like his father, the king has stressed the importance of the European agenda for Morocco and has expressed interest in “a partnership that would be more—and better—than a revised and improved association. . . but not a full membership.”⁶⁹ During his visits to several European countries, notably France, Italy, and Spain, Mohammed VI pleaded for a strong and well-balanced partnership. To ensure Morocco’s standing on the international scene and to assume an active role, the new king has called for an “offensive strategy” as part of “an integrated and coherent plan based on the enlargement already initiated in three concentric circles, namely good neighbourhood, active solidarity and strategic partnership.”⁷⁰

Despite the general criticism regarding the European Neighbourhood Policy, there was overall support for Morocco’s wish for obtaining advanced status and being offered greater economic integration as well as establishing intense cultural and political relations.⁷¹ The free-trade agreements concluded with the EU are capable of boosting economic development, but they are also a means to reduce migratory movements and consolidate the European presence in the southern Mediterranean. The declaration of Romano Prodi, president of the European Commission in 2002, that “we have to be ready to propose more than a partnership and less than a membership,” and his concept, formulated later, of “sharing everything but the institutions,” correspond with Morocco’s current political objective of reinforcing its partnership with the EU. The implementation in 2003 of a think tank concerning Morocco’s advanced status met the ambitions of the kingdom. It is part of the country’s diplomatic strategy of pushing for the maximum and justifying its demands with the political, economic, and social progress achieved by the reforms of the past two decades.

Conclusion

Morocco is an interesting case for analyzing the kinds of political syntheses that have historically resulted from attempts at combining traditional forms of political authority with modern forms of institutions. In its quest for some form of political modernity and democratic legitimacy to face the challenges of the twenty-first century, Morocco remains at this time essentially incapable of detaching itself from the weight of its own authoritarian past. It is the centrality of the monarchy that has remained a constant factor in the political landscape of the country. In a political context that has been largely monopolized by the king, the ideological discourse about democracy has never yet been absent. It is clear that the language of democracy and the shallow institutional ramifications that come out of it have so far served mainly the interests of the monarchy very well.

To more optimistic observers, the fact that Morocco had a strong monarchy in parallel with a multiparty system and a parliament makes the country very well equipped politically to embark on the road to democracy. On the more pessimistic side, the omnipotent *makhzen*, its archaic political culture, and the overall clientelist structures of the state represent major stumbling blocks to any real democratization in the country. In the absence of a real democratic constitution and popular sovereignty, the PJD—like the Istiqlal, the USFP, or the Independent Party before it—is more likely to remain an instrument in the hands of an authoritarian *makhzen* in constant search for adapting itself and guaranteeing its survival.

Whatever position one takes, it is clear that the prospects of democratization in Morocco will be determined by a number of concrete political factors. Probably the most important is the political will on the part of the monarchy to give up some of its powers and to move toward another political logic for the establishment of a more democratic constitution that takes more into consideration some of

the basic components of a democratic system such as the separations of powers and accountability of the decision-makers. Another factor is the ability of different political actors, including the monarchy, the business elite, the army, political parties, and the Islamists, to go beyond the short-term visions of survival and realize the long-term value of democracy as a stable form of political system. An equally important factor is to limit the number of parties and to strengthen their position vis-à-vis the monarchy in order to be able to present a more viable democratic political project. Independent and constitutional, more powerful political institutions such as the parliament and the government are essential to the long-term democratic vision. It is only in such conditions that Moroccans can regain confidence in their political parties and that political parties can regain legitimacy by being more courageous and proposing realistic but democratic political alternatives instead of supporting the status quo.

Suggested Readings

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20 Palestine

Alaa Tartir
Benoît Challand

Where and what is Palestine? This is a question that elicits emotional debates, largely due to the importance of Jerusalem for the three revealed religions. Historically, it is the area between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, bounded on the north by Lebanon and on the south by Gulf of Aqaba. This is called “historic Palestine.” Following the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967, “Palestine” became a reduced version of historic Palestine. Today, “Palestine” refers to the Occupied Palestinian Territory (oPt), including the West Bank and Gaza Strip, comprising 22 percent of historic Palestine. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) informally accepted this reduction of Palestine in 1974 and formally adopted it in 1988.¹ In 1993, the PLO signed the Oslo Peace Accords with Israel, which stipulated the emergence of the Palestinian Authority (PA) as the Palestinian governing body in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. According to the Oslo Accords, a Palestinian state—next to Israel—was meant to be established at the end of the decade on the 1967 borders/Green Line through gradual negotiations with Israel.²

However, an independent and sovereign Palestinian state never materialized. After two decades of a failed peace process, the PA approached the United Nations (UN) in 2011, requesting the recognition of Palestine as an independent state. In 2012, the UN offered Palestine the status of a nonmember observer state. But, this state only exists on paper. The recognized State of Palestine lacks the main pillars of statehood: sovereignty, control over borders, ability to govern, population registry, and national independence on financial and migration issues. This state does not include or represent more than half of the Palestinian people who live as refugees in exile. Not only is “Palestine” reduced, but so too the Palestinian people have been reduced to those who live in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip only.

The government of Palestine, represented by the PA, is partially in charge of ruling the 4.8 million Palestinians living in the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and Gaza Strip. But many more Palestinians (another 7.9 million, of which 1.8 million are living as “second-class” citizens of Israel [see Israel, [Chapter 13](#)]) are scattered around the region, not under the PA’s control.³ Technically, they rely on the PLO, an umbrella organization that federates the majority of nationalist Palestinian parties and that has been internationally

recognized as the “sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.” However, today the PLO institutions are largely absent, co-opted by the PA or simply ineffective. The PLO also suffers from a deep legitimacy crisis, as it does not include the Islamic resistance movement (Hamas), which was the dominant political party in the last legislative elections of 2006. Similar reproaches can be leveled against the PA, which is governing fragmented spaces in the West Bank and besieged Gaza Strip, both under military occupation by Israel. Furthermore, since the intra-Palestinian divide in 2007, the PA does not control the Gaza Strip, which remains governed internally by Hamas under an overall Israeli-Egyptian siege and blockade.

The lack of a sovereign Palestinian state and the continuation of the illegal Israeli military occupation according to international law have profoundly affected the social transformation, institutional development, political economy, and politics of Palestine. This chapter also reflects on the ongoing struggle between the two main Palestinian parties, Hamas and Fatah, and why the ambiguity of the relations between the quasi-state institutions of the PA and the officially prominent role of the PLO are fundamental for Palestinian politics. Additionally, it highlights more recent developments such as the growing impact of the Palestinian-led Boycott, Divestment, and Sanction (BDS) movement, the accession to the International Criminal Court (ICC), the consequences of the wars on Gaza from 2008 to 2014, the wave of protests in the Gaza Strip called “The Great March of Return,” and the impact of the US Trump administration.

Key Facts on the West Bank and Gaza Strip

AREA 2,325 square miles (6,020 square kilometers); West Bank (including East Jerusalem), 2,184 square miles (5,655 square kilometers); Gaza, 141 square miles (365 square kilometers)

SEAT OF GOVERNMENT Ramallah and Gaza City; intended capital: East Jerusalem

POPULATION West Bank, 2,881,687 (plus 636,452 Israeli settlers in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem 2017); Gaza, 1,899,291 (2017)

PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION UNDER 25 West Bank, 57.6; Gaza, 63.6 (2017)

RELIGIOUS GROUPS (PERCENTAGE) Muslims (Sunni Islam), 97; Christians, 3 (Note: In the West Bank, Christians live mainly in Jerusalem, Beit Jala, Beit Sahur, Bethlehem, and Ramallah; the main Christian denomination is Greek Orthodox.)

LANGUAGE Arabic; Hebrew spoken by many Palestinians; English widely understood

TYPE OF GOVERNMENT Some Palestinian self-government; Israel retains ultimate authority as the occupying power

GDP (NOMINAL) West Bank and Gaza, \$14,498 million; \$3,097 per capita (2017)

PERCENTAGE OF GDP BY SECTOR West Bank: agriculture, 2.9; industry, 20.1; services, 77; Gaza: agriculture, 4; industry, 17.9; service, 78.1

TOTAL RENTS (PERCENTAGE OF GDP) FROM NATURAL RESOURCES

West Bank and Gaza: Figures not available

FERTILITY RATE West Bank: 4.3 children born/woman; Gaza: 4.5 children born/woman (2017)

KEY POLITICAL FIGURES President: Mahmud Abbas (also known as Abu Mazen); Prime Minister: Rami Hamdallah (Independent/Fatah, West Bank)

Sources: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "Preliminary Results of the Population, Housing and Establishments Census 2017"; "Statistical Yearbook of Palestine 2017"; "National Accounts at Current and Constant Prices, 2016."

History of State-Building: The Creation of a Quasi State

The famous picture taken on the White House lawn on September 13, 1993, portraying US President Bill Clinton inviting Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat to shake hands, was taken during the signing of the Declaration of Principles. The Declaration aimed “to put an end to decades of confrontation and conflict, recognize their mutual legitimate and political rights, and strive to live in peaceful coexistence.” It marked the mutual recognition of the PLO and Israel and set the two parties on a path toward a two-state solution.

The handshake marked what many hoped to be the end of a decades-long conflict. For Palestinians, the establishment of Israel was a *Nakba*, the Arabic word for catastrophe, since they had lost 70 percent of the territories of historic Palestine and more than seven hundred thousand Palestinians either fled or were expelled by Israeli troops from their homeland. It began the Palestinians’ long quest for their own independent leadership to be able to enter into full negotiations with Israel. For more than fifty years, this journey took place largely in the shadow of violence and lack of self-rule. It was only when new facts on the ground changed the international calculus in the early 1990s that a de facto, nonexistent peace process transformed into negotiations over nascent state structures.⁴

One new reality that forced Israelis and Palestinians to start negotiating was the new world order created in the wake of the 1991 Persian Gulf War. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the success of the US-led coalition against Saddam Hussein during Operation Desert Storm in 1991 toppled the international balance on which the PLO had based its strategy (see [Chapter 12](#)). Arafat feared that, unconstrained by Soviet vetoes, Washington would impose a settlement of the conflict favorable to Israel but short of the “international legitimacy” enshrined by UN Security Council Resolutions (UNSCRs) 242 and 338. The exclusion of the PLO as the representative of the Palestinians at the October 1991 Madrid conference compounded his apprehension.

Second, by 1993 the PLO was broke. Arafat’s decision to support Saddam Hussein in 1990 had estranged the PLO from its Gulf supporters, losing the organization an estimated \$10 billion in assets either from Gulf states’ support or through the remittances that some four hundred thousand Palestinians from the region would have handed over to the PLO. Even as Arafat was approving the principle of secret direct negotiations between the PLO and Israel in the Norwegian capital of Oslo in August 1993, his organization was laying off thousands of functionaries. The emergence of a high-profile Palestinian

delegation from the oPt at the 1991 Madrid conference aggravated Arafat's fear that the PLO stood at the point of eclipse. A new leadership from the oPt could take the lead, or so it appeared to Arafat.

Third, the multilateral negotiating process born of the Madrid conference was going nowhere. For ten rounds, the Palestinian delegation insisted that Israel accept the applicability of UNSCR 242 to the oPt as a precondition for negotiations. Meanwhile, the Israelis preferred to discuss the minutiae of Palestinian self-government. In addition, Israel launched an expansion of Jewish settlements in the oPt, fueled in part by the immigration of four hundred thousand Jews and others from the former Soviet Union. A new and enduring Israeli strategy emerged: procrastinating during negotiations in order to change the facts on the ground. In 1992, former prime minister Yitzhak Shamir said that his aim at Madrid had been to keep the talks going for ten years, by which time Israel's annexation of the West Bank "would be an accomplished fact," a statement echoing that of a close aide of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in 2004, who said that Israel's decision to disengage from the Gaza Strip—a move that was completed in August 2005—was only meant as "the freezing of the political process. . . . The disengagement is actually formaldehyde. It supplies the amount of formaldehyde that's necessary so that there will not be a political process with the Palestinians."⁵ Time and again, serving Israeli prime ministers declared their deep objection to a recognition of a Palestinian state, a tendency that was again endorsed by the US administration under President Trump.⁶

The 1993 secret negotiations in Oslo rescued the flagging fortunes of the PLO. Arafat was facing the challenge of an independent leadership from the oPt and the prospect of increasingly popular Islamist movements that grew stronger with the first intifada (1987–1993).⁷ Israel exploited Arafat's weakness and extracted an agreement from the PLO in which Israel only committed to a gradual negotiation with the Palestinians. Playing with the internal divisions of Palestinians was one side of the coin. The other, for Israel, was to strike a deal in which it could always pull the plug on the negotiations in order to continue its policy of changing facts on the ground and enhancing its bargaining position, thus to keep procrastinating as it expanded illegal settlements.

For Arafat, it was mostly a symbolic victory. The PLO had finally been recognized as a quasi-state actor with new financial leverage since a cohort of international donors flocked to Washington at the end of 1993, promising hundreds of millions of dollars of aid to build a new Palestinian state. Arafat's gamble was that the so-called peace of the brave would pay dividends to the whole Palestinian population—a strategy that proved only half true in the first years of the Oslo period and then totally collapsed with the failure of the final agreements seven years later.

The Declaration of Principles, also known as the Oslo I agreement, was followed a year later by the Oslo II agreement that paved the way for the creation of the PA, established in July 1994. The first euphoric moments of the Oslo years temporarily hid the problematic asymmetric architecture of the Oslo Accords. On the one hand, the accords promised the creation of a Palestinian state but only through a stage-based series of negotiations (during a five-year interim period in which the Palestinians enjoyed self-government only in limited portions of the territories), while, on the other hand, they consecrated Israel's entitlement to steer the peace process on the basis of its own security claims. By renouncing the PLO's "use of terrorism and other acts of violence" and vowing to discipline "violators," Arafat conceded that the basis of the peace process would be Israel's security and not, as the Palestinian delegation had insisted at Madrid, international law. By annulling in 1996 all articles of the covenant of the Palestinian National Council (the PLO legislative body) inconsistent with Israel's right to exist, Arafat was, for many Palestinians, affording legitimacy to the Jewish state prior to any reciprocal recognition of the legitimacy of a Palestinian state in the territories occupied by Israel in the June 1967 War.

As many observers noted, with Oslo, Israel had ceded *representative* legitimacy to the PLO but had given no quarter on the Palestinians' right to self-determination. Instead of peace for land, the logic of Oslo was an outsourcing of Israeli security concerns,⁸ a task that the nascent PA took seriously, especially when it came to cracking down on groups opposed to Oslo and, in particular, Islamist groups. This is the logic that made it possible for Israeli governments to realize a strategy of asymmetric containment.⁹ Let us therefore have a look at the broader social consequences for Palestinians in general before we analyze in greater detail the institutional framework of this asymmetric containment.

Social Transformation: Displaced Elites, Missing Territorial Constituencies, and Fragmentation

The *Nakba* and the displacement of more than seven hundred thousand Palestinians dealt heavy blows to Palestinian society: Most of the previous landowning or commercial elites left the region in 1948 and 1949, leaving the remaining Palestinian people without clear political and economic leaders, and dependent on external powers. This ties to the more general problem of identity formation and the emergence of positive beliefs about the existence of a “nation.” Contrary to Western historical experience, national identities in the Middle East (that is, feeling or describing oneself as a Palestinian, Syrian, or Iraqi citizen) are only a recent construct, situated at the turn of the twentieth century when these Middle Eastern states became semisovereign entities. Rashid Khalidi suggests that there was already a Palestinian identity in the second half of the nineteenth century, most notably among urban elites.¹⁰ Yet given the massive dislocation of 1948, the incapacity for Palestinians to keep the PLO free from external Arab influences, and the fact that Egypt and Jordan administered the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, respectively, from 1948 to 1967 meant that Palestinians had neither the power nor the institutions to reinforce their sense of national cohesion, let alone steer the course of the national struggle against Israel.

With a population dispersed across the globe, most elites in exile, and territories under the control of other governments, there could not be a direct link between the emerging political leaders and the land; neither could there be clear leaders with easily reachable constituencies. The June 1967 War proved to be a watershed for that matter since Israel now came to occupy the whole of historical Palestine, dislodging Egypt and Jordan from their administrative role and putting a definitive end to Egypt’s desire to be the main Arab regional power. UNSCR 242 in 1967 called for a peace settlement based on the exchange of land for peace, putting the focus almost exclusively on the occupied portions of mandatory Palestine. Palestinians, albeit without a clear leader, were now facing the occupying power on their own, and a revived sense of nationalism emerged in various ambits in which the idea of armed struggle was essential in federating Palestinians and Palestinian identity together.

For decades, pan-Arab leaders such as Gamal Abdel Nasser instrumentalized the Palestinian cause, further impeding the emergence of an autonomous Palestinian leadership. Indeed, when the PLO was founded in 1964, it was a

puppet organization controlled by Egypt via the Arab League. Ahmad al-Shuqayri was the first chairman of the PLO between 1964 and 1967. Things were to change in the wake of the disastrous 1967 war and the emergence of a new PLO. The original PLO elite, associated with a discredited Nasser, were forced to resign, bowing to the pressure of a new generation of Palestinian nationalist militants. A young activist, Yasir Arafat (1929–2004), who in 1958 had founded a new party, the Movement for the National Liberation of Palestine, with the Arabic acronym *Fatah*, featured prominently at this time. Fatah was always a loose association of Palestinian nationalists, ranging from Marxists and secular conservatives all the way to adherents of religious ideologies, committed to the creation of a secular, democratic state; it became famous in 1965 for launching military actions against Israel. Thus, armed struggle became central for the sense of Palestinian identity.¹¹

In the aftermath of the 1967 defeat, Arafat's party became the natural candidate to succeed the founding generation of the PLO. In 1974, the Arab League recognized the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people. Palestinians thus became masters of their political fate, although Israel at first deemed the PLO a "terrorist organization" and refused to speak with its members. For that reason, the PLO was hunted down by Israel and expelled from Jordan in 1970–1971 and later from Lebanon in 1982 (see [Chapter 14](#) and [Chapter 16](#)). Black September in Jordan and the shift of the PLO basis and leadership from Beirut to Tunis are two milestones in the history of Palestinian politics and the quest for self-determination. The PLO leadership therefore ended up very far from the oPt, officially based in Tunis since 1982. In the ensuing period, Israel resorted to a variety of maneuvers to keep PLO influences clear from the oPt: It favored the emergence of an Islamist opposition, deported dozens of nationalist leaders, and tried to co-opt a new acquiescent urban elite by offering members of this group positions as city mayors.

The Oslo negotiations changed this. Israel's recognition put the PLO in the "driver's seat." Influential PLO members staffed the top echelons of the PA and, as the number of PA and quasi-state institutions have been abundant, became a political class detached from the base. This detachment of the new PA leadership was compounded by broader and more long-term shifts within the fabric of Palestinian society that emerged toward the end of the Oslo years. Let us touch on some of these contentious issues before addressing the dialectic relationship between politics and religion.

First, there are great differences within the Palestinian community with regard to birthrates. It is often heard that Palestinians' high fertility rate represents a challenge to Israel, if not a threat. However, many studies suggest that once Palestinians reach a higher standard of living, birthrates drop significantly. Thus, most of the Palestinians living inside Israel match, in terms of fertility rate, the

level of advanced capitalist societies (that is, one or two children per family).¹² For Palestinian refugees living outside Palestine, particularly under legal regimes in Lebanon and Syria that prevent or hinder them from practicing their professions as doctors or lawyers or from carrying out entrepreneurial activities, Palestinian refugees are confined to the poor fringes of those local societies. All of these factors have led to forms of social division and growing resentment likely to produce escalating violence from the population.

Palestinians are also fragmented based on territorial, social, political, and economic divisions. The lack of internal cohesion among Palestinians is a key reason for their limited ability to change the dynamics of the conflict and the imbalances of power embedded in it. To some extent, Israel has fostered these divisions in an attempt to sustain its occupation and matrix of control. The UN Development Programme's (UNDP) Human Development Report 2010 argued that "the State of Israel has systematically segregated Palestinians communities into a series of fragmented archipelagos (referred to variously as isolated islands, enclaves, cantons, and Bantustans) under a system that has been deemed 'one of the most intensively territorialized control systems ever created.'"¹³

Thus, in 1987, with no end to the occupation in sight and no direct contacts with the PLO leadership in Tunis possible, Palestinians in the oPt took their fate into their own hands; they revolted against the creeping violence of occupation and land expropriation, beginning the first *intifada* (in Arabic, literally, to "shake off") in December 1987. Within weeks of the *intifada*'s beginning, a new political faction emerged: *Hamas*. "HAMAS" is an acronym standing for Movement of the Islamic Resistance, and a word that means "zeal" or "ardor" in Arabic. Hamas rapidly became a thorn in the flesh of both the PLO and Israel.¹⁴ For the PLO, Hamas became a serious contender for popular support among the Palestinian population; for Israel, the Islamist movement quickly became uncontrollable. The first *intifada*, unlike the second, remained at a low level of violence, but Israel did not manage to quell what was a truly popular revolt at least until 1991 when the international environment ushered in the new reality of negotiations, first in Madrid and then in Oslo. With Oslo, new hopes blossomed for more political participation of the Palestinians at large, but these remained wishful thinking. The so-called PLO returnees who came back from Tunis in 1994 with the advent of the PA and monopolized key positions as a reward for their past activism contrasted with the insiders (that is, the local residents who were born inside the oPt), who very often felt excluded in terms of jobs and a voice inside Fatah.

Outside of the sphere of Fatah's political influence, it is worth underlining the relevance of the formation of popular committees. In these new, self-managed structures, people would function locally on a voluntary basis to provide missing

services such as health, education, or agriculture, or to organize women's committees. In reality, these committees were replicated all over the oPt, but along the lines of small numbers of political groupings, thus reflecting a form of political obedience to one or another of the main Palestinian political factions that Israel had officially forbidden.¹⁵ At that time, these popular committees were almost exclusively secular and linked to one of the following factions, which, by 1990, were all members of the PLO: the Communist Party (PCP, later to become the Palestinian People's Party); two Marxist formations, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP); not to mention Fatah's own popular committees.

Instrumental for the development of more active and powerful popular committees were access to higher education and the growing role of women. Universities and professional colleges were created in the oPt beginning in the early 1970s, with new universities created in Bir Zeit, Bethlehem, Gaza, Nablus, and Hebron; and many more Palestinians obtained degrees abroad, a large share in the former Soviet bloc for those Palestinians of leftist political leanings. This was also a period in which women were dedicated proponents of national liberation, and many of these committees paved the way for the active political participation of women. Once again, in reaction to negative outside influences—in this case, Israel's policies of de-development¹⁶ in the oPt—Palestinians resiliently managed to mobilize new resources on the way to self-government. However, this form of social revolution turned out to be incomplete¹⁷ because of the faulty Oslo agreements and the creation of a gradually more corrupt and autocratic PA. Such an out-of-touch elite also explains the popular discontent, especially of Palestinian youths, during the "days of rage" similar to the ones organized in Tunis or Cairo in the first months of 2011. As in other countries, police crushed the spirit of revolt against the local authority, but it still simmers under the ashes. Since 2011, sporadic protests have erupted in the oPt; however, the PA and its security forces severely beat up these protests, and by doing so, these forces moved in the direction of establishing a police state through visible authoritarian transformations and trends and increasing repression.¹⁸

Religion and Politics: Evolving Relations

As pointed out in [Chapter 5](#), one has to be careful in assuming a direct form of politicization with social groups invoking Islam. Similarly, radical Islamic groups' use of violence begs for a deep historical understanding of its use. In the Palestinian context as well, one has to understand the emergence of the main Islamist faction, Hamas, in the light of a protracted conflict with Israel and gradual dissatisfaction of the population with the secular Palestinian leadership and with a moribund PLO. The emergence of Hamas has been located in the context of the outbreak of the first intifada and the demise of the Palestinian Left after the collapse of the Soviet Union. But one still has to grasp why its popularity in the last decade has been so volatile.

First, the religious imbalance has grown further toward an overwhelming Muslim majority. Christian Palestinians have always been a minority inside Palestine as opposed to Muslim Palestinians, but their percentage was probably close to one-third of all Palestinians at the beginning of the twentieth century. This figure now amounts to a meager 3 percent because of the massive Christian exile, first with the 1948 events and later in 1967, when economic prospects dwindled with the Israeli strangulation of the Palestinian economy.

As seen, Israel used different expedients to undermine the political influence of the PLO. From the late 1970s onward, one of the measures it used was to let Islamic groupings grow and spread their influence in the territories in order to undercut the power of the PLO. This strategy was consistent with other steps that Israel repeatedly took in attempts to divide Palestinians and undermine the possibilities of a united Palestinian population and leadership. Turning a blind eye to Islamist organizations proved to be a tragic mistake for Israel, however. Israel had failed to recognize that these were also nationalist organizations, which were committed to the same means of armed struggle, even if a decade later than other Palestinian parties.

Hamas grew strong during the first intifada, and as soon as the news of Oslo became public, it quickly denounced this agreement as a sell-out of the original goal to establish a Palestinian state in all of historic Palestine.¹⁹ Hamas eventually stayed out of the 1996 legislative contest because its leadership believed that participating would legitimize the logic of Oslo. It preferred limiting its action to an Islamization of Palestinian society from below. Indeed, Hamas at times used a cautious tone and adopted a nonviolent stance toward Israel proper. Like other resistance groups, it believes it is legitimate to target Israelis inside the oPt as an occupying force.

At other times, Hamas did not hesitate in launching deadly attacks inside Israel. It was only after the 1994 spiral of violence, when a Jewish extremist, Baruch Goldstein, killed twenty-nine Palestinians praying in the main Ibrahimi mosque in Hebron, that Hamas retaliated with suicide attacks inside Israel in the spring of 1994.

Table 20.1 Palestine: A Chronology

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1920–1948	Mandatory Palestine under British control
1948	Israel established; Palestinian Nakba; West Bank under Jordanian administration and the Gaza Strip under Egyptian administration
1958	Fatah founded
1964	Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) founded in Egypt
1967	June 1967 War; Israel occupies the West Bank and Gaza Strip
1968	Yasir Arafat becomes new PLO chairman
1970	Black September; PLO is expelled from Jordan
1974	PLO recognized by Arab League
1982	PLO expelled from Lebanon
1987–1993	First intifada
1988	Declaration of independence made by PLO in Algiers
1991	Multilateral peace negotiations launched at Madrid Conference (PLO excluded)
1993	Declaration of Principles/Oslo Accords
1994	Creation of the Palestinian Authority (PA)

1995	Oslo II
1996	Presidential and legislative elections
2000	July: Camp David fails to reach final agreement; September: second intifada breaks out
2004	President Yasir Arafat dies
2005	Mahmud Abbas elected president for four years
2006	Hamas wins majority at legislative elections (PLC). No stable governments formed
2007	June: Hamas's takeover of Gaza; division of a de facto government under Hamas in Gaza and a Fatah-led PA in the West Bank
2008–2009	Israeli Operation Cast Lead in Gaza
2012	Israeli Operation Pillar of Defense in Gaza; recognition of Palestine as a nonmember observer state by the UN General Assembly
2013	June: Prime Minister Fayyad resigns and is replaced by Rami Al-Hamdallah (West Bank)
2014	July: Israeli Operation Protective Edge in Gaza
2015	April: Palestine joins the International Criminal Court (ICC)
2017	Hamas elects new leadership and amends charter/political document
2018	After twenty-two years of waiting, PLO's Palestinian National Council convened in Ramallah and chose a new leadership; Trump administration recognizes Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and moves US Embassy to Jerusalem; The Great March of Return erupts in Gaza

The cycle of (Israeli) action-(Palestinian) reaction was repeated in the 1996 wave of violence. There, after the assassination of one of its leaders, Yahya Ayyash, a Hamas bomb maker and leader in charge of the military wing, by the Israelis in January 1996, Hamas resumed its program of bombings among the Israeli population by organizing four suicide bombings in February and March 1996, killing fifty-eight Israelis. The attacks had no covenant from Hamas's Gaza leadership, which disowned them.

Rather, they were the work of West Bank cells under the instruction of Hamas's exiled leadership, ostensibly to avenge the death of Ayyash but also to undermine the prospect of a Labor government winning in upcoming Israeli elections. Clearly, on this occasion and again in 1996 after the assassination by a Jewish fanatic of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, rejectionists on both sides concurred in trying to kill the peace process. Hamas's supporters also come from different constituencies. Some embrace the gradualist path toward Islamization of Palestine in the mode advocated by the Muslim Brotherhood. Others support a more active, at times violent, path toward the reestablishment of Palestinian control over historical Palestine. But it should also be stressed that many people far from supporting an Islamist agenda vote and support Hamas as a faction: Even some Christian Palestinians voted for Hamas in the 2006 elections, which suggests that Hamas benefited from disaffection of Fatah and corrupt practices. After eleven years of Hamas rule in Gaza, the popular support and legitimacy of its rule keeps fluctuating: They increase amid and following an Israeli attack/war on the Strip because Hamas is seen as a resistance movement, and they deteriorate in more "stable" conditions. The continuous violations of human rights and the responsibility for entrenching the Palestinian divide remain major factors that affect its legitimacy in ruling Gaza. The entrenchment of Hamas's rule in Gaza is remarkable considering the limited financial resources it has: Although the PA's government headed by Prime Minister Rami Al-Hamdallah is supposed to be the only government since 2014, Hamas has an effective shadow government that runs the Gaza Strip.

Development of PA Institutions

The Palestinian Authority was developed over the Oslo years (1993–2000). When a Palestinian state was declared, the PA was a mere collection of formal political institutions without the contours of a proper state. It lacked two basic elements of a modern state: clear borders and sovereignty over its territory. Borders were part of the final status agreements package, and Israel continued to exert external sovereignty, confirming the validity of the thesis that Oslo was based on a logic of asymmetric containment in favor of Israel.

The PA was a constituent body—that is, an emanation or delegation of the PLO to administer the lives of Palestinians living in the occupied territories and in charge of delineating the formal arrangement of a future Palestinian state once a final agreement could be reached with Israel. For example, a basic law (the equivalent of a constitution) was drafted in this interim period by the legislative body (the Palestinian Legislative Council), and different institutions were created in the spirit of classical checks-and-balances functions, with the creation of a separate judicial system, the nomination of an ombudsman for human rights issues (the Independent Commission for Human Rights), and civil-society watchdog associations. Executive power was granted to an elected Palestinian president (Yasir Arafat in 1996), who then would appoint a cabinet made up of about twenty ministries and in direct charge of security bodies. In a nutshell, the PA was a republican presidential regime, based on majority voting for the presidential elections (with a four-year mandate) and a unicameral legislative body (members of the PLC were originally elected for four years on a proportional basis). Palestinian political parties were finally free to form and take part in this electoral process. However, it was mainly Fatah that participated in this election; therefore, there was hardly any political competition. Many other political parties boycotted the elections as they rejected the Oslo Accords framework. It is also vital to recognize the clientelistic and neopatrimonial governance style followed by Arafat that undermined the role of the PLC and its effectiveness and undermined prospects for full internal democracy.

Three elements limited a proper functioning of this system. First, the international community pressured the Palestinian factions to make the Oslo peace process its absolute priority. Political conditionality was the main tool for pressuring Palestinians to accept the biased logic of Oslo. Political actors and factions that refused to play the Oslo tune were sidelined. Without external funding (which has been massive, as [Figure 20.1](#) demonstrates), many of the leftist factions that opposed Oslo were therefore gradually losing ground, funding, and visibility since they refused to run for the PLC elections. Pluralism was losing ground as strong historical actors abstained from participation.

Paradoxically, the second kind of collateral damage growing out of this international pressure has been to a certain extent the rule of law: To respect the logic of the peace process (and therefore guarantee Israeli security), the PA often had to crack down on Palestinian groups violently opposing Oslo, even if it was through State Security Courts' expedited judgments leading to capital punishment. Over the past decade, patterns of torture by Palestinian police forces against their own population, documented both in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip, contributed to limited freedom of expression in the oPt.

The second limitation came from Israel, which sat in a comfortable chair—asking for more security but not having to do the dirty job described earlier. Very often, Israel lamented that the PA was not a democratic and accountable government, but if some of the PA institutions did not exert their power, it was also because Israel controlled sovereignty over the borders of the oPt, forbade the running of a proper foreign ministry, and arrested Palestinian legislators on many occasions, preventing the second PLC from reaching the legal quorum to make any decisions. Israel's strong influence can also be seen in terms of control over land and the circulation of goods and people. To enter into the PA-ruled zone, one needed to pass through Israel, meaning that the PA had no sovereign control over its territory and Palestinians enjoyed only extremely limited freedom of movement, in particular those living in Gaza (see [Map 20.2](#)). This had to do with the system of territorial fragmentation inherent in the logic of Oslo.

When the PA came into existence in July 1994, the PA controlled only parts of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho. Later in 1995, eight other cities of the West Bank came under PA rule. In the West Bank, the PA only had control over so-called Area A, a zone that includes the Palestinian cities and that increased from 2 percent of the oPt in 1995 to 17 percent after the Sharm al-Shaykh summit in 1999. Israel and the PA shared control over Area B, which is roughly 25 percent of the oPt—that is, the rural zones, meaning that security is in Israeli hands and civil administration under PA control. The majority of the occupied West Bank, called Area C—namely, all that does not fall in Area A or Area B, 72 percent in 1995 and 59 percent at the end of the 1990s—remains under full Israeli control. A simple glance at a map of the different areas (see [Map 20.1](#)) shows that the PA only had limited authority over a series of disconnected administrative units.²⁰

The third main source of problems for this ailing PA was a strong tendency toward the personalization of power. Yasir Arafat took over different key functions, such as chairman of the PLO, president of the PA, head of Fatah, and highest military leader, which did not help in fostering a sense of democratic competition in the oPt. Political parties outside of Fatah and Hamas lost further ground, leading to the current situation, where only two parties are really able to create wide consensus in the population (and with Hamas emerging as *the* anti-

Oslo party). The concentration of power in the hands of Arafat can best be understood if one takes a look at the policing of the oPt. Arafat created up to twelve different police units, which he used as channels for clientelism, leading to systematic neopatrimonial practices inside the PA. Until his death, Arafat was also acting minister of interior in the different governments that administered the oPt, meaning that he was entrusted with the key decision centers of the PA. The Interior Ministry is in charge not only of straightforward security issues but also of questions of intelligence, and it deals with the matter of freedom of association. All nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and other civil society organizations had to register with the powerful Ministry of Interior rather than with the more neutral Ministry of Justice, and many interpreted this as a sort of intimidation on dissenting voices inside the oPt.

Table 20.2 The Palestine Liberation Organization versus the Palestinian Authority, 2019

Table 20.2 The Palestine Liberation Organization versus the Palestinian Authority, 2019

	PLO	As the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, superior to the PA and its term of reference	PA
Establishment	Established in 1964; recognized as sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people at the Arab Rabat Summit and by the UN in 1974, by Israel in 1993		Established on the basis of the <i>Palestinian-Israeli Declaration of Principles of Interim Self-Government Authority (DoP)</i> , Washington DC, September 13, 1993, and the subsequent Oslo I and II Accords

	PLO	As the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, superior to the PA and its term of reference	PA
Head	<p>Chairman</p> <p>Head of the Executive Committee elected by the PNC</p> <p>Currently: Mahmoud Abbas</p>		<p>President</p> <p>Ex-officio member of the PLC elected by the Palestinian people in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem</p> <p>Currently: Mahmoud Abbas</p>
Executive	<p>Executive Committee (EC)</p> <p>Elected by the PNC—18 members</p> <p>Central Council (CC)</p> <p>Intermediary between PNC and EC—124 members</p>		<p>Cabinet</p> <p>Appointed by the president</p> <p>(including the prime minister)</p>

	PLO	As the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, superior to the PA and its term of reference		PA
Legislative	Palestinian National Council (PNC) Parliament in exile; members are mostly appointed by the Executive Committee	Headed by a president Currently: Salim Zanoun	Headed by a speaker Currently: Aziz Dweik	Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) Parliament—132 members (88 in the first 1996 election) Elected by the Palestinian people in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem
	Represents trade unions, professional organizations, and so forth, and most factions, <i>excluding Hamas</i>	Members		Does not represent Palestinians in the Diaspora; members are independents or affiliated with Fatah, Fida, PFLP, PPP, DFLP, Al-Mubadara, Third Way, or Hamas

	PLO	As the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, superior to the PA and its term of reference	PA
	<p>Ultimate decision-making body and legislative authority; formulates policies; sets guidelines for the EC</p> <p>Declared Palestinian independence on November 15, 1988</p>		<p>Powers limited by the Palestinian-Israeli agreements; legislation excludes issues left for the final status negotiations</p> <p>No involvement at all in the 2012 bid of statehood at the UN</p>
Armed Forces	<p>Palestinian Liberation Army (PLA)</p> <p>Outside the occupied Palestinian Territories</p>		<p>Palestinian Security and Police Forces</p> <p>West Bank Gaza Strip</p>
Foreign Relations	<p>Conducts foreign relations and related activities (e.g., negotiations)</p>		<p>Has no <i>formal</i> foreign relations powers</p>

	PLO	As the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, superior to the PA and its term of reference	PA
Finances	Palestinian National Fund Chair elected by PNC		PA Finance Ministry/Palestinian Monetary Authority

Source: Adapted with permission from PASSIA, "PLO vs PA." For the original source, see http://www.passia.org/media/filer_public/8a/e7/8ae7c030-ac1d-4688-b3f4-606fbd50cd41/pa-plo2.pdf

Despite these weaknesses, the leadership that emerged in this crippled PA setting comforted its base and gradually extended its power. This led to what could be termed a *system à la Arafat* (and later, in 2005, *à la Abbas*), in which neopatrimonialism was the basis of action and Fatah was the main vehicle for the redistribution of resources, be they economic (rent, control over a monopoly) or prestige-based advantages (VIP vehicles, freedom of movement). Arafat offered a number of Palestinian capitalists monopolies over basic services and goods. The links between those capitalists and the political leadership were fraught with corruption and mutual benefit.²¹ Arafat died in 2004, but his successors have fallen in the same tendency of not sharing power and benefits associated with top political positions.

Pressure for reforms came not only from the local population but also from the international community calling for more reforms and transparency inside the PA in particular in 2002. Under the premiership of Salam Fayyad (2007–2013), the PA with the support of the donor community pursued state-building through the four pillars of reform of the security sector and the enforcement of the rule of law; the building of accountable PA institutions; the provision of effective public service delivery; and economic growth led by the private sector in an open- and free-market economy. The idea was to build effective institutions to acquire statehood. However, this state-building paradigm has polarized opinions. Some celebrate PA's reforms and argue that the improved performance of the PA has contributed to peace and state-building and the enhancement of Palestinian lives; others argue that it has sustained the occupation, reengineered Palestinian society, and revised historical national goals of the Palestinian people. Despite

the glowing rhetoric of the PA's state-building project, the life of the Palestinians remained characterized by further fragmentation, entrenched internal division, and higher levels of inequality and frustration. In sum, the PA's state-building project not only entrenched neoliberalism in the oPt, but it also failed to generate a state or even make Palestinians closer to statehood.

Political Participation

In this section, we look at the most significant features of political participation and see how political contention is not only limited to internal Palestinian struggles (as is most obvious in the Fatah-Hamas standoff) but also intrinsically linked to external factors—in particular, Israeli politics. Indeed, the second intifada is all too often considered only as a struggle between Israel and Palestine, but it is also an internal Palestinian revolt. Other influential external factors for political participation are the influence of aid on social mobilization and regional incentives for radical actors such as Hamas to take a violent stance and adopt armed resistance as a means of action.

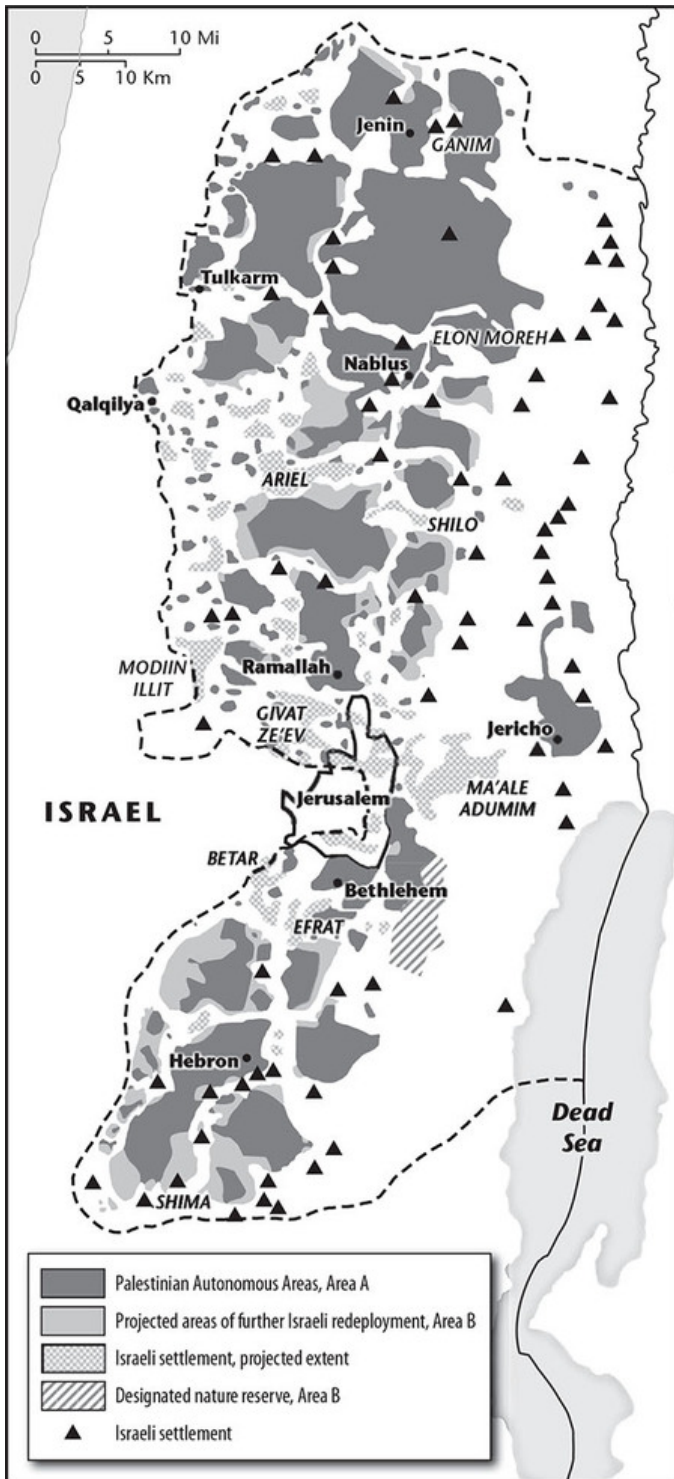
Invigorated by the emergence of this new robust PLO leadership in exile, a new generation of Palestinian nationalist leaders emerged in the oPt and confronted Israeli occupation. As a rule of thumb, one could say that every time such a new nationalist leadership emerged, Israel tried in one way or another to co-opt alternative and docile groups of local leaders willing to acquiesce in order to gain economic or social benefits. Thus, in the 1970s when a new professional middle class emerged to fight against the occupation of the Palestinian territories, Israel decided to run municipal elections in 1976, pushing for its own set of accommodationist candidates. The population refused to play along these lines, and the Israeli move backfired by galvanizing these new nationalist leaders.²² Israel tried again to promote collaborators in official positions with the Village Leagues in the 1980s, but all that managed to do was to incite additional Palestinians to embrace the nationalist stance and practice the politics of *sumud* (steadfastness) or resilience in the face of the de-developing policies of Israel.²³ One famous example of such nonviolent resistance to enduring occupation was in Beit Sahour (a town a few miles from Bethlehem), where the population refused to pay taxes to Israeli authorities for many months because they thought this was simply subsidizing the occupation, and where the Israeli army looks after eighteen cows in Beit Sahour to undermine the self-reliance and resilience of the community (*The Wanted 18* is a 2015 film that illustrates these dynamics powerfully).

On what was originally a rather informal level of mobilization, Palestinians of the oPt tried to react to Israel's ban on nationalist parties. We have seen how popular committees were continuing to become more active on sectoral issues and how they allowed political parties to operate indirectly. Islamist groups, influenced by the mobilization model of the Muslim Brotherhood, active in Palestine since the 1940s, started their own network of charities, in part based on the blueprint of the secular popular committees in the late 1970s. Israel

originally saw these Islamist organizations in a good light, as it considered them potential allies against the spread of Palestinian nationalism and a way to tackle Fatah's popularity in the oPt in the 1970s and 1980s.

Hamas, which grew strong in the 1990s, tried to play on two levels to gain more popular support: by both extending a network of charitable organizations largely autonomous from the political and military leadership and by playing the card of political violence against Israel. Hamas is often analyzed only through the prism of religious identity and its fundamentalist attitude. In reality, Hamas is simply copying both the model of social mobilization of the popular committees of the Left and the adoption of armed struggle as a way to garner support as Fatah did in the 1960s, adding an Islamic coating as justification.

Map 20.1 Occupied Palestinian West Bank



Map 20.2 Gaza Strip



Source: OCHA, 2016. <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/gaza-strip-access-and-movement-august-2016>

Beyond these two main phenomena (the emergence of nationalist leaders in the oPt from the 1970s onward and the gradual radicalization of Hamas), another important segment of political activism worth analyzing is the transformation of the secular Left. Very strong from the 1960s until the collapse of the Soviet Union, Palestinian left-wing parties shrank during the Oslo years. Many in the leftist camp were active in the past in popular committees. With the first intifada, these committees began a process of professionalization, and with the showering of aid concomitant with the peace process from 1993 onward, one

witnessed a mushrooming of NGOs throughout the West Bank and Gaza.²⁴ Within civil society organizations, leftist activists predominated. The problem with this aid was that it moved the focus of these NGO leaders away from local-population priorities and gradually cut many NGOs off from their local bases.²⁵ In synthesis, while Fatah was concentrating on the negotiation process and on running the PA's always-bigger apparatus (around 160,000 public servants in 2017), leftist movements became more accountable to international donors than to the local population because of the necessity of scrambling for funding to keep their NGOs alive.

In this context of a disaffected Left and a radicalized Hamas whose heels were dug deep into the rejection of Oslo, the failure of President Arafat and Prime Minister Ehud Barak to reach a final deal at Camp David during the summer of 2000 brought ominous tensions to the peace process. The peace process then became a topic of almost uniquely domestic contention. The surge of opposition groups such as Hamas is the best evidence of this fact in Palestine. In Israel, also, one can observe this phenomenon. When Ariel Sharon, then the opposition leader in the Knesset, decided to pay a visit to the Temple Mount or *Al-Haram ash-Sharif* in September 2000, he did it mostly to boost his credentials within his party, Likud, because Benjamin Netanyahu, former prime minister and ex-leader of the Likud, was on the brink of a political comeback after his resignation one year earlier due to corruption charges. With Sharon's provocative visit to the Al-Aqsa mosque (he was protected by dozens of armed police), the Palestinian streets erupted into intense battles with Israeli police, first in Jerusalem, then in the rest of the oPt, and eventually also inside Israel. The second intifada had started, casting the darkest shadows ever seen in the region, and the oPt gradually descended into months of military violence. A year and a half later, most of the West Bank was again, de facto, under complete (rather than indirect) military control of the Israeli troops.

Barrels of ink have been poured into trying to make the case of whether or not the Palestinian leadership had planned and organized this uprising. Surely, the fact that Palestinian police were entitled to have small arms in their ranks led to further escalation and militarization of the clashes. But the vast majority of protests were spontaneous and driven by the population's discontent with the ongoing occupation, not by policies coming from above. As an occupied, fragmented, dispossessed, and resilient nation, Palestinians could be seen as a social-movement society.²⁶

With the death of Arafat, the ruling party, Fatah, took on water from all sides, and the entire political system seemed to sway with it. Arafat was the only person with the necessary charisma and historical legitimacy to hold the different factions of Fatah in one single movement. With his death, the riddle of the formal

relations between the PA and PLO resurfaced, with PLO leaders who had opposed Oslo but kept silent during Arafat's rule suddenly reappearing in internal debates.²⁷ Some even suggested that the PA be dissolved and the PLO resume negotiations with Israel. With the presidential elections of January 2005, Mahmud Abbas, second to Arafat in the PLO and in Fatah's structures, won an easy four-year mandate (although Marwan Barghouti, at the time in jail in Israel for alleged terrorist activities, was a threatening alternative to Abbas in opinion polls). With Abbas aging, the question of succession within Fatah and the PLO resurfaces regularly, in particular in 2018 with the PNC meeting that took place in Ramallah after twenty-two years of waiting. However, the outcome of the meeting highlighted a key message: The existing PA/PLO leadership is neither interested in nor willing to grant space to a new generation of leaders.²⁸

Domestic Conflict: Fatah-Hamas Divide

Following the 2006 legislative elections, things turned into a nightmare for the ruling party, Fatah. Although Fatah used various political expedients to boost its chances of winning by augmenting the number of seats to 132 and introducing a two-track voting system, it went to the elections with cracks in all parts of its structure. The result was predictable and epochal: Fatah lost, Hamas won.

However, no one expected such a clear victory for Hamas, maybe not even Hamas itself. Many old PLO companions of Arafat suffered from abysmal electoral results. In Hebron, again, Jibril Rajoub, former head of the Preventive Security Forces in the West Bank and an essential piece of the neopatrimonial network built by Arafat in the 1990s, ran on a Fatah ticket but got only 38,367 votes—that is, twenty thousand short of the top performer in Hebron, who happened to be his brother, Nayyef Rajoub, a top local adherent of the Islamist party, Hamas. It was the first time Fatah had been beaten in a significant national election. If anything, Fatah emerged from defeat even more divided, especially in its stance toward the new Hamas government that ran the oPt on its own for one year.

In June 2006, Fatah and Hamas prisoners in Israeli jails agreed to the so-called National Reconciliation document. It set forth the goal of national struggle for a Palestinian state on the territories occupied in 1967, sought to confine resistance to these areas, and designated the PLO as the only body responsible for negotiations with Israel. It also asserted that all Palestinian parties should accept a final settlement on the basis of “international and Arab legitimacy,” code words for UNSCRs 242, 338, and 194 and the Arab Peace Initiative (that is, the Saudi proposal of March 2002, also termed *King Abdallah Initiative*, suggesting an exchange of the formal recognition of Israel by all Arab states for a permanent settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, according to the pre-1967 situation). By subscribing to these formulas, Hamas was in effect recognizing Israel and a two-state solution to the conflict. It caused much dissension in the movement, but the document would eventually form the doctrinal spine of the national unity government agreed to by Hamas and Fatah in Mecca in February 2007.

Yet while one wing of Fatah preached unity, another practiced subversion. They feared that Hamas’s rise would weaken their hold on the PA and its resources. This faction spurned unity for opposition, hoping that the Israeli and international embargoes would weaken the Hamas government after the 2006 elections. Its members were not averse to sowing a little disorder to hasten a collapse. Abbas appeared to have a foot in each stream. On the one hand, he welcomed the National Reconciliation document although he knew it fell short of Israel’s and

the international community's conditions for lifting sanctions against the PA. On the other hand, Abbas stripped Hamas's government of any authority over the security forces, a move that had the backing of Israel and the United States but stood in violation of the PA constitution.

The result was a year during which negotiations for a unity government were punctuated by violent clashes between Fatah and Hamas, mostly in Gaza. Militias, PA institutions, and security forces split along factional lines and fought to the death for an authority that was bankrupt and largely nominal. The point of no return came in December 2006, when Abbas declared that the unity talks were "dead" and new elections necessary. During the next two months, ninety Palestinians were killed in Gaza. It took the intervention of Saudi Arabia to bring the leaders to Mecca and agree on a document that had been waiting to be signed for seven months.

As a matter of fact, all direct foreign aid to the PA ceased in March 2006 when Hamas formed a government on its own after Fatah turned down offers to join a broad coalition government, in part over the issue of who controlled the police forces; in addition, Israel refused to transfer an estimated \$500 million in tax rebates that legally belonged to the Palestinian people. Donors have instead bypassed the Hamas-led PA, funneling an average of \$1.5 billion of aid (mostly given by the European Union, followed by the United States) through the presidential office since 2006, leading to a skyrocketing level of aid, as seen in [Figure 20.1](#). This mechanism has made the Palestinians even more dependent on the world for their own welfare and increased political factionalism inside Palestinian society.²⁹ It can therefore be sustained that conflict over access to external economic rents, be it from international donors or from Israel, exacerbates or helps maintain internal divisions.

With these emerging dynamics, Fatah hawks (with the blessing and active support of the United States and Israel), preferring to confront Hamas directly, prepared for a coup to oust Hamas from its stronghold in Gaza during the spring of 2007. Hamas found out about this and preemptively organized its own coup against the military forces of Fatah and the PA in the Gaza Strip in June 2007.

Since then, Gaza has been run by Hamas on its own while the West Bank has remained under the control of Fatah, and both persist under the ultimate Israeli control and occupation. From the end of 2007 until 2018, both factions engaged in rounds of failed reconciliations. No agreement could be reached, although immediately after the end of the Israeli Operation Cast Lead (from December 2008 through January 2009), the two factions committed to resume talks, a promise restated in the wake of the Arab revolts in May 2011 and June 2012. The wave of Arab uprisings forced the two factions to resume reconciliation talks both because of the pressure exerted regionally on Hamas's leadership and by

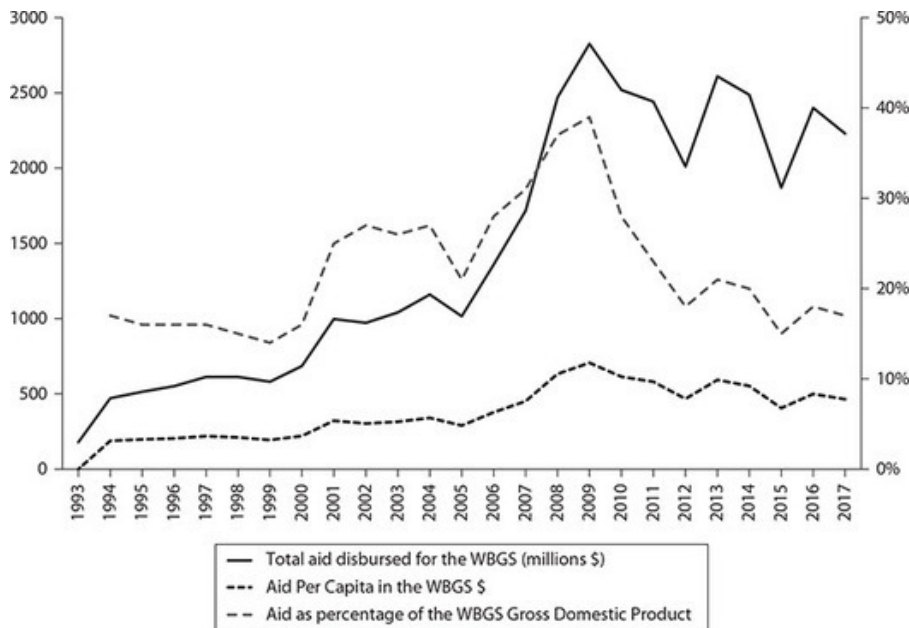
the local population, and due to internal political, leadership, and financial crises within the two parties. Despite the 2014 al-Shati' refugee camp reconciliation agreement signed in Gaza between Fatah and Hamas, as well as the numerous rounds of meetings and declarations, especially under the supervision of the Egyptian intelligence leadership, the division between Gaza and the West Bank remains intact and increasingly entrenched.

Political Economy

As a result of the international community's attempt to buttress a tormented peace process, Palestinians have received US\$35 billion of aid since 1993, which made them one of the highest per capita recipients of nonmilitary aid in the world. From 2004 onward, aid represented between 20 percent and 39 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP), and per capita aid for the same period averaged around \$560 per year.³⁰ A glance at the figures of [Figure 20.1](#) and the high level of foreign aid illustrates the fact that the Palestinian economy is a very political one.³¹ As with political participation, there are strong links of dependency and containment between the Palestinian and the Israeli economies. For the political economy, we have underlined the question of asymmetric containment that Israel managed to introduce in the framework of Oslo, in particular, with the economic rents linked to the management of security forces that had the blessing of and control by the Israeli military leadership. This led to a paradoxical situation where the economy seemed to be booming when there was conflict because development and economic dividends are intrinsically tied to the apparatus of occupation and are often controlled by key military-industrial actors.³² This reflects Israel's longer-term goal of turning the Palestinian economy into a captive market.

As early as the 1970s, Palestinian economic development was hindered by the so-called Civil Administration (in reality a body under the control of the Israeli Ministry of Defense) that was running the oPt through military orders and worked on carving vital spaces for Jewish settlements (illegal under international law). It was during this period (1967–1990) that the Palestinian territories became a captive market for Israel, which could employ cheap Palestinian labor for its construction and agriculture industries. The result of Israeli policies has been effective de-development of Palestine and an increase in the dependence of Palestinians on external aid (see [Figure 20.1](#)).³³ In the health sector, for example, the number of governmental hospitals under Israeli rule dropped in the oPt from twenty in 1968 to fourteen in 1992. Three of the six hospitals that closed were converted into a police station, a military headquarters, and a prison. In terms of investments in the health sector, when Israel was spending \$306 per capita on its citizens inside Israel, it had a per capita expenditure of \$30 in the West Bank in the late 1980s, which decreased even further in 1991 to a mere \$20.³⁴

Figure 20.1 Level of Aid Given to the West Bank and Gaza Strip (WBGS), 1993–2017



Source: As compiled by the authors based on OECD-DAC Aid Database and main statistics from Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS).

Palestinians therefore had to find ways to confront the occupation. The Palestinians offered two solutions. First, to provide their own basic services without state resources, popular committees were formed in a way that reflected political factionalism—one committee per party. Many of these committees were later to become professional NGOs and spearhead a rich civil society sector that boomed during the Oslo years. The second idea, launched by the new PLO, was the creation of a tax system connecting Palestinians from the diaspora with those living under occupation to compensate for the lack of Israeli investment in the oPt. In the 1970s the PLO created the Palestinian National Fund, which levied an income tax of 5 percent on the salaries of Palestinians working in neighboring Arab countries. This aid was then channeled to Palestinian organizations, including the popular committees, in the oPt but also in other Arab countries. It is estimated that Fatah provided about \$50 million annually for its internal constituency in the 1980s.³⁵

With the Oslo process, the Palestinian economy ran into new difficulties. The system of three different areas—A, B, and C—impeded freedom of movement for both individuals and goods. The key words here are *territorial fragmentation*. Area A appeared as an archipelago of small islands with no contiguity (see [Map 20.1](#)). It was therefore easy for Israel to cut each into bits and pieces, for a total of more than two hundred different enclaves, and to prevent Palestinian freedom of movement in case of security threats. Israel applied the lessons learned

during the first intifada when it started its policy of closure of the Gaza Strip as a whole, and Israel expanded this mode of internal closure to the West Bank. At the time of the 1991 Gulf War, 180,000 Palestinians worked in Israel; this represented nearly 33 percent of the total labor force in the oPt and included thirty thousand who moved back and forth every day between Gaza and Israel. In 1993, Israel started limiting access from the Gaza Strip, and through the Oslo agreements, Israel did the same with West Bank workers. The number of Palestinians still working inside Israel decreased to 145,000 by 2000 (a figure that also includes the Palestinians working in settlements, including Palestinian children who are facing continuous denial and violations of their rights as documented by a Human Rights Watch report).³⁶

With the construction of the separation wall in the West Bank beginning in the middle years of the 2000s (see [Map 20.3](#)), this trend has further increased. The wall permits fewer Palestinians access to the Israeli job market. Israel's argument is that this "security barrier" is a way to stop suicide attacks inside Israel. An international ruling on the legality of the wall asserted that even if Israel has the right to self-defense, the route of the wall is not acceptable in terms of international law because it does not follow the 1967 border but allows Israel to annex other bits of the oPt and at times go deep into the newly annexed areas in order to protect Israeli settlements (see [Photo 20.1](#)).

Limited freedom of movement and loss of daily bread for Palestinians ushered in a third problem: that of underperforming economic development. The PLO leadership also bears responsibility for this situation because of the economic agreements it signed in 1994 with Israel. The Paris Economic Protocol (PEP) of April 1994 formalized a de facto customs union that had existed between the two economies after Israel's 1967 conquest. While allowing the PA to raise its own direct taxes, the PEP standardized indirect taxation and gave Israel the power to collect and transfer to the PA taxes on Palestinian imports from or through Israel. The PA was barred from having its own currency or negotiating separate trade and customs treaties with other states during Oslo's interim period.

Photo 20.1 Separation wall in Bethlehem

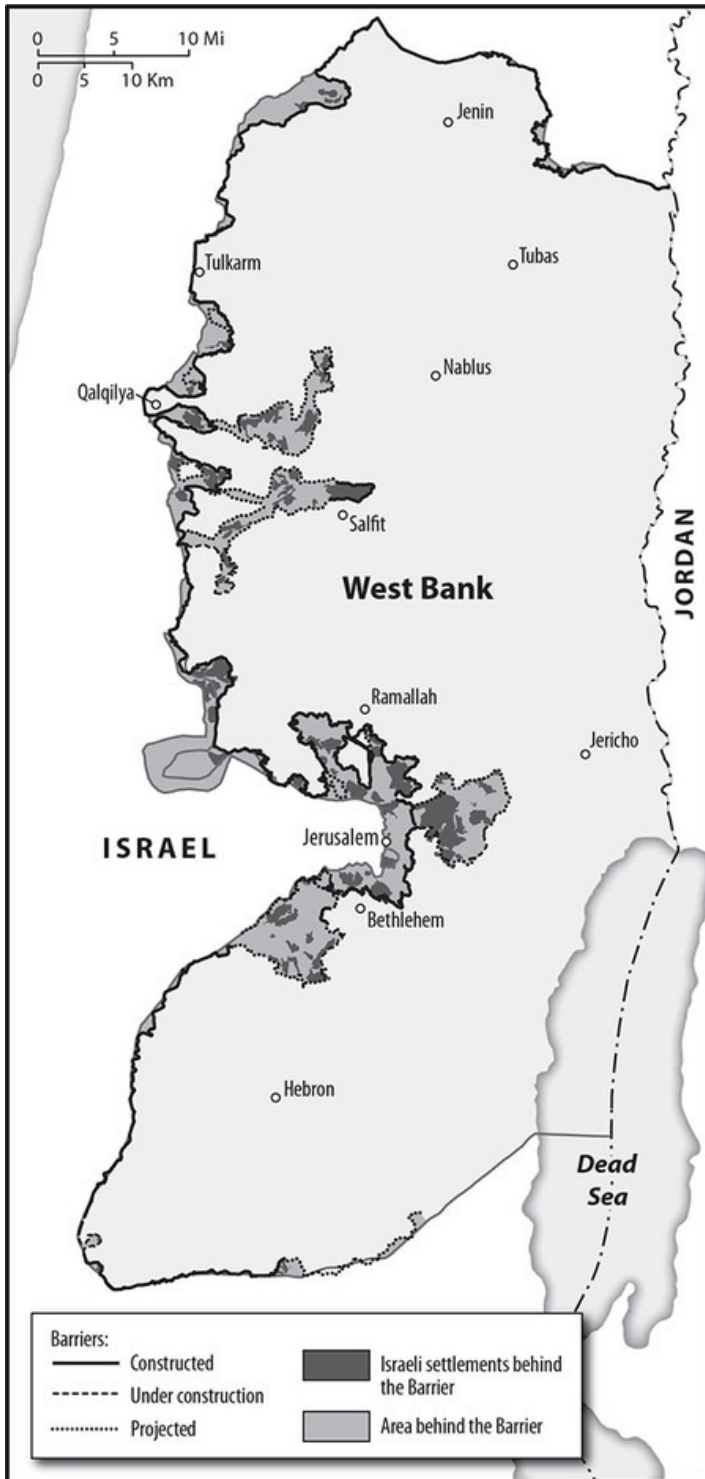


Courtesy of Andrea Merli

The logic behind such lopsidedness was simple: Palestinian negotiators were prepared to defer economic sovereignty in return for integration into the Israeli economy. This corresponds with the notion of economic peace, where economic solutions are proposed to solve political problems. The belief—echoed most forcibly by the then-Israeli foreign minister, Shimon Peres, the godfather of the regional economic integration who supported mixed industrial plants on the border, which allowed cheap Palestinian labor to work for Israeli industries without really entering Israeli territory—was that augmented Israeli investment in the Palestinian areas and increased Palestinian labor flows into Israel would increase prosperity and “build the constituency for peace.” For Palestinian critics of the PEP, skewed economic relations meant increasing Israeli asymmetric containment of the Palestinian economy, especially if “peace” would once again become war. The opposition’s fears proved to be prescient.

This model of economic cooperation relates to a further defect of a crippled PA: poor redistribution of rents. There emerged a ruling elite able to absorb this rent and turn it, internally, into a carrot and stick scenario to create political support. Far from being a transparent authority, the PA turned into an opaque and corrupt governing body redistributing economic advantages to only a happy few; and most of these actions were taken with Israeli blessings.

Map 20.3 West Bank Barrier Route, July 2011



Source: Adapted from United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, occupied Palestinian Territory (OCHA oPt), July 2011, http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_west_bank_barrier_route_updated_july_2011.pdf.

With the advent of the Trump administration in 2017, drastic cuts in aid to Palestine have been threatened multiple times. The US administration took various measures that indicate even more open support of Israel—for example, the move of the US Embassy to East Jerusalem (on stolen, private Palestinian land) in May 2018. It also threatened to cut aid to UN bodies and international organizations that deliver aid to Palestinians. Other European countries also seem on the verge of altering their long-standing policy of supporting Palestinian NGOs and UNRWA, policies that mirror the shift to alt-right xenophobic and anti-refugee attitudes in much of Europe.

Regional and International Relations: Wars on Gaza Instead of Peace Negotiations

Cycles of violence seem to take a regular pattern in Gaza, obscuring the possibility of genuine peace negotiations. As in 2008, the Gaza Strip was under heavy Israeli fire in November 2012 and again during the summer months of 2014, with identical motives for escalations. When it launched its attacks at the end of December 2008, Israel justified Operation Cast Lead as a reaction to Hamas's launch of rockets into Israel. The dynamics of the escalation are actually more complicated because Israel also actively contributed to, or even initiated, the spiraling of violence.

Despite the heavy casualties among Palestinians on all occasions (in 2008, approximately 1,300 dead, compared with thirteen Israeli casualties, while the 2014 attacks led to the killings of more than 2,100 Palestinians and about seventy-five Israelis³⁷), Hamas did not disappear from the political map, and polls suggest that Hamas even gained further popularity, at least in the short run. Israel's military objectives have never been clear, but if the aim of Operation Cast Lead was to oust Hamas from power, then it was a failure. If, however, the objective was to divide the Palestinian factions even more, it might have been a success, but only a partial one. If the aim of the Israeli government was to regain the confidence of the Israeli public in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF)—confidence that had been lost after the 2006 Lebanon war and was now regained through an operation in which Israel suffered hardly any casualties—then the objectives were met. In addition, this would also explain the IDF's use of disproportionate force and heavy artillery. The 2014 war rehearsed this dynamic of an all-out retaliation from Israel but on such a disproportionate basis that the international community could only disapprove of the violence unleashed by Israel, despite its excuse of reacting to attacks by Palestinian rockets on its own population.

When President Abbas initially placed the blame for the Israeli operations in 2008 on Hamas, it seemed as though this was the final blow to any hope of bringing the two main Palestinian factions back together. Indeed, it turned out that the vast majority of the Palestinian population sided with the civilian victims and their sisters and brothers in Gaza. People could not understand Abbas's position, which was seen as indirectly justifying the official Israeli argument of self-defense. This was particularly the case with the release of the Palestine Papers, a collection of confidential documents around the dynamics of the peace negotiations, leaked in 2011 by al-Jazeera.³⁸ Abbas's positions and decisions toward Gaza and its people continue to be controversial and problematic,

especially when accompanied by punitive policies such as withholding public servants' salaries. The 2018 Great March of Return in Gaza, with regular clashes every Friday between Gazan civilians marching toward the buffer zone built around Gaza and Israeli troops, is not only an expression of revolt against the Israeli-imposed blockade, it is also a revolt against the failure of the Palestinian polity in both the West Bank and Gaza Strip to address the plight and suffering of the besieged Palestinians in Gaza.

As of 2018, lack of unity has been the main characteristic of Palestinian politics. Both factions, Hamas and Fatah, have only paid lip service to internal Palestinian reconciliation. The biggest hurdles for the end of the split remain the formation of a national consensus government and the pending reform of security forces. Another strong divergence has to do with the crucial question of PLO reform, which should allow Hamas to contest Fatah's domination inside the PLO; this is also a very sensitive issue that Fatah is not likely to let go of very easily. It is enough to take a look at how Fatah elites have been opposing the profound rejuvenation of their leadership by constantly postponing Fatah's sixth general congress during the last twenty years. This sixth congress was eventually held in August 2009 in Bethlehem without its grassroots supporters from Gaza. It produced stormy debates between the old and young guards of Fatah, and the more senior attendees tried in various ways to use cosmetic changes to create the appearance of reform. A similar pattern followed in 2018 when the Fatah-dominated PLO's National Council convened its meeting in Ramallah and "elected" Abbas, by clapping instead of voting, as the chairman of the PLO. Abbas in turn effectively appointed and chose the members of the PLO's Executive Committee in an ultimate expression of his personalised style of governance and one-man rule. Palestinian democracy was once again denied by the Palestinian leadership and their narrow factional politics.

This does not mean that politics in Palestine has not or will not evolve in the coming years. The Palestinian question remains more than a conflict between two nations fighting for control of the same land. Its deep emotional and symbolic dimensions confer international and regional resonance.

To conclude, we will look at recent international dynamics that might affect the prospect or course for future negotiations between Israel and Palestine.

First, the 2012 UN bid led to a renewed awareness among the international community. By 2015, more than 130 states recognized Palestine on a diplomatic level. Even European countries, such as Sweden, have given formal recognition, while other European parliaments have asked their government to do so. As of 2018, however, these forms of recognition seem to be largely symbolic and ineffective, as they are unable to change the Israeli-imposed facts on the ground. International efforts to resume peace negotiations, such as the 2015 French

Initiative, led nowhere. The UN remains effectively absent, and the EU remains occupied with its internal troubles. The rise of Trump and his “deal of the century” is the latest episode that aims to impose a kind of “solution” with no substance to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Yet what Trump, his administration, and his advisers are promising is anything but peace, as they are only asking Israeli leaders how they envision a peace “deal,” rather than shuttling between the two countries’ leaders to find constructive solutions to land and resource sharing as well as demographic flows.

Second, BDS, an international campaign led by Palestinian activists and calling for the boycott of Israel, has gathered important momentum over the last decade. In 2005, inspired by the South African experience and the apartheid nature of the Israeli state, Palestinian civil society issued a call for a global campaign of boycotts, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) against Israel until it complies with international law by

ending its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands occupied in June 1967 and dismantling the Wall; recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality; and respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN Resolution 194.³⁹

The BDS campaign became the main source of hope for Palestinians inside and outside the oPt. It achieved numerous successes over the last few years, exposed those companies that are benefiting from the occupation, and practiced global pressure on many others to stop their operations in Israel and its settlements, deemed illegal under international law, and divest from Israel. BDS is gaining more momentum over time and proves to be an effective tool to expose Israel, its occupation, and the complicity of international actors, and it holds Israel and the international actors accountable, to the extent that Israel considers the BDS movement as an existential and strategic threat and equates it with the Iranian threat. As a transnational movement, BDS provided the space and tools to the people all over the world to play an effective role in the Palestinian quest for justice and self-determination. And fundamentally, BDS is a prime example of a peaceful approach to and form of resistance that constitutes another instrument to change the balance of power between the occupied and the occupier.⁴⁰

As an additional attempt to internationalize the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and hold Israel accountable to international law, the State of Palestine signed the Rome Status and joined the International Criminal Court (ICC) in April 2015.⁴¹ While the investigation of the ICC might take a long time to materialize or reach

conclusions, coupled with the very complex technical and legal matters, this additional tool to realize Palestinian rights might yield positive consequences that contribute to a long-term solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Despite his problems of alleged corruption, Netanyahu's reelection and the forming of a new right-wing nationalist coalition in the spring of 2015 (and then in the spring of 2019) solidified the basis of an expansive Zionism paying no attention to the situation of Palestinians. In July 2018, Israel changed its Basic Law (constitution) as its government and parliament passed the "Israel as the Nation State of the Jewish People" law. The new Basic Law defines "the state of Israel" as "the national home of the Jewish people," and adds "the right to exercise national self-determination in the state of Israel is unique to the Jewish people." Netanyahu told the Israeli parliament after the vote, "This is a defining moment in the annals of Zionism and the history of the state of Israel."⁴² This law further entrenches the character of Israel as a colonial and apartheid state, observers argue.⁴³ In addition, with the election of President Trump, US policies have taken a more passive turn on "managing" a dormant peace process (despite grandiose talks of significant results under the aegis of Jared Kushner, the son-in-law of Donald Trump).

Debates about the (missing) democratic and statist credentials of Palestine or its degree and extent of formal recognition as a state are probably only excuses not to tackle the roots of this nearly hundred-year-long conflict and try to resolve it on the basis of international law (i.e., the right to self-determination and respect for the UN resolution calling for Israel to withdraw to the 1967 borders) that could lead to a two-state solution.

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21 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Dina Al Sowayel

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is best known for its abundant oil reserves and as the birthplace of Islam. The Kingdom, however, is much more than this headline. Located at the crossroads of Asia, Africa, and the Mediterranean Basin, it plays a vital, at times activist, economic, and political role internationally. Saudi Arabia's strategic location, the presence on its soil of the two holiest sanctuaries of Islam—the Grand Mosque of Mecca and the Prophet's Mosque in Medina—its formidable oil production, and its new focus on science, technology, and art account for the country's regional and global relevance.

The Al Sa'ud, the Saudi royal family, faces new internal and external challenges in maintaining their rule and role as Custodian of the Holy Mosques in Mecca and Medina. In addition to its international role, the regional dynamics can be challenging and demand Saudi attention. The US invasion of Iraq (2003) and Arab protests (often referred to as the Arab Spring 2011) against long-standing political regimes required Saudi attention. These and the civil wars in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, the rise of ISIS, Iran and Turkey's hegemonic aspirations, and Egyptian regime fragility are only some of the events creating rapid change in the surrounding political landscape. This dynamic political environment motivated Saudi Arabia into prompt action. Saudi Arabia is now involved in several new positions: initially backing the Syrian opposition jointly with the CIA and Saudi Intelligence (until it was infiltrated by extremists and complicated by Russian intervention), fighting against Da'esh in Iraq, waging war against the Houthi rebels in Yemen, and supporting the Egyptian military regime of field marshal 'Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi. Subsequent to the 2011 Arab protests, the government was able to address the minor eruptions of discontent through an astute combination of maintenance of public order and economic influence.

The Arab uprisings of 2010 and 2011 reverberated in Saudi Arabia. Demonstrations were held in the Eastern Province (where oil fields are concentrated); in the capital, Riyadh; and around Jeddah (the country's second-largest city, forty miles west of Mecca). The marginalized Shi'i minority, the families of political prisoners, and various groups concerned with corruption, mismanagement, unemployment, and women driving manifested their disapproval of the way the country was run. Some petitions and demonstrations were met with repression. There were rumors that depending on their position in the country's complex hierarchy of power, opponents were banned from travel, deprived of their public-sector jobs, interrogated, jailed, tortured, or shot dead on the street. In 2011, some believed that despite the authorities' claim that "there are no political prisoners in the kingdom," there were about thirty thousand prisoners of opinion, and one out of every six hundred Saudis was detained without trial in appalling conditions.¹ Since then, the appeal of ISIS inside Saudi Arabia has accordingly triggered more repression, and the number of security prisoners—still according to this civil servant—increased again to 4,209 in July 2015.² Ultimately, the reaction to these neighboring uprisings and unrests awakened Saudi citizens to the reality that the revolts could land citizens in worse conditions.

Domestically, the last few years also saw dramatic social and political change in the Kingdom. The current king, Salman bin 'Abd al-'Aziz (born 1935), acceded to the throne in 2015, when his older half-brother King Abdallah bin 'Abd al-'Aziz passed away. It appears, however, that de facto decision-making power rests in the hands of his son, Mohammed bin Salman (MBS, born 1985), appointed crown prince in 2017. Saudi Arabia's activism has intensified with King Salman's accession to the throne in 2015. This is evident in the tensions with neighboring Qatar, the war in Yemen, and support of the Syrian rebels. Domestically, the activism has taken a social bent with the attention-grabbing reforms initiated by MBS. These include allowing women to drive in June of 2018, the opening of movie theaters, and the controversial crackdown on corruption—the last made famous by the detention of princes, senior officials, and

businessmen at the Ritz Hotel in Riyadh during the fall of 2017. The hotel has since reopened for business.

Presumably, these measures are included in the steps toward fulfillment of Vision 2030. Announced by MBS in 2016, Vision 2030 is an ambitious plan to diversify and develop the traditionally oil-reliant economy.

Old notions of Al Sa'ud using a carrot-and-stick policy are no longer relevant, and the concept of "rentier state" is no longer applicable. A young population, new and dynamic leadership, and apt usage of social media has thrust Saudi Arabia into uncharted territory. Although traditionally limited in scope and politically and geographically scattered, Saudi social movements, while not significant in shaping government policy, have had a great impact on the path Saudi development has taken and its current character. To maintain stability and the country's regional leadership, the Al Sa'ud have considerably raised public expenditure in recent years: They created new transportation and urban infrastructure, increased public-sector salaries, introduced an \$800 monthly minimum wage in the public sector, hired more civil servants and security personnel, invested in affordable housing, built up their military, and engaged in a costly war on Yemen, where a Saudi-led coalition is fighting against Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in a country fertile with al-Qa'ida and in the midst of an ongoing civil war.³

With this brief introduction in mind, this chapter examines the key historical and political features that have shaped the Kingdom. We begin with state formation, as that established the institutions upon which the Al Sa'ud legitimacy rests. Next, we consider the role that oil has played in determining the Kingdom's current position and the role it continues to have. Finally, we explore the contemporary political condition of the Kingdom, with an eye toward the dynamic relationship among salient economic, social, and political variables.

State Formation: A Man for a Kingdom and a Kingdom for a Man

On September 16, 1932, the Saudi Arabian Kingdom (*al-Mamlaka al-Arabiya al-Suudiya*) was established. The founder, 'Abd al-'Aziz bin 'Abd al-Rahman Al Sa'ud—known as 'Abdel 'Aziz ibn Sa'ud, or just 'Abdel 'Aziz—(1876–1953), financed by the pro-British amir of Kuwait, Mubarak Al Sabah (1837–1915), was a young Al Sa'ud prince who restored his family's power over Najd (central Arabia) between 1902 and 1912. 'Abdel 'Aziz ibn Sa'ud's successful conquest of the Nejd reflects both personal and political circumstances. During a daring nighttime raid on January 15, 1902, 'Abdel 'Aziz led a band of followers to reclaim his ancestral home in Diriya, on the outskirts of Riyadh. Charismatic, pious, and inspiring, he and his followers went on to conquer Najd, Hejaz, and the Eastern Coast and unify these lands into the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In so doing, 'Abdel 'Aziz ibn Sa'ud became the founder of the third Saudi state.

The restoration of the Saudi rulers in Riyadh in the first half of the twentieth century was interwoven with global dynamics. After the outbreak of World War I, the British abandoned their cautious approach toward the Ottoman Empire and interfered directly in central and western Arabian affairs. In the early twentieth century, British agents in the Gulf started to regard Arabia as a bastion of Islamic-Arab nationalist resistance to the “sick man of Europe,” while the Muslim reformer Rashid Rida (1865–1935) considered the Al Sa'ud a putative candidate for the Islamic caliphate. But the Al Sa'ud claim to rule predates 'Abdel 'Aziz ibn Sa'ud's unification in the 1930s.

Key Facts on Saudi Arabia

AREA 756,981 square miles (2,149,690 square kilometers)

CAPITAL Riyadh
POPULATION 32.26 million, 30 percent of which are nonnationals
PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION UNDER 25 60
RELIGIOUS GROUPS (PERCENTAGE) Sunnis, 85–90; Shi'a, 10–15; and Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, and atheist communities, notably among the foreign residents (statistics not available)
OFFICIAL LANGUAGE Arabic
TYPE OF GOVERNMENT Authoritarian monarchy with basic system of government and nascent local elections
DATE OF UNIFICATION September 23, 1932
GDP \$752.5 billion; \$52,200 per capita
PERCENTAGE OF GDP BY SECTOR Agriculture, 2; industry, 59.7; services, 38.3
TOTAL RENTS (PERCENTAGE OF GDP) FROM NATURAL RESOURCES 46.4
FERTILITY RATE 2.09 children born/woman
LITERACY Male, 97 percent; female, 91.1 percent

Source: Saudi General Authority for Statistics 2018, *CIA World Factbook*, 2017, and World Bank.

In the mid-1700s, Muhammad bin Sa'ud (d. 1795) and Muhammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1793), a Muslim revivalist, joined to create a formidable duo. That politico-religious partnership went on to consolidate the first Saudi state, the Emirate of Diriyah, established in 1744. Today's Saudi Arabia reflects their union, which provides the foundation for the political legitimacy of the Kingdom. The first Saudi state led the many states of the Arabian Peninsula to unify and free them from Ottoman expansion. Muhammad bin Sa'ud's control expanded quickly from the vicinity of Riyadh to a territory roughly comparable to what is now Saudi Arabia, with some incursions as far north as Karbala and Damascus and as far south as Sanaa. The 1802 annexation of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina put an end to almost three centuries of Ottoman custodianship of the two sanctuaries and of the annual pilgrimage (*al-hajj*). Instructed by the Sublime Porte to repress what Europeans feared was a "revolution" trying to restore the "caliphate of the Umayyads,"⁴ Muhammad 'Ali Pasha, Ottoman ruler of Egypt (1769–1849), sent a military expedition to Arabia under the command of his son, Tusun Pasha

(1794–1816). The first Saudi polity was defeated by the Ottoman envoy in 1818.

Map 21.1 Saudi Arabia



Between 1824 and 1891, a second Saudi state, the Emirate of Nejd, disintegrated due to internecine strife within the ruling Al Sa'ud clan and the ascendance of the rival Al Rashids, allies of the Ottomans in central Arabia. The Al Rashid eventually took over the city of Riyadh and forced the Al Sa'ud into nomadic exile until they settled in Kuwait before 'Abdel 'Aziz ibn Sa'ud's triumphant return to Riyadh in 1902. Created in 1913, the Bedouin army of the *Ikhwan* (the Brethren) provided one of the first instances of the "politics of encapsulation"⁵ that was to become the trademark of the Al Sa'ud family. United by

the Sunni revivalist creed inspired by Muhammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhab and settled in agricultural colonies (*hujar*), the Ikhwan were the spearhead of 'Abdel 'Aziz ibn Sa'ud's conquest of Arabia.

When 'Abdel 'Aziz died in 1953, the crown passed to his son, Sa'ud. This established the mode of succession and, therefore, who would lead the Kingdom. Since 1953, the Saudi throne has passed from one son of 'Abdel 'Aziz ibn Sa'ud to the other. The six sons who have ruled since the passing of 'Abdel 'Aziz (see [Table 21.1](#)) came from a pool of more than forty sons of the founding king. King Salman, the current king, appears to be the last of the sons to rule, as he appointed MBS as crown prince in a departure from the traditional pattern.

Succession has not always been smooth. The Al Sa'ud knew a period of internal tension as a fierce battle erupted between King Sa'ud bin 'Abd al-'Aziz Al Sa'ud and his brother Faisal, who insisted on defining government organization and responsibilities. In 1964, King Sa'ud, who had lost the favor of Aramco, faced a financial crisis and a devalued Saudi riyal. With the support of the ulema, senior princes, and cabinet members, he was deposed by Faisal. Under King Faisal bin 'Abd al-'Aziz Al Sa'ud, the Saudi state was soon part of the global, US-centric circuits of money, expertise, and power.

Oil! The Political Economy of Saudi Arabia

At its formation in 1932, the economic survival of the Kingdom depended on pilgrimage (Hajj) revenue, loans from the merchant class, and British subsidies. When the Saudi Arabian state was cemented in 1932, it was first and foremost the expression of the alliance among 'Abdel 'Aziz ibn Sa'ud, the powerful Bedouin tribes, and the Hejazi (Western Province) merchant class that provided Al Sa'ud with loans and social recognition. For example, 'Abd Allah Sulayman, the first Saudi finance minister, had been in charge of the British subsidy and started "milking" the sizable business community of the Hejaz. Nicknamed "the uncrowned king of Arabia,"⁶ he became a successful businessman along the way.

Oil Discovery and Developments

A few months after the creation of Saudi Arabia, on May 29, 1933, the newly established king approved a concession agreement with Standard Oil of California (SoCal). The product of this agreement would forever change the Kingdom and its international geopolitical significance. The agreement with SoCal provided for the exploration for oil in the Eastern Province of the Kingdom. After five years of intense exploration and six wells that proved unsatisfactory, finally Dammam 7 gushed. In March 1938, after ten months of digging at a depth of 1440 meters, Dammam 7 produced commercial quantities of crude oil. Number 7 produced thirty-two million barrels in its nearly fifty years of working life before it was retired in 1982.⁷ The huge size of the Saudi finds required a new partnership, a joint venture renamed Aramco (Arabian American Company) in 1944. This partnership brought together the Saudi Arabian government, Standard Oil of California (Chevron), the Texas Oil Company (Texaco), Standard Oil of New Jersey (Exxon), and Socony-Vacuum (Mobil). In 1950, Aramco agreed to share oil profits with King 'Abdel 'Aziz on a 50/50 basis.

By 1988, Aramco was fully nationalized and named "Saudi Aramco." Aramco became essential in the creating a class of technocrats, as it provided a "key building block in the shaping of Saudi society for decades to come," based on Article 23 of the original concession agreement that read as follows: "[Aramco] shall employ Saudi nationals as far as practicable, and in so far as the company can find suitable Saudi employees it will not employ other nationals." By 2016, the expatriate workforce was down to 15 percent of the total.⁸

Political Implications of Oil

The 1933 concession agreement between King 'Abdel 'Aziz ibn Sa'ud and SoCal marked the beginning of a new era: independence from British influence and from the merchants. The state was now shaped by the various princes and their constituencies and was less dependent on the merchants for its survival. After a few electoral consultations in the Hejaz and attempts at sharing power with the merchants, the US-Saudi agreements set the Al Sa'ud on a more solid and confident course. This process intensified after World War II and the increase of oil revenues. The Saudi state was soon thrust into the centric networks of money, expertise, and power. In 1964, Ibrahim Al Sowayel, the king's most trusted advisor, was sent by King Faisal as his ambassador to Washington and was later to oversee the effects of the oil embargo in 1973. The Saudi political economy became increasingly linked with private and public international institutions, including the World Bank, the Bechtel Corporation, AT&T, the French, British, and American armies, Harvard and Stanford experts, and the Ford Foundation.

The first consequence is the highly centralized and authoritarian character of the state. In the 1940s and 1950s, responding to trade union activism, Aramco contributed to the architecture of political involvement and labor control that was to become one of the trademarks of the Saudi state. In the 1950s and 1960s, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) helped create the monetary and fiscal systems. The World Bank and various Western experts then prompted the development plans that consolidated the state. These factors resulted in the creation of a national bureaucracy run by the main princes and representatives of the merchant community. "The sudden availability of resources led to uncontrolled Byzantine [state] expansion based on patronage,"⁹ which linked the nascent administration to various sectors of Saudi society. The main constituencies of the Al Sa'ud were the Hejazi commercial elite, the Najdi tribal leaders, and the young class of educated bureaucrats, to the exclusion of the less-educated rural populations of the densely

populated southern highlands, the rank-and-file tribesmen of Najd, and the Shi'i community of the Eastern Province.

After the 1973 oil boom, state revenues increased tenfold in a short period of time, jumping from \$4.3 billion to \$43.3 billion between 1973 and 1977. This sudden increase in liquidities had a sweeping effect on state-building. A new merchant class was created in Najd; personal networks and clienteles became key to the distribution of economic opportunities; and the emergence of mechanisms of economic governance was durably impeded. Public-sector employment and real estate speculation became the main mechanisms of rent distribution. Meanwhile, local and national administrations were soon plagued by low-technical capacity, poor organization, and widespread corruption. A ubiquitous yet inefficient state was pouring wealth into an economy it barely controlled. When oil prices dropped in 1986, a defeated King Fahd bin 'Abd al-'Aziz Al Sa'ud had to publicly confess the state's inability to establish the national budget. Since his ascent to power, King Salman bin 'Abd al-'Aziz Al Sa'ud vowed to rein in corruption to address the inefficiencies.

The second effect of oil was that the private sector became feudalistic and as sluggish as the state. Despite a long-term industrialization policy, the Saudi economy remained focused on real estate, services, and the licensed distribution of consumer goods (*wikala*). Long-standing monopolies were created from the 1950s through the 1970s, and the private sector revolved around fiefdoms, which were granted by the state or Aramco to princes and powerful merchant families. Closeness to the centers of political power was the key to economic success: "The composition of significant parts of the Saudi private sector is an outcome of chance encounters that happened many decades ago,"¹⁰ and a handful of shopkeepers and real estate agents were projected by the oil boom to the top of the Saudi economy. The local distribution of automobiles was one of the most fruitful monopolies: the 'Ali Rezas, the Juffalis, the Jamils, and the Jumayhs owe their wealth to car agencies. Others, such as the bin Ladens, the Qusaybis, and the 'Olayans, became contractors of

the state or Aramco. Some felt that such rent-seeking patterns deterred private companies from innovating. Ghassan al-Sulayman, the grandson of 'Abd Allah Sulayman and a successful businessman, declared in 2007 in front of young Saudi entrepreneurs,

The system of commercial monopolies (*imtiyazat*) offers the best business opportunities to young entrepreneurs. . . . The good thing about trade monopolies is that, instead of trying to invent something new, you can benefit from an experience that has succeeded elsewhere. . . . You don't need to innovate; all you need to do is to adapt already successful products to the Saudi market.¹¹

Saudi society was invigorated as elements of change convinced citizens there was upward mobility. Yet in this booming but clientelistic environment, the third effect of oil was that despite the abundance of public and private wealth, unemployment was high and social inequities rampant. The Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency estimates the unemployment rate among Saudis to be 11.8 percent,¹² but 2030 vision aims at reducing it to 7 percent. Since 1986 and the drop in oil prices, the state has attempted to cut its costs or slow down the exponential growth of the public sector. Meanwhile, it has begun to privatize large public companies, such as the Saudi Basic Industries Corporation and the Saudi Telecommunication Company. Yet despite repeated attempts, the strong connection between state and business has long prevented significant moves toward the hiring of more Saudis in the private sector, or "Saudization." One of the main reasons is the cost of Saudization; for comparable jobs, non-Saudis are paid three to four times less than Saudis. Clientelism also tended to hinder economic governance; the administration is paralyzed by its links to the private sector and cannot impose its Saudization regulations. The chambers of commerce and industry regularly vetoed Saudization regulations. Saudis today make up only 15.5 percent of the workforce in the

private sector, whereas they are 94.2 percent of the workforce in the public sector.¹³ Since 2011, the state has attempted to implement Saudization more forcefully, in particular through the “Nitaqat” program, which combines incentives and sanctions. As a consequence of growing inequities and widespread unemployment, approximately 670,000 families relied on social-welfare payments from the Ministry of Social Affairs in 2010. According to official figures at that date, 20 percent of Saudi citizens lived on less than US\$3 a day.¹⁴ To address new demands in the labor market, hundreds of thousands of Saudi students have been sent abroad to gain knowledge and become more qualified to fill jobs at home.

More recently, since Prince Mohammad bin Salman was appointed crown prince in 2017, the Kingdom adopted a new growth path consistent with his Vision 2030, which seeks to diversify the economy and increase privatization based on these main fundamentals: promoting the national economy; reducing the unemployment rate; increasing the contribution of small and medium enterprises to GDP; raising the ratio of female participation in the labor market; increasing the value of the Public Investment Fund’s assets; raising the ratio of direct foreign investments to GDP; enhancing the contribution of the private sector to GDP to 65 percent; increasing non-oil government revenues to SAR1,000 billion a year from the current SAR163 billion; and increasing the ratio of household savings to its total income. The year 2017 saw the Kingdom’s current account of the balance of payments at a surplus of SAR57.1 billion against a deficit of SAR89.4 billion in 2016. The year also saw the inclusion of the Saudi Stock Exchange in a number of global market indexes for emerging markets—a move expected to attract more local and foreign investment.

Many reforms took place in 2017. The most prominent of these included the formation of an anticorruption committee in Saudi Arabia, chaired by the crown prince, which would help boost the confidence of foreign and domestic investors in the Saudi economy; the issuance of visas to foreign investors electronically within a single day so as to encourage foreign investments; and the levying

of a “sin tax” on goods considered harmful to health and environment, which would reduce the enormous cost to the government and citizens that results from their harmful effects.¹⁵

The Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency reported that in 2017 GDP had contracted by 0.86 percent as a result of the decline of the GDP of the oil sector by 3.09 percent. With Saudi oil reserves still the largest at 16 percent of the world’s proven reserves, the 2018 budget forecasted that oil revenue was to rise to SAR492 billion, up from 440 billion in 2017, while non-oil revenue was seen at SAR291 billion in 2018, up from 256 billion in 2017, making total revenue rise to SAR783 billion in 2018. The 2018 budget was to be funded by 50 percent from oil revenue, 30 percent from non-oil revenue, 12 percent from debt, and 8 percent from government balances.¹⁶ By 2017, per capita GDP reached US\$20,700.¹⁷

Changes and Challenges in Society

Saudi Arabia has undergone tremendous changes during the last fifty years. A Bedouin and at times tribal and culturally diverse society, composed of settled and nomadic people (in 1974, Bedouin represented slightly more than one-fourth of the population), it has become highly urbanized. Today, more than 80 percent of the population is concentrated in urban centers, and the great majority live along the Jeddah-Dammam axis in the cities of Jeddah, Mecca, Riyadh, and Dammam-Khobar-Dhahran. Saudi society is also very young; the annual birthrate stands at 1.9 percent, and 29 percent of the population is below fifteen. The country is accomplishing its demographic transition, however. The fertility rate, which was about seven children per woman from the 1950s through the 1980s, has plummeted to two children per woman in 2015.¹⁸

Saudis are in great majority Sunnis, yet Saudi Arabia is more religiously diverse than often believed, especially during hajj and with the millions of visitors that come to Mecca for Umra. The official doctrine of the state stresses the pure Sunni nature of the kingdom but accepts the religious diversity of a country that hosts almost every branch of Islam and various other faiths. Located mainly in the Eastern Province in the cities of Najran and Medina, there is a Shi'i minority that still protests against discrimination. Most Saudi Shi'a are "Twelvers"—that is, they believe in a lineage of twelve imams after the Prophet; the Shi'a of Najran are Ismailis, who believe in a more metaphorical interpretation of sacred texts. In the Hejaz and Najd, Sufi communities flourished in the midst of Najdi revivalist Islam (sometimes mistakenly called Wahhabism). The nonnational population of the country (although no statistics on religion are available) comprises Muslims, Christians (among whom are over a million Catholics, notably Indians and Filipinos), Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, animists, and atheists.

The Saudis are closely tied to a state that drives most change. Its influence makes an autonomous “civil society” hard to locate; thus, social and political change do not equal modernization or progress. Cultural beliefs have sometimes worked to suppress personal freedoms and women’s rights. Instead of seeing the oil boom as an incontestably positive development, Saudis negatively refer to it as *tafra* (leap), a word that stands in sharp contrast with the official notion of *tanmiya* (development).

Many programs have been launched with the objective of diversifying the economy, lowering the deficit, and executing Vision 2030. Saudi Arabia’s 2018 budget at \$261 billion is the country’s largest ever,¹⁹ and real GDP growth was expected to be 2.7 percent in 2018. SAR192 billion is allocated to higher education, including SAR14.7 billion for 173,000 students studying abroad. SAR210 billion is allocated to the military, and SAR147 billion is allocated to health and social development.²⁰

The most important change experienced by Saudi society since the 1970s may well be the incredibly rapid urbanization of the country. In 1970, more than 50 percent of the population lived in the countryside; this percentage was reversed by 1980. In 2013, the urbanization rate was 82.7 percent,²¹ making Saudi Arabia one of the most urbanized countries in the Middle East, on a par with Western Europe.

Rapid urbanization, social inequities, and overwhelming state power have prompted the creation of a series of reinvented traditions. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the economic crisis and the state’s inability to provide employment prompted a revival of tribes through the creation of tribal solidarity funds and the emergence of a widespread passion for genealogy. Women’s rights and freedoms had advanced slowly since the 1970s. Some upper-class women had voiced their disapproval of gender segregation—on November 6, 1990, forty-five women drove their cars in downtown Riyadh to protest the ban on women’s driving. They were briefly detained and lost their jobs temporarily. Since then, women have petitioned for, as

well as against, the right to drive, but they have rarely opposed segregation as such. Then in 2018, the ban on women driving was lifted. What had been the strict segregation of the sexes and the juridical subordination of women as “inseparable from the state’s development and enrichment. . . . State measures vis-à-vis Saudi women have brought about their separation from the rest of the society and their constitution as a particular category”²² is now replaced by a dynamic policy to employ women in all sectors and include them in public conventions and in sports stadiums and other arenas. Lower- and middle-class women mobilize through more local institutions, such as charities and schools. They are less likely to support what in the West would be seen as feminist reforms but may still strongly express their political concerns. On October 14, 2003, ordinary men and women, mostly from rural backgrounds, flocked to Riyadh to reclaim their relatives, jailed by the thousands since 9/11. An old woman, Umm Sa’ud, soon became the emblem of the mobilization, during which 271 demonstrators were arrested.²³

More urbanized, more individualized, wealthier than three decades ago, yet less certain of their economic future, the Saudis are also increasingly diverse. The country is characterized by the presence of an important migrant community (approximately one-third of the population). Because of the long absence of a unified immigration policy, the proportion of immigrants has increased dramatically and steadily since the 1980s. The availability of foreign labor allowed the business community to maintain low wages and poor management standards, thus excluding many Saudis from the job market. In 2013, Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and Indonesians formed the most important foreign communities, closely followed by Egyptians, Syrians, Yemenis, Sudanese, Filipinos, Sri Lankans, Afghans, Nepalese, and Palestinians.²⁴ Saudi Arabia is not a country of immigrants, and the state still views immigrants as “guest workers” who eventually will return to their home countries. Yet many communities seek to permanently settle and acquire Saudi citizenship.

Fearing that Arab migrants would assimilate more easily than Asians and lay naturalization claims on the Saudi state, the administration has restricted the Arab share in the foreign population since the 1980s (from 91 percent in 1975 to 30 percent in 1996). The presence of a large Arab expatriate community was viewed as a threat by the authorities, especially in times of internal dissent, such as the 1990s (see Institutions and Governance). “By promoting massive labor import from Asia and the Indian subcontinent in the 1980s, the Saudi state tried to prevent the risk of migrant social integration.”²⁵ The shift to Asian migrant workers was intended to break a regional imbalance between labor-exporting countries (Yemen, Egypt, and Syria) and the currency-exporting, oil-rich countries of the Gulf. But the emergence of a second generation of Arabic-speaking Asian immigrants, born and raised in the country and disconnected from their homelands, prompted the state to take a harder line on immigration in 2004 and to toughen the naturalization law. Despite this severity, the absolute and relative numbers of migrants have kept increasing during the last decade. In 2013, the state cracked down on undocumented migrants and deported between seven hundred thousand and two million people, depending on the estimates.²⁶ Clashes opposed the police to migrants in Jeddah and Riyadh, resulting in hundreds of arrests and dozens of injuries.²⁷

Institutions and Governance

The main institutions of the Saudi state have been created or consolidated only recently. Formally speaking, Saudi Arabia is an authoritarian, dynastic monarchy with a summary basic law (*al-nizham al-asasi li-l-hukm*, 1992). According to the letter of the basic law, the principle of power resides in the sons and grandsons of 'Abdel 'Aziz ibn Sa'ud, and its reality lies in the hands of the king, who is "the source" of the "powers of the state"—that is, "the judicial power, the executive power, the legislative power" (Article 44). Concentration of power and informality of procedures lead to considerable day-to-day hurdles in the actual functioning of the state. Created in 1953, the Council of Ministers is the main institution of the state; the king, the supreme decision-maker, heads it. The king's powers are formally unchecked, and he appoints the members of the Consultative Council (*majlis al-shura*). The Consultative Council was initially created in 1926 in the Hejaz, held in abeyance since the 1950s, and only reopened in 1993 by King Fahd (1921–2005) as a response to the 1991 and 1992 opposition movement (see Actors, Opinion, and Political Participation). Although not politically challenged by any part of the state apparatus, the king's authority is technically limited by a bureaucracy that plays a large role in shaping and hindering the main policies of the state.

The number of Al Sa'ud princes is unknown but estimated anywhere between a few thousand and a few dozen thousand. The politically important princes are, however, not more than a few dozen. They are in charge of the core functions of the state, form the backbone of the country's civil administration, fill positions of power in the sovereignty ministries (interior, defense, and until recently, foreign affairs), and serve as assistants or advisers in some technical ministries (information, petroleum). They also fill crucial positions in the local administrations and the army and patronize the main youth institutions.

King Salman bin 'Abd al-'Aziz (b. 1935) ascended the throne on January 23, 2015, upon the death of his half-brother, King 'Abdallah bin 'Abd al-'Aziz (1924–1915). As governor of the Riyadh province for almost fifty years (1963–2011), Salman engineered the transformation of the capital into a bustling metropolis of more than six million inhabitants. Salman has handled family disputes and commercial rivalries in a similar resolute manner; he is considered an anchor for the family.

King Salman's decisiveness helped him solve the ever-recurring question of the succession to the throne. A few months after ascending the throne, Salman named his nephew Muhammad bin Nayif (b. 1959) crown prince and his son Muhammad (b. 1985) deputy crown prince, thus ending the succession of the aging sons of 'Abdel 'Aziz ibn Sa'ud to the throne in favor of the next generation of princes. Then in June 2017, Salman went a step further in anchoring his rule when he removed his nephew and appointed his son Muhammad to replace him as crown prince.

There was general hope that Salman's iron fist would help dismantle the ubiquitous royal family's position of monopoly over the national economy and put an end to rampant corruption. The wealthy, among them princes, owned a great deal of land and companies. They distributed opportunities, granted favors, and allocated resources. They were partners in large-scale business deals and took substantial commissions on most transactions. Arms deals, construction contracts, and equipment supply may have been subjected to a fee collected by them.

Faced with outside threats such as Saddam Hussein in 1990 and due to the threat of terrorists and their activities in Saudi Arabia, such as the bombing of the US Vinnell National Guard building, Saudi Arabia continues to build up its security and military apparatus, which includes the Ministry of Defense, the National Guard, and the Ministry of Interior. And this effort to protect the country and its citizens will probably be strengthened under Salman and his son, as there is agreement between the Saudis and the

United States on the importance of protecting the oil installations and internal security. The allegiance of the main Bedouin tribes was gained through direct subsidies and the integration of many Bedouin into the army, the police, and the National Guard. Since the defeat of the Ikhwan in 1930, repression has also characterized the relationship between state and society. The heavy militarization of the country has not helped resist any foreign threat (in 1990, the Al Sa'ud called in an international force when reportedly threatened with an Iraqi invasion), but it imposes a climate of fear that often dissuades political expression or dissent. Demonstrations are regularly banned and crushed, and political opponents are shot in the street or imprisoned. Torture and ill treatment are common in prisons and are used even during routine investigations.

Table 21.1 The Kings of Saudi Arabia
 Table 21.1 The Kings of Saudi Arabia

The kings of Saudi Arabia	Date of rule
'Abd al-'Aziz bin 'Abd al-Rahman Al Sa'ud	1932–1953
Sa'ud bin 'Abd al-'Aziz Al Sa'ud	1953–1964
Faisal bin 'Abd al-'Aziz Al Sa'ud	1964–1975
Khalid bin 'Abd al-'Aziz Al Sa'ud	1975–1982
Fahd bin 'Abd al-'Aziz Al Sa'ud	1982–2005
'Abd Allah bin 'Abd al-'Aziz Al Sa'ud	2005–2015
Salman bin 'Abd al-'Aziz Al Sa'ud	2015–present

After the royal family and the security apparatus, the religious establishment is the third main component of the public space. The Saudi state recognizes the centrality of religion; the first article of the

1992 basic law states that “its constitution is the Qur’an and the Sunna” (the actions and words of the Prophet Muhammad), even though the king is described by the same text as the ultimate source (*marja’*) of power (Article 44). Since 1932, the official *ulema* (legal scholars), regrouped in 1971 in the council of senior scholars, have in general been deferential to political authority and have not voiced any strong opposition to the Al Sa’ud. With some exceptions, their concerns have been limited to moral and narrowly religious matters. They have overall “contributed to the consolidation of a state that is politically secular and socially religious.”²⁸

They have notably legitimized the foreign military presence during and after the Gulf War (1990–1991). Although they retain a certain social prestige, the *ulema* are more and more often criticized, especially since 1990, for their acquiescence to power.

Actors, Opinion, and Political Participation

Since the Ikhwan rebellion in the late 1920s, the Al Sa'ud have often responded vigilantly to national and international political challenges. In the late 1920s after the conquest of the Hejaz by 'Abdel 'Aziz, local autonomist movements voiced their concerns and were repressed. To help consolidate their power, the Al Sa'ud banned political parties and demonstrations in the 1920s. In the 1940s and 1950s, Aramco was among the first to be affected by political and economic change. In the Eastern Province, there were several oil strikes in 1945, 1951, 1953, 1956, and from 1962 to 1966. The most important strikes took place in 1953 and 1956, as Saudi oil workers not only protested against racial discrimination and corporate violence but also voiced political demands and denounced the US political weight and military presence in the country. One of the leaflets seized by the US Embassy in 1954 reads, "O workers! Get rid of the American pigs and seize the profitable oil company. . . . O Arabs, unite because the Arabian Peninsula is for the Arabs."²⁹ Protest was met with repression by Aramco and the Saudi state. Strikes and incitements to demonstrate were outlawed in 1956. During the 1960s, Saudi adherence to the Western side of the Cold War prompted an escalation of repression. Ba'athists, socialists, and Arab nationalists were jailed, tortured, and murdered. Novelists 'Abd al-Rahman Munif (1933–2004) and Turki al-Hamad (b. 1952) both chronicle oil protest and leftist activism in their works.

While leftists were repressed, numerous Egyptian, Syrian, and Iraqi Muslim Brothers fled to Saudi Arabia from the 1950s to the 1970s in order to escape the nationalist crackdown on Islamic activism. They opened several unofficial branches of the Muslim Brotherhood in the kingdom and influenced the Saudi educational system. Repression of nationalist and leftist political organizations, together with the development of education and Islamic universities, fostered the

politicization of the educational system and of mosques in the 1960s and 1970s. Religious knowledge became a sphere of contention, and many revivalist—Salafi—groups emerged alongside the Muslim Brothers. One of these groups, the Salafi Group that Commands Virtue and Prohibits Vice (*al-Jama‘a al-Salafiyya al-Muhtasiba*), created in 1965 in Medina, took an infamous part in the religious effervescence of the 1970s. One of its members recalls that the group had broken “the obstacle of respectful fear between the mufti and the believer. They had made the legal science—which was the monopoly of the sheikhs and the students of religion—popular. They instilled in the masses the spirit of religious controversy.”³⁰ Espousing millenarianism, the group eventually occupied the Grand Mosque of Mecca in 1979, alleging they had among them the Messiah. The army and the National Guard, with the help of French military personnel, took action to free the Ka‘abah.

In the troubled context of the late 1980s and early 1990s, students of the Muslim Brotherhood participated in a broad oppositional movement that criticized political authoritarianism, the mismanagement of oil wealth, the militarization of the country, and US influence. The main figures of the opposition movement were Sheikh Salman al-‘Awda, Sheikh Safar al-Hawali, Sheikh ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Qassem, Muhammad al-Hudhayf, Muhsin al-‘Awaji, and Muhammad al-Mas‘ari. From 1991 through 1994, they staged demonstrations, circulated petitions, and formed a human rights committee when the repression began. Along with a series of cosmetic reforms (including the re-creation of the Consultative Council in 1993), the state repressed the movement, driving some of its leaders to choose exile.

The participation of numerous Saudis in the resistance to the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the repression of reformist movements inside Saudi Arabia prompted the internationalization of Saudi political opposition. Created in Riyadh in 1993 to defend suppressed opponents, the Committee for the Defense of Legitimate Rights (CDLR) was banned and its funders jailed or exiled. Re-created in London in 1994 by Muhammad al-Mas‘ari and Sa‘d al-

Faqih, the CDLR became more vocal but less influential on the Saudi scene. "Saudi Arabia is the graveyard of the 'ulama," proclaimed Mas'ari in the late 1990s, taking up an old revivalist motto. The CDLR split up in 1996 when Sa'd al-Faqih created the Movement for Islamic Reform in Arabia (MIRA). MIRA broadcasts inside Saudi Arabia through a radio and a television channel, which appear to yield some influence, in particular among the families of political prisoners. These movements remained weak and did not gain momentum among the Saudis.

In Afghanistan, the internationalization of Saudi politics took a militant turn. Launched by Osama bin Laden (1957–2011) in the 1990s, the organization al-Qa'ida soon targeted the US presence in the Arabian Peninsula and the Middle East. In 1995, al-Qa'ida bombed US paramilitary installations in Riyadh. The next year, a US military building was bombed in al-Khobar by Shi'i militants. Bin Laden's main slogan, a saying of the Prophet Muhammad, "Expel the polytheists from the Arabian Peninsula," echoes the old nationalist mottos. Of the nineteen hijackers who carried out the September 11, 2001, operations, fifteen were Saudis.

Since 2001, the state has tried to address social issues, notably by engineering from above a "civil society" that could capture foreign imaginations and more efficiently deal with domestic challenges. The Saudi Journalists' Association was created in 2002 but remains ineffective. Two other professional bodies, the Saudi Engineers' Association and the Saudi Lawyers' Association, launched in 2000 and 2003, respectively, are also dependent on the state. The Center for National Dialogue opened its doors in 2003 to serve as a forum for intellectuals and experts. Its sessions were, however, prim and conservative in tone. It has since then been often used by the senior princes to respond to foreign criticism of the lack of political rights in the country. Two human rights bodies were created in 2003 and 2005: the National Human Rights Association, presented as independent but funded and staffed by the government, and the Human Rights Commission, which is an official body. These still-fledgling nongovernmental organizations appear to some as

monitored by the state, thus possibly constituting the exact opposite of what is generally described as “civil society.”

In a more serious gesture toward political opening, in 2005 the Al Sa‘ud reenacted a long-forgotten electoral law and organized municipal elections for the first time since the 1960s. The Muslim Brothers won polls in Riyadh and Jeddah. Although popular participation did not exceed 11 percent of total potential voters, political coalitions defied an extremely restrictive electoral code, thus demonstrating the conservative groups’ political skills and their ability to win elections. The municipal elections showed the readiness of networks of businessmen and intellectuals to take responsibility locally. From 2005 through 2009, however, the elected municipal councils had not acquired any executive or monitoring responsibility but gained a distant advisory role. In 2009, the government postponed the next municipal elections, which were held in September 2011. The turnout was reportedly lower than in 2005, and the 2011 electoral campaign didn’t witness the political activism that had marked the 2005 campaign.³¹ In 2011, Saudi women were granted the right to vote and stand in the December 2015 municipal elections.

Protests have not spared the country, however. In late January 2011, after violent floods killed a dozen people in Jeddah and wrecked 90 percent of the city’s road infrastructure, demonstrations were organized by outraged residents. They were protesting against corruption, municipal mismanagement, and the poor official response to environmental crises. The protests were met with repression.³² The Jeddah floods and protests sparked a series of reactions and encouraged other groups to express their discontent. In various cities, residents turned out in front of official buildings, protesting against corruption and unemployment.³³ Continuing their almost decade-long antirepression movement, families of political prisoners have been regularly protesting in front of the Interior Ministry. In the Eastern Province, several demonstrations opposed the Saudi-led military intervention in Bahrain; police brutality and Al Sa‘ud inflexibility fostered an escalation.³⁴ About a dozen Shi‘i

Saudis were killed during peaceful protests on the streets of Qatif and al-'Awwamiyya between January 2011 and July 2012. Protesters in the Eastern Province demanded democratic reforms and the demise of the ruling dynasty.

Regional and International Politics

From a neglected imperial frontier, Saudi Arabia has become in a century one of the most important countries for the world's economy and security. Its vast oil resources and its strategic location account for this spectacular transformation. The oil company Aramco was instrumental in bringing the country to the forefront of the United States' new interest in the Middle East. When World War II began, oil became a commodity of crucial strategic importance, and US experts estimated that the center of oil extraction was shifting from the Americas to the Arabian Gulf. Meanwhile, Britain was strengthening its economic influence over the Saudi state, which prompted US oil companies to react and champion a long-lasting US-Saudi alliance. On February 18, 1943, responding to the advice of Standard Oil, President Franklin D. Roosevelt added Saudi Arabia to the list of beneficiaries of the 1941 lend-lease program. Saudi oil production increased dramatically during the last years of World War II and supported the Allies' victory over the Axis powers. Construction of a US military base began in 1944 in Dhahran, near the oil fields and the Aramco compounds. The famous meeting between President Roosevelt and King 'Abdel 'Aziz on board the USS *Quincy* in the Suez Canal in 1945 clearly signified that Britain's influence in the Middle East was on the wane. Saudi Arabia was officially the first Middle Eastern country to enter the sphere of US interests; many other countries in the region followed it, and the Middle East became "the most penetrated international relations sub-system in today's world."³⁵

The Saudi role in US international politics became even more vital with the beginning of the Cold War. Strategically located between the three continents over which the United States and the Soviet Union competed, less affected by European colonialism and less populated than its neighbors, Saudi Arabia was an ideal ally in times of global tension. Its oil fueled the postwar reconstruction of Western Europe and Japan and supported the dominance of US oil companies over

the global oil market. The “Saudi connection”³⁶ or “neotriangular trade”³⁷ established by Presidents Roosevelt and Truman among the United States, Saudi Arabia, Western Europe, and Japan provided cheap and abundant oil and air force bases to the Western world. It also made Islam an important weapon in the US Cold War ideological arsenal. King Sa‘ud bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz (1902–1969), who succeeded his father in 1953, adhered in 1957 to the Eisenhower doctrine, and Saudi Arabia became a powerful anticommunist instrument in the Middle East, providing help and services in what has been called the “Arab cold war,”³⁸ notably against Nasserite Egypt, republican North Yemen, and communist South Yemen. Under the Nixon doctrine (1969), Saudi Arabia became, along with Israel and the shah’s Iran, one of the pillars of US dominance in the Middle East.

Meanwhile, the creation by Faisal bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz (1903–1975) of the World Muslim League (*Rabita al-‘Alam al-Islami*, 1962) and of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (*Munazhzhama al-Mu’tamar al-Islami*, 1969) produced pan-Islamic bodies in which Arab nationalist regimes were marginalized. This policy aimed at destroying Soviet influence in the Arab world. After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, Saudi Arabia again mobilized its finances and its Islamic networks—exiled Muslim Brothers from neighboring Arab countries and Saudi Muslim Brothers—in support of the Afghan resistance to the Red Army, contributing to the eventual defeat of the Soviet Union in Central Asia.

US-Saudi relations were partly overshadowed by the recurrent question of Palestine. During his 1945 meeting with President Roosevelt, King ‘Abdel ‘Aziz asked him, “What injury have Arabs done to the Jews of Europe?” Over a year later, President Truman infamously answered by telling American diplomats, “I have to answer to hundreds of thousands who are anxious for the success of Zionism; I do not have hundreds of thousands of Arabs among my constituents.”³⁹ Pan-Islamism, although used against the Soviets’ ambitions in the Arab world, was also an attempt to transcend the Arab nationalist position on the issue of Palestine. At the request of

King Faisal, the Organization of the Islamic Conference created a fund for the holy war against Israel during its second meeting in 1972.

The 1973 oil embargo was triggered by the October war between Egypt and Israel. On October 17, 1973, the ten Arab oil-exporting states reduced their production by at least 5 percent every month until the end of the Arab-Israeli conflict. A few days later, they suspended the oil supply to the United States. Within six months, the Saudi oil revenue increased fivefold. In January 1974, after the end of hostilities, oil production resumed. In March 1974, Saudi Arabia insisted on ending the embargo on oil exports to the United States. This mild use of the oil weapon had not managed to influence US policy toward Israel. Yet the embargo allowed Saudi Arabia to replace Egypt as the leader of the Arab world. Despite the US threat to invade the Saudi oil fields in order to restore production and export, the embargo paradoxically strengthened the US-Saudi relationship. In the aftermath of the Iranian Islamic revolution of 1979, Saudi Arabia became, alongside Israel, the paramount US ally in the Middle East.

Since the end of the Cold War, Saudi Arabia's leading position in the Middle East has been strengthened by the unilateral politics of the United States. The high revenues of the Saudi state have exposed it to continuous US and British pressures to sign extremely costly military agreements. Since 1973, the country has spent roughly one-third of its budget and approximately 25 percent of its GDP on the military. Still, "militarily the kingdom is powerless"⁴⁰ and has had to rely on foreign aid whenever threatened, as it did in 1979 or, more recently, during the 1990 to 1991 Gulf War. The financial and military link to the United States, along with Saudi Arabia's performance as an oil producer, explains why the political alliance has remained so strong.

Because of its wealth and close relationship with the United States, Saudi Arabia has become an important economic and political crossroads. Its cultural influence is perceptible through its religious

networks and its control over many print media and television channels across the Middle East.⁴¹ Most pan-Arab media are controlled by the Saudi royal family. The exceptions are, among others, the Qatari, US, and Iranian satellite TV channels al-Jazeera, al Hurra, and al Alam, and the Palestinian daily *al-Quds al-'Arabi*. The satellite channel al-Arabiya and the dailies *al-Hayat* and *al-Sharq al-Awsat* are the main media outlets of Riyadh.

This regional vocation also expresses itself in many other ways, from diplomatic mediation to direct intervention. Saudi Arabia has offered to arbitrate many conflicts: with Saudi help, the Lebanese civil war ended with the Taif agreement of 1989, the Lebanese National Pact was renegotiated, and French-imposed sectarianism in Lebanon was destined for abolition. More recently, the Hamas-Fatah agreement, signed in Mecca in February 2007, was an attempt to resolve intra-Palestinian tensions. In the Arabian Peninsula, Saudi Arabia has exerted a very strong influence on its neighbors through its economic importance, its “immigration diplomacy” (toward Yemen),⁴² and the formation in 1981 of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)—first and foremost a Saudi club—which includes Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman. In recent decades, it has also exerted direct influence over Yemen by funding many political forces, tribal forces, and Islamic and communist groups. After serving as a Cold War ally of the United States, Saudi Arabia now seeks autonomous leadership, notably through its 2002 Israeli-Palestinian peace plan, which is at the forefront of the Arab peace effort. The 2011 and 2012 Saudi counterrevolution was but a continuation of this politics. The 2015 war on Yemen, waged by Saudi Arabia leading the coalition formed by Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Morocco, Egypt, Sudan, and Senegal, was a perplexing escalation. Officially started to restore the Yemeni government of president 'Abd Rabbo Mansur Hadi against the rebellion led north of Yemen by the al-Houthi family, the war soon turned into a humanitarian disaster, and Yemen, nicknamed in the nineteenth century “the graveyard of the Ottomans” for its staunch resistance to the Turks, has become “Saudi Arabia’s Vietnam.”⁴³

Religion, Politics, and Domestic Conflict

An exclusive focus on state-sanctioned Sunni revivalism occults the complex links between religion and politics and the fact that many mostly religious, transnational networks crisscross the country. It is often forgotten that Arabia has not only exported but also imported religious ideas and practices. The two holy mosques of Mecca and Medina have attracted pilgrims, students, and travelers since the beginning of Islam. The urban Hejaz is traditionally linked to all corners of the Islamic world through education and worship, which the state has tried, with uneven success, to institutionalize and control since 1932. The state intended the Sharia College of Mecca (1949) and the Islamic University of Medina (1961) to provide a structure for scholars and students attracted to the holy cities. The holy cities and the nascent Saudi state captured the imagination of numerous scholars from all over the Islamic world, and many intellectuals and adventurers flocked to Saudi Arabia, especially the Hejaz. The most famous were the Egyptians Muhammad Qutb (1919–2014) and Muhammad al-Ghazali (1917–1996), the Syrian Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani (1914–1999), the Palestinian ‘Abd Allah Azzam (1941–1989), and the Moroccan Muhammad Taqi al-Din al-Hilali (1894–1987). Saudi Arabia became a haven particularly for the Muslim Brothers, who were subjected to violent repression in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq during the 1950s and 1960s. Although they were officially prevented from creating a Saudi branch of their movement, the Muslim Brothers could direct their Egyptian, Iraqi, Syrian, and Palestinian branches from Saudi Arabia. They also participated in the creation of the Muslim World League (1962), the Organization of the Islamic Conference (1969), and the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (1972), all international institutions that fostered Saudi influence in the Islamic world. They have been both an instrument of Saudi influence and an autonomous player in the region.

The oil-rich Eastern Province is home to a Shi'i minority, which is closely connected to Shi'i communities in Bahrain, Kuwait, Iraq, and Iran. The community faces discrimination from the state, Aramco, and the religious establishment. Indeed, King Faisal's policies led Shi'a to revive historic sectarian relationships across national borders. "The success of the Iranian Revolution in 1979 turned several Shi'i activists into 'Muslim rebels.'"⁴⁴ Iranian influence has, however, never been as obvious as the Saudi state claims. During the 1970s and 1980s, Saudi Shi'a were linked to Iraq and Kuwait through Muhammad al-Shirazi (1926–2001), a cleric from Karbala, Iraq, who settled in Kuwait in 1971 and was actually an intellectual rival of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.⁴⁵ In 1991, the Organization for the Islamic Revolution in the Arabian Peninsula, created in 1979 and headed by Sheikh Hassan al-Saffar (b. 1958), renamed itself the Reform Movement and abandoned its radical objectives. In 1993, it settled an agreement with the Saudi government that allowed its exiled leaders to return to Saudi Arabia.⁴⁶ Since the fall of Baghdad in 2003, Shi'a have revived their Gulf networks. Yet the Al Sa'ud still see Saudi Shi'a as an Iranian fifth column, and they escalated the confrontation between the state and the religious minority.

Because of its central position in the political economy of the Middle East, Saudi Arabia has been a launching pad for activists who threaten the existing regional order. Osama bin Laden was the main leader of this trend and al-Qa'ida, its main label. His and other militant networks are truly international, however, and are not traceable to one particular country: "It is the cross-fertilization of religious thought in the Hejaz that produced bin Laden, who cannot be anchored in one locality of intellectual tradition."⁴⁷ In Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Chechnya, Bosnia, Yemen, Sudan, Somalia, Iraq, Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, and the Gulf states, violent activism benefited from numerous regional crises. Defined as *al-fi'a al-dhallah* [those who have gone astray] by the Saudi state, these groups attacked the US presence in the region and the prolonged dependence of Middle Eastern regimes on the United States. Besides Osama bin Laden, Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi (b. 1959), Yusuf al-'Ayyiri (1974–2003), and the anonymous Internet writer

“Lewis ‘Atiyat Allah”⁴⁸ are the main organizers or promoters of these networks. The creation of ISIS in Iraq in 2006, its extension to Syria in 2013, and its subsequent expansion at once epitomize the failure of the US interventions in the region and reveal the fragility of the postcolonial Arab state system. The violence of the Syrian and Egyptian regimes within their borders, the violence of ISIS in Iraq and Syria, the violence of the Al Sa‘ud in Yemen, and the continued Israeli violence in Palestine all point to a darker future for the region.

Conclusion

Inside Saudi Arabia, the main challenge remains the economic and social integration of the country's younger generations, especially when they come from disadvantaged backgrounds (Bedouin, non-Najdis, non-Sunnis, African Saudis, etc.). The success of this integration is what Vision 2030 seeks to achieve—and even then, the Najdi domination over the rest of the country may remain structural. The integration of foreign migrants is another pressing challenge. Until the creation of nation states in the twentieth century, Arabia had been continuously integrating newcomers into its diverse population. The fantasies of ethnic and religious exceptionalism, borne out of the imperial encounter and exploited by local elites, stand in the way of economic integration and political participation—as does the concentration of wealth into too few hands.

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22 Syria

Raymond Hinnebusch

The Syrian state, founded under the French (1920–1946), was initially ruled by a liberal landed oligarchy until the latter was overthrown by military officers associated with the Arab Ba‘th Socialist Party, which launched a socialist “revolution from above” (1963–1970). After years of instability, an “authoritarian-populist” regime was consolidated under President Hafiz al-Asad (1970–2000); Hafiz passed power to his son, Bashar al-Asad (2000–), whose attempted transition to a semimarket economy helped prepare the way for the Syrian Uprising beginning in March 2011. Seven years of violent conflict resulted in a partially failed state.

History of State Formation

Syria's geography and history shaped its current statehood. Historically, Syria was a trading civilization, its largest cities, particularly Aleppo and Damascus, living off the East-West trade routes. A substantial grain-growing agricultural sector existed, albeit vulnerable to periodic drought, while pastoralists raised animals on the steppes. The country suffered from a wide gap between urban civilization and the peasantry. Sociocultural heterogeneity plus the country's geographic complexity—a land of plain, desert, oasis, and mountain—resulted in a fragmented society; without a historic centralizing state, it was a prize fought over by neighboring river valley empires.

The imposed creation by Western imperialism of the modern Syrian state after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire during World War I left a permanent sense of national frustration. Britain and France agreed to divide up historic Syria, *bilad ash-sham*. Modern Lebanon was detached from western Syria, Jordan from its south, Iskandarun (Alexandretta) was ceded to Turkey, and Palestine was turned over to the Zionist movement. French rule in Syria could only be imposed by the repression of several uprisings in the early 1920s.¹ This experience generated enduring irredentist and anti-imperialist sentiments. The truncated Syrian state, seen as an artificial creation, did not enjoy the strong loyalty of its citizens, who were mostly attached either to sub-state communities or to supra-state ideologies, pan-Syrianism, pan-Islam, or pan-Arabism. The most successful political elites and movements championed Syria as part of a wider Arab nation even if, to a degree, they accepted its (possibly temporary) separate statehood. Seeing itself as the “beating heart of Arabism,” Syria gave birth to Ba‘thism, a movement that sought to unify the Arab states. Decades of conflict with Israel generated a particular Syro-centric form of Arabism in which Syria claimed to be the most steadfast defender of the Arab causes, notably Palestine. After a half century of separate statehood, a

Syrian Arab identity gradually emerged with the boundaries of the contemporary state largely accepted. But since most Syrians still saw Syrian identity as Arab, the idea of a Syrian nation-state distinct from the Arab world did not achieve hegemony, and sub- and supra-Syrian identities retained credibility.

Changing Society

Syrian society has been fragmented—on one hand, by a “mosaic” of communal divisions, and on the other, by class cleavages, rooted in the feudal-like agrarian capitalism that dominated the early independence period.

Key Facts on Syria

AREA 71,498 square miles, including about 500 square miles occupied by Israel (185,180 square kilometers)

CAPITAL Damascus

POPULATION 18,028,549 (2017); includes 20,500 people living in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights (2014)

PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION UNDER 25 51.2

RELIGIOUS GROUPS (PERCENTAGE) Sunni Muslim, 74; Alawite, Druze, and other Muslim sects, 16; Christian, 10; tiny Jewish communities in Aleppo, Damascus, and al-Qamishli

ETHNIC GROUPS (PERCENTAGE) Arab, 90.3; Kurds, Armenians, and others, 9.7

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE Arabic; Kurdish, Armenian, Aramaic, French, Circassian, and English also spoken

TYPE OF GOVERNMENT Nominal republic, but in reality, authoritarian with domination by the Ba'th Party

DATE OF INDEPENDENCE April 17, 1946 (from League of Nations mandate under French administration)

GDP (PPP) \$50.28 billion; \$2,900 per capita (2015)

GDP (NOMINAL) \$24.6 billion; per capita not available

PERCENTAGE OF GDP BY SECTOR Agriculture, 20; industry, 19.6; services, 60.4 (2017)

TOTAL RENTS (PERCENTAGE OF GDP) FROM NATURAL RESOURCES Not available (20.7 in 2007)

FERTILITY RATE 2.5 children born/woman (2017)

Sources: Central Intelligence Agency, *CIA World Factbook, 2017*; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, <http://www.unhcr.org/news/NEWS/45a243a54.html>.

Syria's ethnic and religious diversity, combined with a geographically shaped localism, fostered strong loyalties to sub-state communal groups, cities, and regions. Indirect rule of identity groups (*milletts*) through religious leaders and notables during the Ottoman Empire (1500–1918) and the divide-and-rule policy of the French mandate (1920–1946) strengthened sub-state identities. Ethnic minorities include Kurds (7 percent), Armenians, and small numbers of Assyrians, Circassians, and Turkmen. Religious minorities include Greek Orthodox Christians (8 percent), various smaller Christian sects, and several Islamic minority sects—the most important being the Alawites (12 percent), the Druze (3 percent), and the Ismailis (1.5 percent). Countering this fragmentation, a vast majority of Syrians are Arabic speakers. Ninety percent are Muslim, but religious and ethnic minorities enjoy autonomy in matters of personal status and greater protections than in most other Middle Eastern states.

The main communal issue is the perceived unequal distribution of power. The Alawite minority, traditionally denied political influence by the Sunni majority, flocked to the armed forces and to the secular Ba'th Party, the two institutions that together came to rule Syria after 1963.² The Sunni Muslim majority, the religiously minded of whom regard the Alawites as heretical,³ inevitably resents their resulting disproportionate political power. Additionally, Syria's Arab identity assumes the Arabization of minorities such as the Kurds; the major source of Kurdish disaffection has been the denial of citizenship rights to some one hundred thousand Kurds who were settled in Syria under the French mandate. In the post-2011 uprising, insecurity from civil war led many Syrians to fall back on communal identities and protection, exacerbating communal cleavages.

Map 22.1 Syria



The first quarter century of Syria's independence was a continuation of the politics of Ottoman notables. Landlord, tribal, and merchant families overwhelmingly dominated parliament and cabinets.⁴ Half the land was concentrated in great landed estates, while more than two-thirds of the peasants were landless sharecroppers. An indigenous agrarian and industrial capitalist class emerged after independence, investing in uncultivated lands in the eastern al-Jazeera plains, pump-irrigated cotton cultivation in the river valleys, and new agricultural industries. This new wealth fed the growth of the state apparatus and enlarged the salaried and professional middle class. An important stratum of this new class was drawn from the rural towns and the peasantry—many of them of minority background—forming a partly urbanized, rural intelligentsia. Of pivotal importance, the army officer corps, which was rapidly expanded to deal with separatist threats and border conflicts with Israel, became a channel of upward mobility (via free admittance to the military academy) for peasant- and lower-middle-class youth, while the scions of the upper classes eschewed military careers.⁵

A smouldering landlord-peasant struggle was ignited when landlords started replacing traditional sharecropping with mechanization and wage labor, disrupting whole villages and generating a mobile agrarian proletariat.⁶ By the mid-1950s, Syria's laissez-faire capitalism stalled as an unskilled workforce and a limited market constrained further growth. Many Syrians believed a major role of the state in the economy and land reform were required to drive development, but the ruling oligarchy resisted. The belief became widespread that the capitalist model was exhausted and incompatible with social justice. This became a self-fulfilling prophecy because the upper class began to disinvest as it lost confidence that it could control political events.⁷

As a result, several radical middle-class parties emerged to contest the power of the oligarchy; of these, the Ba'th Party eventually became the main political vehicle that overthrew the old regime. The party was founded by two Damascene schoolteachers: Michel Aflaq, a Christian, and Salah ad-Din Bitar, a Sunni Muslim. On an eventually merging parallel track were Alawites Zaki Arsuzi, a teacher and refugee from Iskandarun, and Wahib al-Ghanim, a medical doctor from Latakia. The Ba'th later also merged with Akram al-Hawrani's Arab Socialist Party, which had organized educated youth and peasant tenants to challenge Hama's great feudal magnates. The social base of the Ba'th was lower-middle class and rural, as its early followers were peasant youth who came to the city for education. Many of them were from minority communities, notably Alawites, attracted by a secular, nationalist message that accepted minorities as equals. The party acquired special strength in the two professions that were most open to people of modest backgrounds—the army and teaching⁸—and which were also keys to the command of force and the shaping of opinion.

Ba'th ideology was a mixture of nationalism and social reformism. It held that imperialism had artificially divided the Arab nation into many states to keep it weak. The mission of the party was to awaken the slumbering Arab nation and lead its unification. It mixed this pan-Arabism with a call for national renaissance—*ba'th*—to be achieved

through the overthrow of “feudalism.” The party’s official 1947 program, radical for its time, demanded a major role for the state in national development, social welfare services, labor rights, and agrarian reform. The ideology’s appeal was instrumental in making the Ba’th Party the most important and ultimately successful of the radical movements that arose in postindependence Syria. The Ba’th slogan, *wahdah, hurriyah, ishtirakiyah* [Unity, Freedom, Socialism], became the trinity of Arab nationalist politics throughout the Arab world.

Syria’s fragile liberal institutions, though initially oligarchic-dominated, might have been democratized by the inclusion of wider class strata. Indeed, in the 1954 election radical middle-class parties, including the Ba’th, won a minority but high-profile bloc of seats in parliament. At the same time, however, as the officer corps, dominated by the middle class and former peasants, was politicized and radicalized, it turned against the oligarchy. A duality of power emerged between the parliament, still led by landowners, and the army—a stalemate that prevented major reform and fostered instability.

In parallel, Syrians were deeply divided over foreign policy between supporters of pro-Western Iraq, which advocated security through membership in the Western-sponsored Baghdad Pact, and followers of Egypt’s Gamal Abdel Nasser, who opposed the pact in the name of nonalignment. Because the fate of the Pact was believed to turn on Syria’s choice, a regional and international “struggle for Syria”⁹ took place (1954–1958). Nasser’s rising stature as a pan-Arab hero, especially after the Suez War, weakened conservative pro-Western and pro-Iraqi politicians and strengthened those aligned with Cairo—above all, the Ba’th. Widespread pan-Arab sentiment led Syria into a merger with Egypt in the United Arab Republic (1958–1961); although the union failed, the oligarchy could not thereafter be restored. In sum, the postindependence rise of middle-class radical nationalism, combined with peasant land hunger, destabilized the semiliberal, postindependence regime and paved the way for the Ba’th coup of 1963.

Institutions and Governance

Formation of the Ba'th Regime

The coup that brought the Ba'th Party to power in 1963 initially ushered in an era of instability. Although the coup leaders called it a revolution, the new regime was the product of a conspiracy by a handful of "ex-peasant" military officers, not of mass mobilization from below. This narrow-based regime, facing the opposition of the old oligarchs, the Muslim Brotherhood, and mass-Nasserist agitation over its failure to reunite Syria and Egypt, was hard put to survive; it did so by launching a "revolution from above" in which nationalization of big business and land reform demolished the class power of the old oligarchy, gave the Ba'th control of the levers of the economy, and allowed it to mobilize a mass constituency. This was accompanied by intense class struggle between regime and opposition.

Adding to the instability, the regime was internally split between party patriarch Michel Aflaq, who prioritized pan-Arab union, and younger radicals of minority or rural provincial origin who were more interested in a social revolution in one country. In intraregime struggles, ideological and personal rivalries overlapped with sectarian divisions between Sunnis and the minorities who had long been disproportionately represented in the party and army. Because Alawites increasingly won out, thereby disaffecting Syria's Sunni majority, the regime was pressured to prove its Arab-nationalist credentials. A radical faction under Salah Jadid seized power in a 1966 intraparty coup.¹⁰ Driven by ideological militancy and a search for legitimation, the radicals supported Palestinian fedayeen raids into Israel, in spite of the unfavorable Syrian-Israeli balance of power, thereby provoking the 1967 defeat and Israeli occupation of Syria's Golan Heights. The recklessness of the radical faction discredited it, allowing the 1970 rise of a newly pragmatic wing of the party under General Hafiz al-Asad.¹¹

Hafiz al-Asad's coup ushered in the consolidation of the Ba'th regime. Under the radical Ba'thists who preceded him (1963–1970),

the regime had already broken the control of the dominant classes over the means of production and had mobilized workers and peasants. Asad now constructed a “presidential monarchy” that concentrated power in his own hands. He used his control of the army to free himself of Ba‘th ideological constraints and placed a core of personal followers in the security apparatus to give him autonomy from the army. Secure in control of the party and army, he appeased the private bourgeoisie through limited economic liberalization and fostered a state-dependent new bourgeoisie to create another leg of support. At the same time, at the top of the power pyramid, elements of the Damascene Sunni bourgeoisie entered into tacit business alliances with Alawite military elites, while at the base, the party and its auxiliaries incorporated a popular following from both Sunni and non-Sunni villages. Thus, Asad built a cross-sectarian coalition, whose effectiveness proved itself in defeating the major Islamic fundamentalist uprising of 1978 to 1982. To build his regime, he also depended on external resources—that is, Soviet arms with which he built up the army and Arab oil money with which he expanded the bureaucracy and co-opted the bourgeoisie. Only as the state was stabilized and the regime attained relative internal cohesion was Asad able to confront Israel and make Syria a player, rather than a victim of regional conflicts. The legitimacy of Asad’s regime was largely based on its relative success in doing this, beginning with the 1973 Arab-Israeli war.¹²

Regime Power Structures and Intra-Elite Politics

The Syrian Ba‘th regime was headed by the Asad presidency that rested on three overlapping pillars of power—the party apparatus, the military-police establishment, and the state bureaucracy. Intra-elite politics was played out largely in the relationship between the presidency, party, and security barons, and informal networks of actors linking these power centers operated behind the scenes of formal institutions,¹³ the latter being important as instruments of the elite policy implementation or arenas for their rivalry.

The president was the main source of policy innovation and had numerous powers of command, appointment, and patronage. When Bashar al-Asad succeeded his father as president, he initially had to share power with the old guard, his father’s lieutenants; but he used his appointment powers to replace them with his own loyalists and establish himself as the prime decision-maker.

The security services made up under Hafiz al-Asad of his trusted network of military and intelligence officers—a majority of them Alawites—were second only to the president in influence; charged with surveillance of threats to the regime, they were also instruments through which the president controlled the other regime power centers. Additionally, their role in vetting all candidates for office and promotion and keeping files on everyone’s peccadilloes and loyalty, along with the extralegal powers acquired in fights with the regime’s many enemies, allowed top security barons to become powerful political brokers whose support ambitious politicians and prominent businessmen sought.

Third in importance was the Ba‘th Party’s Regional Command (*al-qiyadah al-qutriyah*), the top collegial leadership body, roughly divided between senior military commanders, the most powerful cabinet ministers and governors, and top party apparatchiks. A periodically assembled party congress of some 1,200 delegates was a main arena in which ideological and later bureaucratic intra-elite

conflicts were compromised, elite turnover engineered, and a stamp of approval given to major new policies. The Regional Command controlled the party apparatus; in 2000, party membership of nearly two million incorporated teachers, students, state employees, peasants, and workers and controlled the worker, peasant, and professional unions. Party institutions gave the regime roots in society and bridged sectarian and urban-rural gaps.

The army was another pillar of power. It was differentiated into elite units, primarily charged with regime defense and staffed on the basis of political loyalty and (Alawite) sectarian affiliation; and the wider professional army charged with defending the state's borders. The last pillar was the state bureaucracy headed by the Council of Ministers (cabinet) and charged with policy implementation. It was responsible to the *Majlis ash-Shab* or people's council (parliament), of which two-thirds of seats were reserved for candidates of the National Progressive Front (NPF), the alliance of the Ba'ath Party with small leftist and nationalist parties. In order to co-opt elements outside the regime's state- and rural-centered power base, independent candidates, mostly from the urban bourgeoisie, were allowed to contest the remaining one-third of parliamentary seats. The judiciary was politicized through party control of appointments and failed to guarantee rule of law or civil liberties; hence, redress of grievances often depended on informal clientele connections.

These structures proved very enduring, even under the extreme pressure of the Syrian Uprising. Although both party and government penetration of the countryside contracted, with half of Syrian territory falling out of regime control, the bureaucracy persisted, and the party was increasingly "militiaized" to defend proregime areas (as is detailed in the section on Domestic Conflict and Rebel Governance).

Actors and Participation

Political participation in Ba’thist Syria has taken various forms. In the early Ba’thist state (1963–1970), ideological conflicts were settled at party congresses and by intraparty military coups. Once Hafiz al-Asad consolidated the regime, the articulation of material interests was funnelled through the party and corporatist institutions described previously. Space for more exceptional “big-issue politics” over the direction of the country opened during periods of crisis such as the failed Islamic revolution (1978–1982) and during the presidential succession, when nonregime actors—Islamists and liberals—sought to reshape Syrian politics with limited success. A third major issue of political contestation was the evolution of economic policy, which regime politicians, technocrats, and business representatives incrementally adjusted to deal with chronic economic difficulties. The limited efficacy of formal channels of participation helps explain periodic bursts of street protest, including the “Damascus spring” (2001–2002) and the Syrian uprising, in which citizens sought to shape outcomes through mass peaceful protest and, later, armed insurgency. In the following section, two main issues of contestation—the place of religion in politics and the scope of political participation—are examined in some detail.

Table 22.1 The Rise of the Ba’th Party: A Chronology

Table 22.1 The Rise of the Ba’th Party: A Chronology

1943	Michel Aflaq and Salah ad-Din Bitar call their followings the “Ba’th movement”
1947	Founding conference of the Ba’th Party
1953	Merger of Ba’th and Arab Socialist parties

1954	Ba'th Party wins parliamentary presence
March 8, 1963	Ba'th military and allies seize power in Syria
October 1963	Sixth National Congress of Ba'th Party radicalizes party ideology
February 1966	Radical coup led by Salah Jadid ousts Aflaq and Bitar
November 1970	Hafiz al-Asad seizes power, ousts radical Baath faction
2000	Hafiz al-Asad dies; his son, Bashar, accedes to the presidency
2005	Ba'th Party congress consolidates Bashar's power, retires "Old Guard," and approves transition to a "social-market economy"; Syria forced to withdraw from Lebanon
2011	Beginning of the Syrian uprising against Ba'thist rule
2012	New constitution removes clause designating Ba'th as the leading party

Religion and Politics: The Struggle between Ba'thism and Political Islam

The Ba'th regime generated its antithesis—political Islam—which reflected the interests and values of the roughly half of Syrian society excluded from the Ba'thist state. Political Islam was historically concentrated in traditional urban quarters, where the mosque and the *suq* (market) came together. From this milieu, politicized *ulema* (religious scholars) and the Muslim Brotherhood (*al-ikhwan al-muslimun*), whose members were typically recruited from urban-merchant families, mounted the main opposition to the regime. Beginning in the 1960s, as the state takeover of foreign trade and restrictions on imports deprived merchants of business, they denounced Ba'th socialism as Marxist and atheist. As the youth of traditional neighborhoods went to university, a growing proportion of Islamist activists came to be drawn from the university educated.¹⁴

From 1977 to 1982, the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan) instigated a violent insurrection against the regime. Corruption, sectarian favoritism, Hafiz al-Asad's 1976 confrontation with the Palestinians in Lebanon, and Sunni resentment of minority domination generated fertile conditions for Islamist revolution. The Ikhwan attacked the Alawites as unbelievers and, reflecting the urban-centric and antistatist worldview of the *suq*, denounced the regime's land reform and called for an Islamic economy based on free enterprise. Financed by the aggrieved notability of Hama and Aleppo, the foot soldiers of the insurgency were recruited from the *suq* and sharia students, primarily from northern cities and towns. Hama was a historic center of Islamic piety, and the Hamawi notables resented the presence of Ba'th provincial officials and the favor shown surrounding villages they once dominated. By contrast, the Damascene bourgeoisie, enriched by the disproportionate share of public money expended in the capital, remained quiet during the uprising. The Islamist revolution failed, owing to its fragmented and largely unknown leadership and the urban and northern bias of its

social base. The regime, backed by its rural base, remained cohesive, and the security apparatus, led by Alawite troops with a stake in regime survival, mounted a repressive campaign of unusual ruthlessness, marked by the 1982 sack of Hama in which fifteen thousand to thirty thousand people were killed.

With the Ikhwan's supporters jailed and its leaders exiled,¹⁵ Islamist revolution had failed, but a less politicized, less oppositional Islamization from below was thereafter tolerated by the regime as Asad sought to tame political Islam through an alliance with moderate Sufi Islam, expressed in the appointment of Ahmad Kaftaro as Grand Mufti. Muhammad Sa'id al-Buti preached a moderate Islam in the media. Bashar al-Asad continued the strategy of fostering moderate Islam as a counter to both radical Islamists and the secular opposition, resulting in the spread of Islamic schools and charities, conservative attire, and mosque attendance. Islamist intellectuals and businessmen were co-opted into parliament, and recognition was given to the Qubaysi movement that preached Islam among upper-class Damascene women. This largely nonpolitical Islam, concentrating on personal piety, rejecting violence, and mobilizing around issues such as opposition to liberal reform of Syrian family law, seemed less threatening to the regime.¹⁶ While the outlook of the *ulema*, recruited from the *suq* merchant class, was sharply at odds with Ba'athist socialism, it was convergent with Bashar's increasingly neoliberal tangent. Bashar al-Asad also built alliances with the interlocked business and religious elite of formerly oppositionist Aleppo. Islamists were not, however, politically incorporated and instead the regime continued efforts to control them by appointing the senior *ulema*, such as muftis and imams of the big mosques; exploiting differences between Sufi orders and their Salafi critics as well as between conservative imams and modernists; and according those who sought accommodation with the regime the freedom and resources to spread their networks.¹⁷ The government's coming to terms with political Islam initially enhanced stability, but the consequent erosion of secularism carried real dangers that manifested themselves in the Islamic color of much of the uprising starting in 2011.

In the environment of extreme conflict after 2011, Islamic ideology and discourse mutated and deepened: The previously dominant peaceful Sufi strand of Islam, which had accommodated itself to the regime, suffered contraction, while salafism and jihadism, in their various “moderate” and “radical” forms, became the main mobilizing ideologies of the insurgency. Increasingly, sectarian discourse (Sunni Islam vs. Shi’a and Christians) was used to mobilize support and demonize opponents. Governance in rebel-controlled areas came to be based on various forms of supposedly “Islamic” practice, such as “Islamic courts.”

Stalled Democratization and Authoritarian Upgrading

When Bashar al-Asad assumed power in Syria in July 2000, there was much optimism about a young president with exposure to Western education who announced his determination to modernize Syria and who invited constructive criticism of the regime. According to Volker Perthes,¹⁸ however, al-Asad's project was to "modernize authoritarianism" in Syria. This required limited political liberalization and more rule of law, but not democratization. The regime's initial tolerance of the Damascus Spring of 2000 to 2001 suggested that a coalition between regime modernizers and the loyal opposition was possible,¹⁹ and indeed, the secular liberal opposition wanted a gradual and peaceful democratization. But when hard-line opposition figures attacked the legacy of Hafiz and spotlighted the corruption of regime barons, regime hard-liners were strengthened, and Bashar shut down his political liberalization experiment.²⁰ Western democracy, he declared, could not just be imported and had to follow social and economic modernization, not precede it.

There were in fact several structural obstacles to any "democratization from above." The minority Alawite elite feared sectarian voting (as in Iraq) would allow the Sunni majority to drive it from power. Even regime reformers believed economic reforms would be blocked if the masses were empowered by the vote. Demand for democratization was concentrated in a limited number of middle-class intellectuals and a minority of the private bourgeoisie who were deeply divided. Additionally, the fear that democratization would spread the "Iraqi disease"—sectarian conflict—to Syria briefly generated for the regime what might be called legitimacy because of a worse alternative.

As a substitute for democratization, Asad embarked on a process of "authoritarian upgrading," the fostering of alternative constituencies to substitute for the alliance with workers and peasants the regime

was abandoning. The regime co-opted an alliance of reforming technocrats and the business class, a powerful social force that, dependent as it was on the state for opportunities (contracts, licenses), had no interest in democratization. The new rich and the urban-middle class were encouraged to develop their own civil society organizations, such as junior chambers of commerce. At the same time, to appease the urban middle class, Asad allowed a certain political decompression, which reduced the “barrier of fear” that had resulted from the 1980s repression of the Islamic rebellion. Critics of the regime were treated more leniently, albeit within boundaries highlighted by episodic instances of selective repression. Similarly, the introduction of the Internet and mobile telephones was seen by Asad, who had been president of the Syrian Computer Society, as an essential tool of economic modernization, which the regime also used to mobilize supporters and legitimize itself. But these moves also gave political activists the ability to build networks, overcome atomization, and publicize abuses;²¹ they paved the way for the 2011 uprising, as will be detailed in the section on Domestic Conflict.²²

Political Economy

Ba'th Populist Statism (1963–2000)

The Ba'th regime carried out a “revolution from above” that effected a significant redistribution of economic assets through land reform and the nationalization of industry, banks, and other big businesses; opened education and public employment to the lower strata; and established welfare entitlements, including labor rights and food subsidies. Formerly rigid class lines were broken, unleashing substantial social mobility.²³ There was a major transformation of the countryside through land redistribution, irrigation, and land reclamation works; the spread of education, health care, and electrification; and the subsidization of agriculture, which increased incomes and opportunities for rural residents. This considerably mitigated the historic urban-rural gap, although rural poverty remained a fact of life.²⁴

The economy significantly expanded in the 1970s, as the state channeled investment and substantial foreign aid from the East bloc and Arab oil producers into factories, railways, dams, and irrigation projects in an effort at statist import-substitute industrialization (ISI). By the mid-1980s, however, the exhaustion of Ba'th statism was apparent in balance-of-payment and foreign-exchange crises and a chronic savings investment gap, reflective of the failure of the public sector to accumulate capital. This was because of systemic corruption, massive military spending, inefficiencies in public-sector management, and the general subordination of economic rationality to political imperatives. Meanwhile, the private sector, confined after the nationalization of big business to small-scale enterprises, failed to invest, and the rich exported their capital. The economy became excessively dependent on petroleum revenues and transfers from Syrians living or working abroad.²⁵

The regime responded to the weaknesses of statism with three waves of liberalization—in the early 1970s, late 1980s, and early 1990s, resulting in an ever-greater role for the private sector, whose share of investment and GDP exceeded that of the public sector in

the 1990s. Economic liberalization generated a new “military-merchant complex” at the heart of the regime as senior regime stalwarts, notably Alawite military and security officers, went into business with Sunni private-sector partners, often rent seekers exploiting their connections with the state. In time, as the sons of the elite went into business, their intermarriage and business partnerships with the private business class generated a new upper class, which partly bridged old sectarian divides. Parallel to the emergence of the new rich, mounting inflation threatened the livelihoods of the publicly employed middle class, and class distinctions sharpened.²⁶

There was, however, resistance to a full transition to a market economy. Populism was institutionalized in the ruling party and the “social contract” under which citizens surrendered political rights in return for economic entitlements. The ability of the regime to buy loyalty through patronage would have been risked by full withdrawal of the state from the economy. Sustained economic liberalization required reconstruction of an entrepreneurial bourgeoisie, which, willing to invest, could provide a viable alternative to the public sector as a source of jobs and taxes; but the old bourgeoisie was politically opposed to the regime; newer elements were largely commercial and rent seeking; all evaded taxes; and capital was exported in the absence of investor confidence, which required greater rule of law, policies favoring investors over labor, and ending regional conflicts. Rent windfalls—oil revenues and Arab aid—and bursts of investment following liberalization initiatives temporarily relieved pressure for deeper economic liberalization. Rent and relative lack of debt to the West buffered the regime from International Monetary Fund–imposed structural adjustment.

Postpopulist “Reform” under Bashar al-Asad (2000–)

Bashar al-Asad’s economic reform project was driven by several imperatives: Since the 1980s, GDP per capita had stagnated, as economic growth barely kept up with population growth, resulting in burgeoning youth unemployment. Revenues from petroleum exports, which had funded half the state budget, began a decline at the end of the 1990s. With the global failure of the socialist alternative to capitalism, private capital investment appeared to be the only solution to the exhaustion of Syria’s statist economy. Ba’th Party ideologues and apparatchiks gradually lost power to new, liberalizing technocrats. The regime officially favored the “Chinese model” through which the market is introduced while the state-dominated system, including populist welfare measures, is downsized gradually in order to avoid social instability. Actual policy measures, however, were driven by two partly conflicting imperatives: to stimulate growth through private investment, which meant prioritizing the needs of investors, and, with the decline of oil revenues, to improve Syria’s dismal 10 percent tax-to-GDP ratio, which required ending widespread tax evasion by the private sector at the expense of the public sector and its employees. The regime had to simultaneously encourage private investors and extract a share of their profits for the treasury.²⁷

A multitude of new laws were designed to create the legal framework for a more market-oriented economy, reinforce property rights, and restrict political interference in economic administration. Private banks and insurance companies opened, and trade and foreign exchange were liberalized. Private companies were permitted in virtually all fields, although they still required nontransparent official approval. Capital could now be repatriated; foreign banks could wholly finance projects; and labor laws were relaxed. Syria jumped from 145th out of 157 countries on the Index of Economic Freedom in 2006 to 91st in 2008.

Many reforms, however, went wholly or partially unimplemented, owing to the underqualified, poorly motivated, sometimes-hostile bureaucracy charged with carrying out reform. Vested corrupt interests also obstructed or perverted the reforms. Moreover, the regime aimed to survive a transition from a statist to a market economy by creating its own fraction of the emerging capitalist class; indeed, the new class of “crony capitalists”—the rent-seeking alliances of political brokers led by Bashar’s mother’s family—acquired a stranglehold on the economy that deterred investment by more productive entrepreneurs. The role of the state in the economy remained substantial: Its investment was the main economic stimulator; the public industrial sector was not privatized, although contracting its management to private firms might have been a privatization by stealth. Because the public sector also supplied contracts and intermediate goods at low cost to the private sector, their relationship was symbiotic.

Under the new political economy, average GNP growth was only 3 percent between 2000 and 2006, barely above population growth. After 2004, a spurt of investment due to excess liquidity in the Gulf from the oil price boom and Syria’s improved business climate drove a private-sector boom in trade, housing, banking, construction, and tourism. But the failure to invest in significant job-creating enterprises severely limited the trickle-down effects. Socioeconomic inequality steadily increased. While the new bourgeoisie was enriched, the failure of official salaries to keep up with inflation since the 1980s impoverished the salaried middle class, and public-sector workers normally had to work multiple jobs. A 2005 United Nations Development Program (UNDP) study found 30 percent of Syrians lived near the official poverty line, and unemployment was estimated at close to 18 percent. To be sure, agriculture support prices helped peasants, and the subsidization of basic consumption commodities, such as bread, provided a safety net for town dwellers. But the government started reducing subsidies, especially on fuel products that encouraged smuggling to neighboring countries at the expense of the treasury. Public health and education services, deprioritized under austerity budgets, sharply deteriorated. This pushed those

able to pay to rely on private medicine and send their children to new Syrian private universities the regime encouraged. Syria's scores on the Human Development Index (HDI), which improved from 0.580 in 1980 to 0.691 in 2000, with life expectancy about seventy years and the literacy rate at 76 percent, reflected momentum from earlier social investments. The country still ranked 108 out of 173 countries on the HDI, with an official per capita annual income of approximately \$4,800, although this figure did not adequately capture the large informal economy.

All of Syria's developmental gains were dissipated in the civil war that broke out after 2011: Four years after the civil war started, GDP had been at least halved; unemployment stood at 57 percent; 7.9 million fell into poverty and, of these, 4.4 million into extreme poverty.²⁸ Eleven million Syrians were displaced, and massive numbers left the country to become refugees in neighboring countries. Regime bombing destroyed urban quarters; whole factories were dismantled in Aleppo and taken to Turkey. With the ruin of the normal economy, the market shrank to local household production or else people survived by human, arms, and drug trafficking; looting; or else enlisting as fighters, with the Gulf-funded Islamist groups the best able to recruit and pay them. Syrian capital fled the country, and exiled businessmen became major investors in Turkey. War profiteers connected with the regime enriched themselves on scarcities, smuggling, and monopolies, and regime stalwarts exported their funds and families to Dubai.

Domestic Conflict and Rebel Governance

The Syrian Uprising

By mid-2011, mass peaceful mobilization demanding the fall of the Bashar al-Asad regime had swept large parts of Syria, putting the regime on the defensive. The seeds of the uprising can be seen in the “authoritarian upgrading” by which Bashar al-Asad sought to fix the vulnerabilities of the regime he inherited from his father, notably the exhaustion of statist development. This drove regime efforts to find alternative sources of revenues, via tax cuts, and currency and trade liberalization, designed to attract expatriate capital and surplus liquidity from the Gulf and Turkey. The priority on investment sidelined the official ideal of a social market economy that would ensure fair distribution. This was especially dangerous since rapid population growth generated legions of unemployed youth whose access to economic opportunities contracted. The removal of subsidies on agricultural inputs and decline of farm support prices, combined with the terrible drought of 2007 to 2009, led to agricultural decline. Poor neighborhoods around the cities burgeoned with the influx of drought victims and Iraqi refugees. The conspicuous consumption of the new urban rich alienated those in the surrounding deprived suburbs.²⁹

In parallel, to advance his postpopulist reforms, Asad concentrated power in the presidency in an extended struggle with the Ba‘thist old guard. Uprooting Sunni old-guardists destroyed the clientele networks that had incorporated key segments of Sunni society into the regime. This made the president overdependent on the presidential family, Alawi security barons, and technocrats lacking bases of support. Also, seeing the party apparatus and the worker and peasant unions as obstacles to economic reform, Asad debilitated them. This weakening of the regime’s organized connection to its rural and Sunni constituency contracted its social base, making it more minoritarian and more upper class. Parallel to this, authoritarian upgrading did foster alternative constituencies, mostly in the big cities.

While mounting grievances and narrowing regime support made the regime vulnerable to the Arab uprising, it was the overreaction by the security forces, starting in Dara where protests were met with violence, that precipitated revolt in Syria. The protests initially demanded democratic reforms, not revolution, and Asad might therefore have reacted with democratic concessions; however, given the minority core of the regime and the debilitation of its former cross-sectarian base, this would have risked conceding the advantage to Sunni oppositionists. He chose to stand with the hard-liners in the security forces and to demonize the protestors as Islamist terrorists to justify their repression; however, the regime's use of violence only spread the protests to further areas and precipitated maximalist demands—fall of the regime—from the opposition. This was encouraged by the regional Arab Uprisings, which spread the idea that popular protests could succeed in overthrowing authoritarian rulers and broke the “fear barrier” in Syria. Internet technology was used to generate opposition networks and deliver their revolutionary message, while local committees sprang up to coordinate protests.³⁰

Despite the mobilization of mass protest sweeping large parts of Syria, no presidential overthrow took place. This was partly because the uprising, geographically dispersed away from the capital, never acquired momentum at the center of power. Rather, beginning in the rural peripheries, it then spread to small towns, suburbs, and medium-size cities, such as Homs and Hama, where its foot soldiers were unemployed youth, refugees from drought, and medium- and small-size traders and manufacturers, victimized by trade liberalization and also resentful of the expansion of the Alawis into business sectors. The regime, moreover, had its own support base—it relied on those that had benefited from its policies or felt threatened by the uprising, notably the crony capitalists and the minorities, especially Alawis. It had support in neighborhoods of Damascus and Aleppo, where the investment boom and the new consumption were concentrated. The middle class of the two main cities feared instability and loss of their secular modern lifestyle if traditional rural insurgents took power. Exiled businessmen who had

lost out to regime-connected operators were big funders of the insurgency; but much of the in-country business class saw no alternative to the regime. In summary, there were enough grievances to fuel an uprising in Syria but only among a plurality of the population, with a significant minority adhering to the regime as a better alternative than civil war and the majority on the sidelines.³¹

All efforts to find a political solution to the crisis failed. Even though the regime conceded some reforms that the opposition had been demanding for decades, they were considered inadequate and insincere. Besides the moral outrage at the killings perpetuated by the government, opposition activists believed that they could only be safe from its retribution if the regime was removed. The opposition strategy depended on a level and scale of protests such that the security services would be stretched thin and exhausted, perhaps so provoked they would increase violence that would turn a majority of the population against the regime or lead to such disaffection in the army that it would become an unreliable instrument of repression. Indeed, the streets of scores of towns and small cities were swamped with protestors, putting the regime very much on the defensive. However, the military, organized around its Alawi core and closely linked to the presidential clan, but also long invested in the regime through the military branches of the Ba'th party, remained largely cohesive and loyal for a long time. It did not turn against its superiors, and Alawi-dominated units, such as the Fourth Division headed by Maher al-Asad and the Republican Guard, were most involved in repression. Alawis (and others) were also mobilized in militias (the *shabiha*), later organized into a formal national guard; with much to lose if the regime fell, they remained its most reliable shock troops.

A major escalation of the conflict was the battle for cities in which the opposition sought to escape from confinement in the peripheries. It realized it could not win without breaking the alignment between the regime, on the one hand, and the bourgeoisie and middle class, on the other hand, in the two main cities, Damascus and Aleppo. It was initially thought that the turmoil and Western sanctions would

paralyze the economy, cause the business elites to desert the regime, and sap the regime's revenue base, hence its ability to pay salaries and sustain the loyalties of the state administration.

However, an economic collapse did not take place, and the regime proved capable of perpetuating itself financially. Ultimately, therefore, to turn the main cities against the regime, parts of the opposition sought to show, through bombings and armed infiltrations into urban neighborhoods and suburbs, that the regime could not guarantee stability; the regime, in turn, used heavy weapons against suburban neighborhoods harboring the insurgents to send the message to populations that such armed groups should not be tolerated in their midst. Homs, which slipped almost entirely under opposition control, became a particular victim of this dynamic in which regime violence against urban neighborhoods was particularly bloody.

The regime deliberately sought to rally the solidarity of its minority base, intertwined with the security forces, by sectarianizing the conflict, accusing the opposition of Islamic terrorism, and framing it as a choice between social peace and jihadi violence to win the support of minorities who could expect retribution if the regime fell. The opposition initially sought to win over the minorities with a rhetoric of civic inclusion; however, as democracy activists either exited Syria or fell back on religious zeal in a time of high insecurity, the balance shifted to Islamist hard-liners, empowered by money and guns from the Gulf. For the opposition, framing the conflict in sectarian terms potentially allowed it to mobilize the Sunni majority. While Asad's increasing use of lethal force against nonviolent protestors alienated wide swaths of the public, because society rapidly became polarized along sectarian and class lines, no bandwagoning against the regime similar to that in Egypt happened. As the conflict morphed into semisectarian civil war, whole communities became entrapped in the "security dilemma," seeing the "other" as enemies. Mass flows of refugees emptied the country of those caught in between and also of many of the secular, middle-class peaceful protestors, leaving the field to the radical Islamists.

This was paralleled by militarization of the conflict. Although the mass protests had been nonviolent, the regime's violence generated a desire for revenge and legitimized the notion of armed self-defense among the opposition. Army defectors formed the core of armed resistance to the government, the Free Syrian Army (FSA), while many of the protestors joined armed Islamist groups, which could soon deploy tens of thousands of fighters, bolstered by foreign jihadists. Strategic areas, such as the Ghouta—rural suburbs of Damascus—eastern Aleppo city, Raqqa, and Idlib fell under the control of armed Islamist groups. The armed opposition's capacity to deny the regime control in many areas and the army's lack of sufficient reliable manpower to repress what became widespread, armed insurgency, led the regime to withdraw into its strategic southern and western heartlands; this left much of rural northern and eastern Syria out of government control.

Partially Failed State: Governance amid Civil War

As the civil war deepened, the regime was subtly transformed to fight the opposition. On the one hand, it attempted to sustain a monopoly of state services, to the point of continuing to pay government salaries even in opposition-controlled zones. The party militarized and was supplemented by militias, local self-defense forces, some originating in the proregime thugs (*shebiha*) that has repressed protestors; while the regime made an effort to institutionalize and reassert central control over these groups by incorporating them into “National Defense Forces,” local groups dependent on raising their own resources and defending their own communities inevitably acquired considerable autonomy, thereby decentralizing power. Shi‘i militias, particularly Hizbullah but also Iraqi militants recruited by Iran, established a semiautonomous presence in certain areas as well and formed the shock troops of government offensives. On the other hand, the regime sought to preempt efforts by the opposition to establish a counteradministration in key urban areas such as western Aleppo and Douma, through sieges and bombings. This, combined with the failure of the opposition to provide services and security in their zones, precipitated population movements into government-controlled areas. As regime resources became scarcer, however, it increasingly tied access to state services to loyalty to the regime.

Meanwhile, the militarization of the conflict and the relative withdrawal of state-delivered welfare and security from opposition-controlled areas left a vacuum of order that rival groups sought to fill. Local councils, initially set up by young coordination committee leaders and civil society groups, attempted to provide public services and humanitarian aid, but as this first-generation leadership was detained, killed, or fled the country, civil society groups were marginalized. Amid growing insecurity, citizens looked to informal traditional institutions such as clan, tribal, and sectarian/ethnic groups for protection and support. Autonomous armed groups proliferated as the Free Syrian Army gradually morphed into warlord

bands and jihadist movements. Jihadist groups tended over time to prevail at the expense of secular civil society and of the FSA because they combined superior financial resources and the best motivated and armed fighters. Endless permutations of salafist armed groups merged into umbrella groups (e.g., Islamic Front, Syrian Islamic Liberation Front) and splintered over time (being in competition with each other as well as fighting the regime), but the most powerful and enduring were the al-Qa'ida avatars, Jabhat al-Nusra and "Islamic State" (IS). Sharia courts (or authorities) were established to manage conflicts between armed groups and were often recruited from them; when run by jihadist groups, they imposed radical interpretations of Islam on populations. Even initially secular groups promoting inclusive citizenship over time mirrored the Islamic discourse pervading the opposition-controlled areas. Still, even in towns controlled by jihadists, civil society groups occasionally mobilized demonstrations against their arbitrary treatment of citizens.

A war economy emerged, and conflict came to be driven by competition over resources, giving warlords and jihadi groups a stake in its continuance. Among the most important resources were oil fields, gas, electricity, and water, in addition to profits from border fees and checkpoints and from looting of banks and factories. IS looted billions from the bank in Al-Raqqa and seized flour mills and oil fields while al-Nusra controlled oil pipelines. Economic deals crossed political divides: In Aleppo, a "water-for-electricity" deal was agreed between government and opposition, and in Deir ez-Zor, the regime and Al-Nusra shared oil profits.

A three-way struggle for power emerged among the regime, "moderate" opposition, and jihadists, themselves split, with the balance of power different in each area. In Raqqa, civil society groups had elected a council after the regime withdrew, but jihadists soon took over and then themselves came to blows, with IS driving out Jabhat al-Nusra and establishing the city as capital of its "Caliphate." In Aleppo, rural Islamist militias infiltrated and seized the poorer eastern section of the city; IS, briefly dominant, was driven out by local "mujahedeen," which shared power with the Muslim

Brotherhood and Jabhat al-Nusra in a local council and sharia authority. The regime's barrel bombs, however, led to increasing population flight from the opposition-controlled half of the city. Deir ez-Zor also remained contested between regime and rival opposition forces.

The interventions of rival outside forces further fragmented authority. The disparate exiled groups in Turkey were grouped in the National Coalition of the Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces (NC). It used international funding to build patronage connections to the nongovernment-controlled areas but was perceived as detached from grassroots interests and was divided between the clients of Saudi Arabia and Qatar, whose funding of rival groups also fragmented the armed opposition on the ground. Western governments, via subcontracted private agencies backing different groups, also contributed to fragmentation in the opposition areas.³²

The subsequent evolution of the conflict was basically shaped by the military balance of power between regime and opposition. In early 2015 after the fall of Palmyra to IS and after the formerly divided Islamist clients of Qatar and Saudi Arabia came together to seize Idlib, the regime looked to be in a precarious position. The Russian military intervention, a reaction to these advances by the militant Islamists, combined with the US-Western coalition against IS in the eastern part of the country, particularly Raqqa, substantially shifted the internal power balance back toward the regime. It began a series of seemingly inexorable advances, retaking the northern cities, including Eastern Aleppo, Palmyra, and eastern areas from IS, then completing the defeat of the opposition in the Ghouta, Dara, and the South in 2018. Regime advances were backed by Shia militias and Russian airpower, but were also facilitated by deals to relocate opposition fighters to Idlib, which became an island of opposition militants. Meanwhile in the East, many IS held regions fell to the US-backed, Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, which repelled regime efforts to advance into Raqqa and to retake oil fields in Deir ez Zor. In the North, Turkish incursions in support of its own client FSA forces captured al-Bab from IS and contested the Kurdish PYD

control of the border areas, notably taking Afrin from the PYD in 2018. By mid-2018, the regime commanded the country's heartland and biggest cities, but grain- and natural-resource-rich northeastern areas, and especially Kurdish-majority regions, remained outside its control. Unless a diplomatic deal could be reached among Russia, the United States, and Turkey or between the government and the Kurds, Syria faced continued de facto partition. The active civil war appeared to be winding down, but reestablishing legitimate authority and accessing the resources to reconstruct the economy remained daunting challenges.

Regional and International Politics

Syria's foreign policy is shaped by historical grievances and geographic vulnerability. It had a limited manpower base, few natural boundaries, little strategic depth, and exposure on three sides to stronger countries: Iraq had designs on Syria, and Turkey has, at times, pressured Damascus by troop movements or control of the water of the Euphrates River, which runs through both countries. Grievances originating in the dismemberment of historic Syria produced an Arab nationalism that brought conflict with a militarily stronger Israel, with which Syria fought several wars (1948, 1967, 1973, and 1982).

Syrian Foreign Policy under Hafiz al-Asad (1970–2000)

The struggle with Israel has been at the center of Syrian foreign policy, but only under Hafiz al-Asad did Syria become a credible actor in this contest. He scaled down Syria's goals to match the country's limited capabilities, abandoning the liberation of Palestine and prioritizing recovery of the Arab lands occupied by Israel in 1967 above all the Golan Heights. But his goal of achieving Palestinian statehood in the West Bank and Gaza under a comprehensive peace was sufficiently important that Syria eschewed for a quarter century a potential separate settlement with Israel over the Golan at the expense of the Palestinians. Second, Asad significantly upgraded Syria's capabilities. Convinced that Israel would never withdraw from the occupied territories unless military action upset the post-1967 status quo, his main aim after coming to power in 1970 was preparation for a conventional war to retake the Golan. Syria's alliance with the Soviet Union and with Arab oil states enabled the rebuilding and expansion of the armed forces. Alliance with Sadat's Egypt, the most militarily powerful Arab state, which shared Syria's interest in regaining the occupied territories, was necessary to take on a more-powerful Israel.³³ Egypt and Syria went to war with Israel in 1973 to recover their occupied territories. Syria failed to recover the Golan Heights militarily, but Asad sought to use the political leverage from the credible challenge to Israel and the simultaneous Arab oil embargo to get international pressure on Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories. Henry Kissinger's mediation resulted in a 1974 disengagement agreement on the Golan expected to be the first step in total Israeli withdrawal. However, Sadat's subsequent separate deals with Israel undermined Syria's diplomatic leverage in bargaining for recovery of the remainder of the Golan and put a comprehensive Arab-Israeli settlement off the agenda. Thereafter, for Damascus, the threat of an Israel emboldened by the neutralization of its southern front had to

be contained, and the resumption of peace negotiations depended on restoration of the Arab-Israeli power balance.

Syria's 1976 intervention in Lebanon's civil war was part of Asad's attempt to construct a Syrian sphere of influence to substitute for the collapsing alliance with Sadat's Egypt; it also aimed to head off emergence of a radical Palestinian-dominated Lebanon that could give Israel an excuse to intervene militarily, possibly seize southern Lebanon, and threaten Syria's soft western flank. Intervention allowed Asad to station his army in the Bekaa Valley against this danger. Asad also sought, via the intervention, to control the Lebanon-based PLO, hence the "Palestine card": Syria's diplomatic bargaining leverage would be enhanced if it could veto any settlement of the Palestinian problem that left Syria out and overcome rejectionist Palestinian resistance to an acceptable settlement. Asad also conducted a low-level conflict on Israel's Lebanese border, using proxies such as Palestinian and later Hizbullah guerrillas, designed to show Israel it could not have peace without a settlement with Syria. He simultaneously worked to obstruct schemes to draw other Arab parties into partial, separate settlements with Israel that circumvented Syria. Thus, he took great risks to obstruct the 1983 Lebanese-Israeli accord in defiance of US and Israeli power.³⁴

Just as Egypt withdrew from the Arab-Israeli power balance, the 1979 Islamic revolution transformed Iran from a friend of Israel into a fiercely anti-Zionist state and potential Syrian ally. When Iraq attacked Iran, Asad condemned the invasion as diverting the Arabs from the Israeli menace. His stand with Iran was vindicated after the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, when the dramatic effectiveness of the Iranian-sponsored Islamist resistance to Israel—out of which Hizbullah was born—helped foil a mortal threat to Syria. Asad's support for the Western-led war coalition in the 1990 to 1991 Gulf War following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait was driven by the desire to contain the hostile Iraqi regime, but also by the perceived opportunity to trade membership in the anti-Iraq US coalition—whose credibility Syria's Arab nationalist credentials arguably enhanced—for US

promises to broker an acceptable Arab-Israeli settlement after the war.³⁵ Hafiz entered the US-brokered Madrid peace process in the early 1990s and later, bilateral negotiations with Israel. The two sides came very close to a settlement, but Israel's demands to keep its surveillance station on Mount Hermon, 5 percent of the Golan, and control of the Sea of Galilee led to collapse of the negotiations in 2000.³⁶

Foreign Policy under Bashar al-Asad (2000–)

Bashar al-Asad inherited a deteriorating strategic situation: end of the peace negotiations with Israel, a new Turkish-Israeli alliance, and opposition to Syrian forces remaining in Lebanon following Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000. With the collapse of Syria's Soviet arms supplier, he could not sustain the conventional military balance with Israel. In response, al-Asad tried to construct compensating alliances; he sought a strategic opening to Europe, improved relations with Turkey, and in 2001, started an opening to Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

Toward Israel, Asad affirmed that Syria was willing to resume peace negotiations if Israel accepted a full withdrawal to the June 4, 1967, borders on the Golan. But once the rise of Ariel Sharon to power in Israel pushed a settlement off the agenda, he supported Hizbullah operations against Israeli forces in Shabaa Farms, a disputed enclave in southern Lebanon, as a way of pressuring Israel. Given the strategic imbalance with Israel, Syria now relied for deterrence on Hizbullah's asymmetric warfare capability and Syrian missiles with chemical warheads. Bashar also pursued Turkish-brokered peace talks with Israel, which, however, were aborted by Israel's 2009 attack on Gaza.

Syrian-US relations dramatically declined under the George W. Bush administration. After 9/11, Bush announced that all states not with the United States in his "war on terror" were foes, but Syria, regarding groups on the US terrorism list—Palestinian militants and Hizbullah—as national liberation movements and "cards" in its struggle with Israel, evaded US demands that it cease support of them. Syrian-US relations further worsened as Syria reopened the closed oil pipeline with Iraq, thereby gaining the Syrian treasury a badly needed windfall of a billion dollars yearly in oil revenues. At the UN and in the Arab League, Syrian diplomats attempted to delegitimize the looming US invasion of Iraq and following it, allowed resistance fighters to transit Syria's border into Iraq while giving

refuge to fleeing Iraqi Ba‘thists. This risked military confrontation with the United States, but Syrian public opinion was so inflamed against the invasion that the regime’s legitimacy and Arab nationalist identity dictated opposition.

After triumphing over Saddam Hussein, the United States upped its demands on Syria, including that it end support for Palestinian militants and Hizbullah, withdraw from Lebanon, and cooperate with the occupation of Iraq—in short, give up its “cards” in the struggle over the Golan, its sphere of influence in the Levant, and its Arab nationalist stature in the Arab world. The regime did end overt support for the resistance in Iraq, but otherwise continued to defy US demands. One cost of this defiance was US economic sanctions that obstructed aspects of the regime’s economic liberalization by discouraging Western banks and companies from doing business in Syria. Another cost was that the United States joined with France to engineer UNSC Resolution 1559, calling on Syria to withdraw its military forces from Lebanon, to which Syria reluctantly submitted. They also set up an international tribunal to investigate Syria’s alleged role in the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri, who had tacitly backed Syria’s withdrawal from Lebanon; this was seen by Damascus as a tool of regime change in Syria. After Syrian withdrawal, there was a struggle for dominance in Lebanon between a US-French-Saudi coalition and Hizbullah, backed by Syria and Iran, until Hizbullah’s 2008 takeover of West Beirut led to the Doha agreement on a national unity government in which Hizbullah had a veto of any moves against Syria.

A major consequence of Syria’s stands in the Iraq and Lebanon conflicts was a shift in its regional alignments. Two axes emerged—a “moderate” one led by the United States and backed by the EU, of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan, with Israel an unofficial partner, and a “resistance front” led by Iran and Syria, aligned with Hizbullah and Hamas and enjoying wide support in Arab public opinion, with Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine the main battlegrounds. As Syria faced isolation in the West as a “pariah” state, its links with similarly isolated Iran strengthened.

Also to compensate, Syria moved into close alignment with formerly hostile Turkey. In the 1990s, the two states had come to the brink of war as Syria supported the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) against Turkey to pressure Ankara into giving it a greater share of Euphrates River water controlled by new Turkish upstream dams. In the mid-1990s, Turkey and Israel formed an alliance against Syria and Iran. Turkey's 1996 military threats caused Syria to abandon its support for the PKK, and thereafter, the empowerment of the Kurds by the US-Iraq wars gradually drove Turkey and Syria closer over the shared threat of Kurdish separatism. By the end of 2008, Syria was also enjoying a modest improvement in relations with Europe and the United States under the new administration of Barack Obama.

However, the 2011 uprising reshuffled the cards and unleashed a "New Struggle for Syria." Weakened by the uprising, Syria was turned from a pivotal actor in the regional power struggle into an arena for the struggle of external forces. At stake in this struggle for Syria was the balance between the pro-Western "moderate" (and Sunni) axis led by Saudi Arabia and the Iran-led "Resistance Front." While the Syrian uprising was essentially indigenous, external forces sought from the beginning to use it to their advantage. Qatar used Al-Jazeera to amplify antiregime protests, while the Saudis funneled money and arms to antiregime tribes. An anti-Asad coalition, led by the United States, France, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey, began financing, training, arming, and infiltrating insurgents into the country. As Syria became a partly failed state, it became a magnet for jihadis and al-Qa'ida militants, some funded or armed from the Gulf and assisted by Turkey. The Asad regime's only chance of slipping out of this tightening stranglehold was its links to "Shi'i" partners, Hizbullah in the West and, in the East, to Iraq and Iran. Meanwhile, Russia and China, antagonized by the West's use of a UN humanitarian resolution to promote regime change in Libya, protected Syria from a similar scenario.

Table 22.2 The Conflict between Syria and Israel: A Chronology

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1948– 1949	War in Palestine; Syrian irregulars and, later, regular forces participate
1955	Israeli attack on Syrian border positions inflames Syria's Arab nationalism
1965– 1966	Jordan River waters dispute with Israel; Syrian-backed Palestinian guerrillas raid Israel
June 1967	Third Arab-Israeli war; Israel occupies Syrian Golan Heights
October 1973	Fourth Arab-Israeli war: Syria fails to recover Golan
May 1974	Henry Kissinger brokers Syrian-Israeli disengagement on the Golan
1981	Israel "annexes" Golan
1982	Israeli invasion of Lebanon; major clashes with Syrian troops
1984	Syria foils Israeli-Lebanese peace accord
July 1991	Syria enters Madrid peace negotiations with Israel
May 1996	Likud election victory in Israel dims Syrian-Israeli peace prospects
1999	Election of Ehud Barak in Israel revives Syrian-Israeli peace prospects
2000	Asad-Clinton meeting marks breakdown of Israeli-Syrian peace negotiations

2006	Syria backs Hizbullah during Hizbullah-Israeli war in Lebanon
2008	Turkish-brokered indirect peace talks between Syria and Israel fail
2011+	Israeli airstrikes against Hizbullah and Iranian forces in Syria punctuate the period of the Syrian uprising

In parallel, a diplomatic struggle over Syria took place, initially within the framework for settlement set by the Geneva Declaration of 2012 that prescribed a political transition involving power sharing, while remaining silent on the role of the incumbent president. The opposition's insistence on his departure and the regime's unwillingness to accept power sharing, the backing for their uncompromising positions by their respective regional patrons, and the unwillingness of their great powers patrons—the United States and Russia—to apply pressure on them to compromise led to paralysis of the Geneva process and diplomatic stalemate. This only ended when the military stalemate on the ground was broken after the Russian intervention. Turkey, preoccupied with the threat of PKK-backed Syrian opposition on its borders, abandoned its anti-Asad stance, while Gulf states' support for the opposition gradually declined as they became preoccupied with other arenas (Yemen) and were divided by deepening Saudi-Qatar rivalry. The United States, and the West as a whole, had in parallel shifted their concern to the defeat of IS at the expense of removing Asad. This provided the conditions for Russia to back Asad's drive to subjugate opposition areas through various forms of siege and bombardment that forced them into various forms of truce involving de-facto power sharing or the evacuation of militants unwilling to accept such "reconciliation" to Idlib, which became a militant redoubt outside Damascus's military control. Russia also brought Turkey and Iran into diplomatic efforts at Astana and then Sochi to reach a political settlement that would leave Asad in power and entail limited power

sharing with the “acceptable” wing of the opposition. Nevertheless, the war against IS allowed the United States to establish a sphere of influence in the East through its Kurdish-led client, the Syrian Democratic Forces, which gave it leverage in any diplomatic-driven settlement of the conflict. Without such a political settlement, the restoration of Syria’s sovereignty remained blocked by foreign control over parts of its territory and overly dependent on the coercive capacities of a regime lacking legitimacy among much of the population. The lack of a settlement, in turn, obstructed plans to begin economic reconstruction of the country and the return of millions of refugees and displaced persons to their homes.

Conclusion

Hafiz al-Asad constructed a robust authoritarian regime that translated into enhanced Syrian statehood. Bashar al-Asad's effort to adapt this state to the post–Cold War age of globalization and his mismanagement of peaceful protests for political reform led to a civil war that cost Syria much of its previous achievements. After seven years of protest and then civil war, the balance of military power shifted to the Asad regime; a political settlement between the regime and the opposition remained out of reach.

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23 Tunisia

Laryssa Chomiak
Robert P. Parks

On December 17, 2010, the day that protests for economic dignity and antiregime calls began across Tunisia, the World Bank released a competitiveness and integration report on the Tunisian economy.¹ The report underscored the longtime portrayal of Tunisia as a *bon élève*, or good pupil, stressing the need to continue along the path of economic liberalization and reform:

The global integration strategy has allowed it to gradually become a fairly diversified and open economy. . . . The development model that Tunisia pursued over the past two decades has served the country well, but it has shown to be increasingly inadequate to reduce unemployment and promote growth of high value-added sectors.

That same day, in the central town of Sidi Bouzid, a young produce vendor named Muhammad Bouazizi immolated himself after a local police officer confiscated his produce, cart, and scales. The dramatic act of suicide represented Bouazizi's frustration with the lack of possibilities for basic economic sustainability or advancement, symbolizing a broader anger at corruption in the country's powerful network of privileged families. Muhammad Bouazizi's tragic act represented the plight of millions of Tunisians excluded from economic advancement and denied political expression by the repressive policies of ex-President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali and his small clan of powerful families.²

Within hours, Bouazizi's self-immolation unleashed waves of protest, first in Sidi Bouzid, then across Tunisia's interior, eventually

culminating into a nationwide movement, which by early January called for social justice, dignity, equality, and the removal of the regime. January 14, 2011, marked the Tunisian Revolution, the immediate flight of President Ben Ali, and the collapse of his single-party regime.³

The rupture broke many of the mechanisms of a fifty-four-year-old authoritarian state, but the dynamics of postrevolution politics and institution building also reflect a continuity of Tunisia's experience with state-building and social change, extant political institutions, modernization programs, resistance movements, and its position in the regional and global economy. This chapter begins with an overview of postrevolution politics, highlighting critical developments from January 14, 2011, to the present. Subsequent sections focus on state-building and social change, institutions and government, political actors and participation, Islam and politics, and underscore historical tensions around modernization and reform in the country.

Overview of Tunisia's Transition

Nature abhors a vacuum, and in the months following January 2011, Tunisia's government would go through several permutations. Ben Ali-appointed Prime Minister Mohammed Ghannouchi declared himself Interim President on January 15, 2011, only to be replaced the following day by then-Speaker of the Parliament Fouad Mebazza, following a ruling of the Constitutional Council, which itself was dissolved in March 2011. Mebazza promptly named Ghannouchi his prime minister, who formed a national unity government and promised elections within six months. Deemed too tainted by the Ben Ali regime, Ghannouchi was replaced by Beji Caid Essebsi, a longtime minister of Habib Bourguiba—Tunisia's first president—on February 27.

Key Facts on Tunisia

AREA 101,663 square miles (163,610 square kilometers)
CAPITAL Tunis
POPULATION 11,532,127
PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION UNDER 25 39.14
RELIGIOUS GROUPS (PERCENTAGE) Muslim (Sunni), 99.1; other (includes Christian, Jewish, Shia Muslim, and Baha'i), 1
ETHNIC GROUPS (PERCENTAGE) Arab, 98; European, 1; Jewish and other, 1
OFFICIAL LANGUAGE Arabic; French and Berber also spoken
TYPE OF GOVERNMENT Republic
DATE OF INDEPENDENCE March 20, 1956 (from France)
GDP \$40.26 billion; \$11,911 per capita (2017)
PERCENTAGE OF GDP BY SECTOR Agriculture, 9.9; industry, 25.6; services, 64
TOTAL RENTS (PERCENTAGE OF GDP) FROM NATURAL RESOURCES 2.5
FERTILITY RATE 2.2 children born/woman

Sources: The World Bank and CIA World Factbook, 2017.

Among Essebsi's first actions was the nomination of legal scholar Yadh Ben Achour to head the newly created High Authority for the Realization of the Objectives of the Revolution, Political Reform, and Democratic Transition (referred to as the *Ben Achour Commission*), a body of legal experts, scholars, and representatives of civic associations. Less than a month after its creation, the Ben Achour Commission announced the procedures that would frame anticipated elections for a National Constituent Assembly (NCA).

On October 23, 2011, Tunisians voted for the 217-seat NCA, a body tasked with drafting a democratic Tunisian constitution within one year, while overseeing the work of an interim government formed by the prime minister. With a 51.97 percent turnout,⁴ election results stunned many: The previously banned Islamist Ennahdha party, led by Rachid Ghannouchi, and the Congress for the Republic (CPR), led by long-time Ben Ali opponent Moncef Marzouki,⁵ won between them a parliamentary majority. Ennahdha won a large plurality, with 37.04 percent of the vote, translating into 89 NCA seats. Marzouki's CPR won 29 seats, with 8.71 percent of the vote. They joined the fourth-ranked party (20 seats), Ettakatol, led by longtime reformist opposition leader Mustapha Ben Jaafar, to create a 130-seat parliamentary majority. The *Troika*, as the coalition would be called, supported the candidacy of Mustapha Ben Jaafar for speaker of parliament. In December, the Troika-dominated NCA adopted the "Law on the Interim Organization of Public Powers," which was to replace constitutional authority while the NCA drafted a new constitution. That law defined the prerogatives and limitations on executive, government, and parliamentary authority. Two days after the law was passed, the NCA elected Moncef Marzouki as interim president, who in turn nominated Ennahdha executive-committee member Hamadi Jebali as prime minister, tasking him to form a government to run day-to-day affairs while the NCA drafted the constitution.

Interim Tensions

The interim government was immediately confronted with problems that could not be resolved through vote. By the time the NCA began to draft the constitution, the economy had been in contraction for a year. According to the World Bank, 2011 GDP growth fell to 1.6 percent, while unemployment spiked to a national aggregate of 18.1 percent. Alarming, the International Labor Organization (ILO) reported unemployment at 42.3 percent for Tunisians between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-five years old. According to the World Bank, foreign direct investment (FDI) in manufacturing, agribusiness, and tourism receipts plummeted as foreign investors and potential visitors shied from the aftershocks of revolution. FDI fell from US\$1.3 billion in 2010 to just over \$400 million in 2011,⁶ and Tunisia received close to two million fewer tourists in 2011 than in 2010.⁷

Immediately touched by the economic context, workers demanded swift action to increase employment options and salaries. Worker movements also had been at the forefront of resistance to the Ben Ali regime, most notably during the 2008 Gafsa Mining Basin rebellion.⁸ While the peak union, the General Union of Tunisian Workers (Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail, UGTT), eventually joined the anti-Ben Ali protest movement calling for a general strike on January 13, 2011, it has lost control over much of its rank and file. In such a context, the UGTT has been unable to control worker activities. According to one estimate, the number of strike movements increased by 122 percent between 2010 and 2011, involving 340 companies and over 140,000 workers.⁹ This had a major effect on manufacturing and extractive industries, which saw a reduction of 40 percent of value added in mining, primarily due to labor unrest in the phosphate sector. Phosphate production, eight million tons in 2010, fell to 2.5 million tons in 2011.¹⁰ Since 2011 and especially following 2014, strikes and protests in the mining regions have increased exponentially as a response to Tunisia's weakening

economy, but also because of deteriorating working and social service conditions. In 2017, phosphate production was just over half of that produced in 2010—4.15 million tons.

While 2012, the first year of the NCA, was marked by a slight upturn in economic growth, none of Tunisia's economic sectors had rebounded to 2010 levels. In the context of prolonged economic contraction and the effervescence of revolutionary sentiment, social and political unrest continued. In addition to a sagging economy, the Troika government had to contend with a rise in radical social movements and political violence. Accredited immediately after the Revolution, Ansar Al-Sharia and Hizb Tahrir are two distinct Salafi movements that created much confusion among the political class, especially among secular-leaning elites. Anti-Ennahdha voices painted the rise of Salafism as part of Ennahdha's long-term strategy for the Islamization of the country, fears largely unfounded given the many Ennahdha public statements regarding the party's commitment to democracy and pluralism. Hizb Tahrir sought and eventually won accreditation as a political party in July 2012, whereas Ansar Al-Sharia rejected political overtures opposing Tunisian political institutions, including the NCA and future constitution. In September 2012, Ansar Al-Sharia received authorization to organize a protest in front of the US Embassy in Tunis in response to a homemade YouTube video that allegedly insulted the Prophet Mohamed. Turnout was larger than authorities expected and quickly turned violent as protesters stormed the Embassy walls, setting fire to the structure and ransacking the nearby American School. Moncef Marzouki, then president, condemned the attacks and called them "unacceptable, considering its implication on our relations with Washington."¹¹

The attacks on the US Embassy marked the beginning of a political crisis that would stall the constitution drafting process, incite political infighting, and block important political reform agendas around transitional justice and judicial reform. While the NCA and Troika worked diligently to keep Tunisia on its path to democracy, public criticism of the postrevolutionary environment was co-opted by a

rising political opposition, *Nidaa Tounes* (Call for Tunisia), formed of secularists, leftists, labor representatives, industrialists, big-business interests, and former regime elements. Supporters of the Troika blamed the opposition for obstructing the work of the assembly for its own political gains. Some of the Troika's most ardent critics used this occasion for a public campaign to question a democratic future that accommodates both religious beliefs and the rights paradigm of secularists under rule of law.

In February 2013, five months after the US Embassy attacks, Chokri Belaid, a leftist Tunisian politician and vocal critic of the Ben Ali regime and the Troika, was assassinated in front of his home in Tunis. The assassination spiraled the country into deeper crisis, underscoring existing political tensions. Tens of thousands of Tunisians turned out at the Belaid funeral, and the UGTT called for a national strike. In response, Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali proposed to form a temporary technocratic government and schedule elections to weather the deepening political crisis. Jebali's plan was rejected by Ennahdha. Faced by rebellion from his own party, Jebali resigned, stating,

I promised if my initiative did not succeed I would resign as head of the government, and this is what I am doing following my meeting with the President. Today there is a great disappointment among the people and we must regain their trust and this resignation is a first step.¹²

Deepening political tensions provided an opportunity for the rise of *Nidaa Tounes* (Nidaa), led by former Interim Prime Minister Beji Caid Essebsi. Building a platform that criticized postrevolution security, Nidaa's popularity was amplified following the country's second postrevolution political assassination. In July, Mohamed Brahmi was murdered in front of his family while leaving his home. Brahmi was a member of the same leftist coalition as Chokri Belaid, and his assassination sparked the *Rahil* (Departure) movement, which convened daily in front of the NCA. *Rahil* was supported nationwide

in smaller protests calling for the dissolution of the NCA. The leftist coalition *Jabha Shaabia* (Popular Front), led by long-standing dissident Hama Hammami, joined forces with Nidaa to form the National Salvation Front (NSF). Oppositional parties represented in parliament joined the ranks of the NSF, and their deputies withdrew from parliament. Lawyers, judges, intellectuals, revolutionary activists, and civil society organizations joined the movement. The constitutional process was thus on the brink. *Rahil* expanded to include members of the UGTT and consisted of daily demonstrations calling for the dissolution of the NCA. Within two weeks, the sit-ins were gathering more than 150,000 protesters, which the NSF claimed represented a “national consensus” stronger than the electoral legitimacy of the Troika.¹³ Troika supporters called the NSF undemocratic and detrimental to Tunisia’s political transition.

The culmination of the street-based *Rahil* protests and the NSF’s widespread support pushed Ennahdha and the opposition to negotiate a political compromise. A national dialogue (*hiwar watani*) led by the quartet of UGTT, UTICA, the Lawyer’s Union, and the Tunisian League for the Defense of Human Rights brought the Troika and its opponents to reach a consensus in October 2013: The NCA would complete the Constitution by early 2014; upon its completion, the Troika would step down to be replaced by a technocratic government that would organize legislative and presidential elections within a reasonable time frame. The national dialogue was hailed by many observers as a key moment that led Tunisia out of political deadlock, while laying the groundwork for Tunisia’s first postauthoritarian parliamentary and presidential elections.

Despite continued protests, the NCA worked relentlessly to complete an acceptable draft of the Constitution, which was unanimously approved on January 26, 2014: Two hundred deputies voted for the Constitution, twelve against, and four abstained. Amid nationwide celebration on July 27, 2014, Interim President Moncef Marzouki, NCA President Mustapha Ben Jaafar, and head of government Ali Larayedh signed the document. Observers hailed the landmark

Constitution as a successful result of a compromise between Ennahdha and the oppositional forces. The Constitution mandates shared power along a dual executive, strengthens the legislature, and for the first time in the history of the Arab world, requires gender parity in elected bodies.

Two days after the signing of the Constitution, the Troika ceded power to a technocratic government led by former Minister of Industry Mehdi Jomaa. At the time, NCA President Ben Jaafar declared, “The peaceful transfer of power has occurred in an extraordinary way that history will not forget.”¹⁴ Ennahdha deputies and supporters defended their party’s performance in light of fierce attacks by religious extremists as well as relentless protests by leftists and the secular-leaning anti-Ennahdha front. Deep-seated prejudices against the moderate Islamist party and open statements that all Islamists were terrorists continued into the October 2014 legislative elections and the December 2014 presidential polls. At the same time, the secular opposition was painted immediately as a resurgence of the Ben Ali regime, despite its great internal ideological diversity.

Nidaa swept the legislative vote, and Essebsi unseated Marzouki as president. Many journalists and international observers characterized the victory as the triumph of secularism over Islamism, but important scores by smaller parties indicated a shift of politics beyond the religion-secularism divide: Free Patriotic Union (UPL) led by Tunisian businessman and soccer club owner Slim Riahi (now Secretary General of Nidaa since October 2018), the leftist *Jabha Shaabia* led by Hama Hammami, and the liberal *Afeq Tounes* constituted the runner-up parties. The surprise performance of the populist UPL underscored the continued salience of populism among the Tunisian electorate. To the surprise of many, Nidaa entered into a coalition government with Ennahdha, sparking the first internal crisis within Nidaa. Its secretary general, Mohsen Marzouk, split from the party with fourteen Nidaa deputies in March 2016, forming a new party, *Machrouu Tounes*. This move tilted the balance of seats within Parliament, and Ennahdha once again became the largest

parliamentary bloc with 68 deputies. In May 2016 at its first party congress since 2012, Ennahdha surprised many by announcing it was no longer Islamist, but rather a Muslim Democrats party.

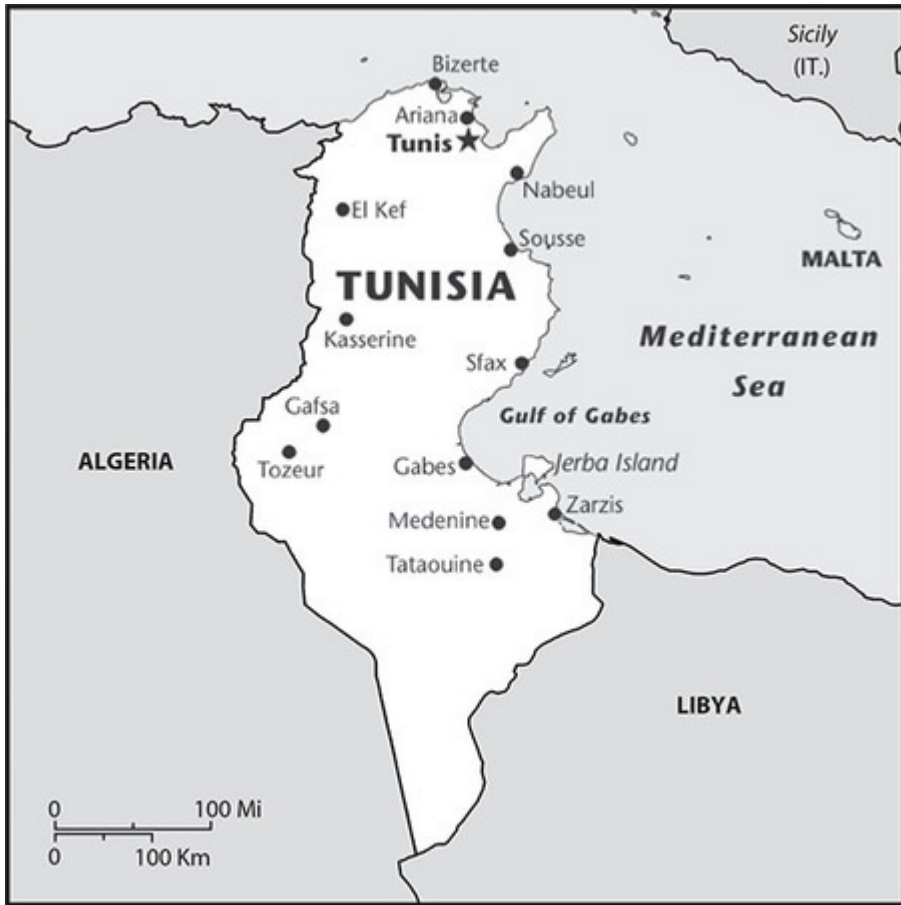
Since the elections, Tunisia's democratic transition was once again shaken by two devastating events: deadly attacks on tourists at the Bardo National Museum in Tunis on March 18, 2015, as well a deadly attack at a tourist beach in Port El Kantaoui (Sousse) on June 26, 2015. President Essebsi declared a state of national emergency following the attacks, putting increased security services visible in public and tourist spaces, while human rights activists have criticized the government for reversing freedoms and derailing advances made toward democracy. After multiple delays, on May 6, 2018, Tunisia held its first postrevolution municipal elections. With a 33 percent voter turnout for 350 municipalities, independents received 32.2 percent of the vote, Ennahdha 28.6, and Nidaa Tounes 20.8 percent. During this period, Prime Minister Youssef Chahed (August 2016–present) has reshuffled his government three times, increasingly bringing in Ben Ali-era figures into prominent government positions.

History of State-Building

In 1881, French troops crossed into northwest Tunisia from French-occupied Algeria, and in less than a month had forced the ruling Hussaynid ruler, Sadok Bey, to sign the Bardo Treaty. While the Bey continued to be the country's leader, the treaty ceded French control over defense and taxation policy, as well as control of many daily governance functions, while attempting to keep minimum costs to the French Republic.

The establishment of the French protectorate changed the political economy, accelerating formation of social classes and political strata. To bolster French claims, the Protectorate enticed French farmers, merchants, and administrators to immigrate. In 1892, the French mandated annual land transfers to a central commission set up to encourage colonization. By 1915, close to one-fifth of arable land had been transferred to French settlers and colonial agrobusiness. These transfers encouraged newly dispossessed peasants to migrate to Tunisia's major cities, where many integrated the new colonial economy. French military conscription of Tunisian men, as elsewhere in colonial empires, served to politicize them. Similarly, Tunisian laborers developed a class and nationalist consciousness, working alongside French and Italian laborers who excluded them from their unions. French control of territorial administration extended to technical ministries responsible for public services, infrastructure, and industry in the 1890s. These independent bureaucracies excluded Tunisians. By 1939, only 5,500 of the fourteen thousand administrative posts were held by Tunisians. Public education only reached about 20 percent of citizens by 1955.

Map 23.1 Tunisia



The Rise of the National Movement: Toward Independence

While the Tunisian nationalist movement evolved in three stages, often with overlapping membership,¹⁵ it organizationally coalesced in 1934 with the founding of the 1934 Neo-Destour party—a schism from an earlier nationalist group. Founded by Habib Bourguiba, Bahri Guiga, Mahmoud Materi, Tahar Sfar, and Salah Ben Youssef, the Neo-Destour Party (NDP) attracted young men who received their secondary education at the Sadiki College in Tunis and then went on to postgraduate studies in France. The NDP's founding leadership emerged from modest origins, predominantly from the Sahel region. They believed that only mass mobilization could ensure economic and social development in preparation for an independent Tunisia. In line with these progressive views, the NDP supported women's rights, modern education, and a secular state, enshrined in a liberal constitution.

The NDP successfully mobilized most segments of Tunisian society, actively working with Tunisia's nascent sectoral organizations, including the Tunisian General Labor (UGTT; ca. 1946); the Tunisian Union of Industry, Trade, and Handicrafts (UTICA; ca. 1947); the General Union of Tunisian Farmers (UGAT; ca. 1949); and the General Union of Tunisian Students (UGET; ca. 1952). Founded in 1946, the UGTT played a major role in mobilizing workers in support of the Neo-Destour party and the independence movement. Independence sentiments promoted by the Neo-Destour, the UGTT, and other sectorial movements forged national unity among rich and poor, bourgeoisie and peasant alike during French occupation.

Radical Transformation and Mass Mobilization

In the mid-1950s, discussions over independence divided the NDP movement between followers of two of its historical leaders, Habib Bourguiba and Salah Ben Youssef, leading to intraparty violence in 1955. The crisis pitted supporters against opponents of France's limited autonomy proposal—supported by Bourguiba and opposed by Ben Youssef. A founding member of the party, Ben Youssef had served as the party's second secretary general from 1948 to 1955 and forged his own popularity during this period by expanding the ranks of the party. Bourguiba and his supporters prevailed in late 1955; Ben Youssef fled the country, and many of his supporters were jailed. Ben Youssef was assassinated in Frankfurt, Germany, in 1961.

After independence, Bourguiba further strengthened his hold over the NDP and its control over the administration through a series of centralizing administrative and party reforms. Bourguiba justified these political changes by the need to rapidly modernize the country and resistance to the Neo-Destour he encountered along the way. Bourguiba faced opposition surrounding his progressive family code reforms. Shortly after independence, he enacted the 1957 Personal Status Code, which granted expanded rights to women. The new code abolished polygamy, provided equal rules for divorce, fixed a minimum age for marriage, and acknowledged a near equality of women in providing for the family. The new regime also sought to reduce the power of religious institutions in both the rural and urban milieu. In 1956 and 1957, the regime dissolved religious endowments (*habous*), which prevented up to a fifth of Tunisian land from being used in commercial transactions. More than just an attack on traditional property mechanisms, the reforms undermined the authority of religious leaders, who had managed this land in parallel to state social welfare institutions. Similarly, Bourguiba integrated the Zaytouna mosque—the Maghreb's premier site of Islamic learning—into the national education system. On July 25, 1957, Bourguiba deposed the Beylic and declared Tunisia a republic.

Forging National Unity through Economic Centralization and Repression

A decade after independence, the state sought to reform the agriculture sector to boost economic production. The regime's new enthusiasm for state-led development was reflected in the party's name, which was changed to the Socialist Destourian Party (PSD) at the 1964 party congress. That year, the Tunisian state had recuperated all of the nearly one-fifth of arable land ceded to French interests during the protectorate. In 1965, former head of the UGTT and Minister of Agriculture Ahmed Ben Salah announced the integration of these and all other state-owned lands into modern cooperative production units (CPU).¹⁶ Despite complaints from workers and small farmers who had been forced to join the program, it continued to expand and by 1968, integrated close to 1.8 million hectares of land. In March 1969, Ben Salah announced plans to incorporate all Tunisian land into the cooperative movement. Under pressure from peasants and his PSD allies, Bourguiba announced the end of forced collectivization, and Ben Salah, visionary of the state-led experiment, was arrested and charged with treason.¹⁷

In the 1970s, the government shifted its focus to private-sector development, promoting private investments in agriculture, agro-industry, light industry, and tourism. The new economic direction increasingly isolated the UGTT, which organized the 1978 general strike. The regime responded harshly to that act of defiance, which revealed both the degree to which the population did not embrace the new economic orientation and the new leadership's inability to capture the political hearts of an increasingly vocal population.

Calls for political reform had already begun in the 1970s. The failed cooperative movement revealed to many the limits of a single-party system. These tensions came to a head at the 1971 PSD party congress, when Minister of Interior Ahmed Mestiri and a group of political liberals, which included current President Essebsi, called for

a political opening.¹⁸ While that effort failed, the regime agreed in 1981 on a limited-political opening, allowing Mestiri's Socialist Democratic Movement (MDS) and the Tunisian Communist Party (PCT) to participate in elections. Neither party was allowed to play a significant role in politics, and both failed to win a seat during the 1981 legislative elections. During the same period, radical groups had begun to coalesce on university campuses. In 1981 as well, Rachid Ghannouchi¹⁹ and Abdelfattah Mourou, currently the Ennahdha president and former deputy speaker of parliament, respectively, requested political accreditation for the Movement of Islamic Tendency (*Harakat al-Ittijah al-Islami*, MTI), a movement that rejected the socialist project inasmuch as it rejected Bourguiba's regime and many of his modernization policies, which they saw as an attack on culture. Its application was rejected, but over the next few years the MTI would exponentially grow into a major political force.

The political arena continued to contract following the 1984 bread riots, a violent response to an IMF demand that the government cut key subsidies. The PSD had lost much public support, while political intrigue blocked significant efforts to push for either greater economic or political reform. A sign of the degree of political fragility, in July 1984, Prime Minister Mohamed Mzali (1980–1986)²⁰ was replaced by rival Rachid Sfar, who proposed a political alliance with the UGTT in the November 1986 elections. Accredited only five years before, both the MDS and PCT chose to boycott the 1986 legislative elections. Sfar was himself replaced by Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali in October 1987.

In 1986, the government claimed that a radicalized MTI wing was responsible for a series of bombings in Sousse. In late 1987, Bourguiba tried to reopen court cases against its leaders, seeking death penalties. Fearing that such actions would plunge Tunisia into civil war, Ben Ali had Bourguiba declared unfit for rule. On November 7, 1987, the bloodless coup d'état was met with surprise and hope for an end to autocracy.

Ben Ali came to power with promises to liberalize the political system, taking a number of steps to open dialogue with the *'ulama*, disaffected social groups, opposition parties, Islamists, labor, human rights organizations, and civil society groups. The result of these discussions was the much-touted November 1988 National Pact, which promised pluralism and inclusive state-society engagement. Ben Ali organized presidential and parliamentary elections in April 1989. Ben Ali, though, ran uncontested, winning 99.27 percent of the popular vote, while the Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD)—the revamped PSD—obtained all 141 seats in the Chamber of Deputies with 80 percent of the vote. In 1991, the regime cracked down on Ennahdha, arresting thousands of its rank and file and leadership. Imprisoned, many were tortured, while key leaders were sentenced to long terms of solitary confinement. Others, like Ghannouchi, were forced into political exile and would not return to Tunisia until after the 2011 revolution.

In 1999, the regime apportioned a token percentage of parliamentary seats to the “losing” parties in the winner-take-all system: 20 percent in 1999 and 2004, and 25 percent in 2009. In the 2000s, Ben Ali changed the constitution to expand the political elite and RCD patronage to professional associations.²¹ A 2002 amendment created a bicameral legislature with an upper house, the Chamber of Counselors supplementing the lower house, and the Chamber of Deputies. Ben Ali also amended constitutional limits on presidential terms and the maximum age of the president so that he could stand for the 2004 elections.

The 2009 Tunisian presidential and legislative elections were held in October, and Ben Ali sought yet a fifth presidential term, inciting an organized oppositional movement, the *18 Octobre Collectif*. Prior to elections, parliament passed a 2008 constitutional amendment that required presidential candidates to receive recommendations from thirty parliamentary members and to have served at least the past two years as party leader. The 2008 law derailed the candidacies of Mustafa Ben Jaafar (Ettakatol) and Nejjib Chebbi of the Progressive Democratic Party (PDP). The 2009 presidential elections were the

last failed elections prior to the revolution. The complete shutdown of the political arena left little room for formal and electoral contestation. However, the opposition grew through informal political spaces and extended to citizens disenfranchised with the Ben Ali regime. That opposition successfully mobilized to stand up against dictatorship, resulting in the Tunisian Revolution or the beginning of the regionwide uprisings.

Social Change in Tunisia

Pays pilot, or model country, Tunisia has always been an early innovator in the Arab world, from the Beylical period (1705–1957) to the contemporary era. Founded in 1946, the UGTT was the Arab world's first independent labor union. The 1956 Family Code transferred personal status from religious to civilian courts—the first time ever in an Arab country. In 1861, Tunisia's precolonial government drafted the Arab World's first constitution.

1956 Personal Status Code

Tunisia's Family Code significantly altered the nation's social fabric. The Family Code is in reality a bundle of laws that transferred law pertaining to personal status from religious courts to positive law. These laws required marriage in civil courts, banned polygamy, gave women the right to divorce while protecting them from spousal abandonment, defined alimony requirements, and set out a reorganization of inheritance laws.

Subsequent laws economically and politically emancipated women, giving women the right to vote; to guaranteed access to primary, secondary, and higher education; to work; to open bank accounts; and to move without a tutor's authorization. Bourguiba tasked the National Union of Tunisian Women (UNFT) to educate women of their expanding rights. By 1960, the UNFT had fourteen thousand members and 115 branches across Tunisia—attesting to both the popularity of the reforms among women and the degree to which Bourguiba was willing to support his cause.²² Women's rights throughout both the Bourguiba and Ben Ali regime were closely tied to the PSD and later the RCD party; by the late 1980s, the UNFT was instrumentalized to oppose Tunisia's nascent Islamist movement.²³

Though not fitting squarely into the Personal Status Code, equally important reforms were a series of public health laws, especially the 1962 laws that gave women access to contraception and a 1965 law guaranteeing access to safe abortion.²⁴ The effects on fertility were profound. Adolescent fertility rates fell from 66 in 1,000 (ages 15–19) in 1960 to 7.6 in 1,000 in 2016.²⁵ Overall fertility rates also declined. Whereas in 1960, fertility rates averaged seven children per female, they dropped to 2.2 children per female in 2016.

In September 2017, President Essebsi overturned a law banning the marriage of Muslim women to non-Muslims. A second, more controversial proposal was announced in tandem with the release of

the COLIBE (The Individual Freedoms and Equality Committee) report in June 2018, proposing equal inheritance to both men and women. The proposal generated a several-thousand-strong protest in August. Opponents claim that the law and some recommendations in the report contradicted Islam, while the project itself was Western-imposed.

Expanded Education Opportunities

Educating Tunisians was a priority for all of Bourguiba's modernization projects. While in 1971, net primary, secondary, and tertiary enrollment was 79 percent, 23 percent, and 2.5 percent, respectively, in 2013 primary enrollment was close to 100 percent, secondary enrollment 90 percent, and 33 percent of Tunisians were pursuing higher education. Gains for women have outpaced male enrollment, reflecting the effects of the Family Code across time. Net female primary school enrollment has jumped from 65 percent in 1971 to 98 percent in 2008, whereas female primary school completion has increased from 43 percent in 1973 to 98 percent in 2013. The degree to which Tunisia has promoted women since independence is most salient in higher-education enrollment. In 1971, just over 1 percent of Tunisian women were enrolled at university, compared to 4 percent of Tunisian men. In 2000, for the first time ever, women enrollment at universities surpassed men, and by 2013, 42 percent of Tunisian women are pursuing college educations or postgraduate studies compared to only 26 percent of Tunisian men.

While the Tunisian regime's commitment to output is uncontested, the quality of Tunisian education can be improved. A 2011 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study survey on fourth- and eighth-grade student mathematics scores, for example, places Tunisia well below the international average, with only 2 percent and 30 percent of students reaching the intermediate or higher international benchmark, respectively.²⁶ In addition to ongoing reforms in K–12 education, the Tunisian Ministry of Higher Education has also embarked on an ambitious Tunisia 2020 reform project funded by international organizations and bilateral aid projects to link higher education to critical skills needed in the job market.

Women in Politics and the Workforce

Tunisia's government's proclaimed progressive policy of equity, enshrined in both the 1957 and 2014 Constitutions and through organic law, has had a major effect on the economic, political, and social rights of women in Tunisia, both inclusive and exclusive. Whereas women only gained the right to vote in 1957 and the right to run for office in 1958, women won close to 27 percent of seats in the NCA elections of 2011, increasing to 31 percent in the 2014 to 2019 parliament, thanks in part to a quota system in candidate lists. Despite the positive changes since the revolution, only 148 of the 1,500 competing lists in the 2014 legislative elections were headed by a woman, reflecting continued patriarchal biases in Tunisian national politics. Women candidates seem to fare better at the local level. In the 2018 municipal elections, women won 47 percent of the seats allotted in Tunisia's 350 municipalities; 27 percent of those elected officials were the heads of competing lists.

While access to education and politics has made Tunisia a model for developing (and many developed) nations, women continue to face discrimination. In 2017, the International Labour Organization estimated female unemployment at 23.1 percent, compared to 12.6 percent for men and a 15.4 percent national average. Though it is unclear that this necessarily reflects discriminatory hiring practices, the breakdown of the active workforce is more revealing. In 2017, the percentage of female labor force participation was only at 24.3 percent, compared to 70.6 percent for men.

Many have hailed Tunisia for its promotion of women's rights and expanding economic and educative opportunities to much of its population. However successful, the modernization program also excluded vast segments of the country's population. While in the past, authoritarianism and corruption limited both access to and quality of these services, democratization presents new opportunities for new visions of progressive social change through the empowerment of Tunisian citizens via the urn.

State Institutions and Governance

The Tunisian state played an important transformative role during the years of Tunisia's two autocrats, Habib Bourguiba and Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali. The consolidation of authority came to an end with the 2011 Revolution, and Tunisia has been governed by four governments since the transitional government headed by Beji Caid Essebis (March–October 2011); the Troika government (November 2011–January 2014); the Mehdi Jomaa technocratic government (January 2014–February 2015); and the 2014-elected Nidaa Tounes-Ennahdha coalition (February 2015–present), currently led by Prime Minister Youssef Chahed.

Constitution and Powers

Political Authority Prior to the Revolution

Prior to the revolution, authority was founded upon the constitution of 1959 Tunisia. That document established a republic, with Arabo-Islamic foundations (Article 1), vesting sovereignty in the people (Article 3). The constitution founded the republic upon the rule of law and political pluralism, yet it stipulated that state and society strive for “solidarity, mutual assistance and solidarity among individuals, social categories and generations” (Article 5). The 1959 constitution specified rights, liberties, and obligations and among its freedoms granted press, publication, association, assembly, and labor organization (Article 8). Article 8 as revised in 2002 also stipulated that parties be free of violence and hatred, without organization on exclusionary premises such as religion, race, sex, or region. Subsequent constitutional amendments introduced by Presidents Bourguiba and Ben Ali qualified or modified the articles, introducing ambiguity and de facto reductions in freedom. Rights of association were subject to contradictory amendments that stipulated that groups be approved by the state and elsewhere stipulated that all Tunisians respect public order, social progress, and national defense. The state did not apply articles fully, and it rested on a politicized judiciary to rule arbitrarily in its favor.

2014 Constitution

The current constitution is the result of a consensual drafting process in the 2011 National Constituent Assembly. Adopted on January 26, 2014, the Tunisian Constitution is hailed as the Arab world’s most progressive constitution. During the drafting process, special constitutional committees were created to debate some of the most controversial articles, while a special consensus committee of twenty-two deputies was established to mediate and reach agreements on contentious articles prior to voting and adaptation. The constitution establishes parity between men and women in

elected assemblies (Article 45), and executive powers have been reduced as part of a contentious debate on the separation of powers throughout the process (Article 90). The document reflects an impressive consensus between Islamic, liberal, socialist-leftist, and nationalist voices represented in the NCA.

Executive Authority

Prior to the revolution, power was concentrated in the executive, allowing former presidents Bourguiba and Ben Ali to dominate the legislative and judicial branches of government. Prime ministers, ministers of government, ambassadors, judges, and often the heads of nongovernmental organizations were named by and beholden to the executive. During the NCA, the premiership directed government with a cabinet of forty-three members. Presidential power was limited to foreign policy and commander in chief of the armed forces. Under the 2014 constitution, the president is the symbol of national unity (Article 71) and represents the state, orienting national defense, security, and foreign relations, in consultation with the prime minister (Article 77). The president formalizes the composition of government, determined by the premiership, and can only call for two votes of confidence during a presidential term (Article 99). Disputes between the presidency and premiership can be referred to the Constitutional Court by either party (Article 101).

Judiciary and Its Independence

The judicial system has not been overhauled since the revolution. Former President Ben Ali appointed the majority of judges currently in office. Under the former constitution, the judiciary was an extension of the presidency. [Chapter 5](#), Section 2 of the new constitution mandates a new Constitutional Court to replace the Ben Ali court, dissolved in March 2011. Unlike the previous court, which functioned as a tool of the executive, the new Constitutional Court will review proposed laws by lower courts as well as the parliamentary rules of procedure. Though still not finalized, the court will be comprised of twelve members, appointed by the president, parliament, and Supreme Judicial Council. As of November 2018, only one court member has been named.

Transitional Justice

The first postrevolution institution of transitional justice was the new Ministry of Human Rights and Transitional Justice, led by former Ennahdha political prisoner Samir Dilou, himself a victim of arbitrary arrest during Ben Ali. On June 9, 2014, the government launched the Truth and Dignity Commission (IVD). Headed by human rights activists and oppositional journalist Sihem Ben Sedrine, the IVD investigated human rights violations committed by the Tunisian state against citizens since independence, providing compensation and rehabilitation for its victims. The IVD received sixty-five thousand files and organized thirteen public hearings by victims and perpetrators on prime-time television. In the spring of 2018, the IVD began transferring files to specialized chambers within the Court structure to hear human rights trials. While the IVD's mandate ended in December 2018, cases are now being adjudicated in the special chambers, and a special fund for reparations has been set into place.

Former President Ben Ali was tried and found guilty by a military court of ordering the death of protesters. Ben Ali received multiple

life sentences in absentia and has denied the charges. Shortly after Ben Ali's ouster, the interim government organized two ad hoc commissions²⁷ to investigate police abuse and corruption. These commissions filed their final reports in December 2011 and May 2012, but despite more than ten thousand requests, two thousand examinations, and three hundred judicial case transfers, few have been brought to trial, and few assets have been returned to Tunisia. The Tunisian state did confiscate \$750 million (\$1.2 billion) from Ben Ali and from 113 other members of his elite circle.

Military-Civilian Relations and Security

Prior to the revolution, the military and security apparatuses were concentrated in the hands of the presidency and were themselves divided into multiple institutions in order to maintain civilian authoritarian rule.

The Tunisian presidency has fewer powers over the military and security establishment than under the previous two regimes, but it nevertheless retains an important degree of power. According to the 2014 Constitution, the Tunisian president is Commander in Chief of the Tunisian Armed Forces, which includes the Army, Navy, and Air Force, and chairs the National Security Council (Article 77). While control of the military and security forces is assured by government via the Minister of Defense and Interior (respectively), who themselves are appointed by the prime minister, the president appoints and dismisses individuals to senior military and police positions, in consultation with the head of government (Article 78). The president is required to preside over the Council of Ministers on all issues relating to defense, foreign policy, and national security (Article 93). Article 80, furthermore, mandates the president to take any measures to protect the stability of the republic and can approve a thirty-day state of emergency, in consultation with the prime minister and Speaker of the Assembly of Representatives.

The Tunisian Armed Forces (TAF) has historically been small. Domestic spending for the TAF in 2010 was 1.3 percent of GDP, compared to 3.5 percent for both Algeria and Morocco.²⁸ This figure has increased in the postrevolution period, especially as security threats multiplied along the Algerian border near Kasserine and along the Libyan border to the southeast. By 2018, the military was estimated at between forty thousand and sixty-five thousand members and was reinforced and professionalized through cooperative agreements with Algeria, the United States, and most recently NATO.

Whereas the TAF was historically sidelined, the various apparatuses within the Ministry of Interior—including the National Guard, Judicial Police, Presidential Guard, Rapid Intervention Brigades, regular National Police, and General Directorate of Information—were actively used by Ben Ali to identify and punish political opponents through harassment, incarceration, and torture. Violence and deaths during the revolution were directly attributed to various elements of the Ben Ali police force. Following the revolution, there was much discussion on investment in security sector reform, which remained slow. While the exigencies of counterterrorism in the current period make security sector reform both a pressing need and risky endeavor, the July 2015 Anti-Terrorism Law, voted by the Assembly of the Representatives of the People, reinforces the government’s ability to gather information on and detain suspected members of terrorist organizations.²⁹ While reinforcing counterterrorist measures, many view the law as a potential regression for human rights.³⁰

Public Administration

Tunisia's new elected assembly will write and pass law, but implementation is incumbent on the state administration—the central nervous system of the polity. Adapted from the French model, the Tunisian bureaucracy is composed of state cadres from the various national and regional administrations, ministries, public-sector enterprises, and municipalities, with an estimated 785,000 employees (close to 7 percent of the population).³¹

The current administration is deconcentrated into twenty-four governorates and 264 delegations, each led by a high-ranking cadre from the Ministry of Interior. On May 6, 2018, Tunisia held its first postrevolution municipal elections. Currently, Tunisia's 350 municipalities are governed by elected deputies, followed by appointments of mayors and city councils. Souad Abderrahim became the first female mayor of Tunis, running as an independent on the 2018 Ennahdha list.

Table 23.1 Political Parties in Tunisia

Table 23.1 Political Parties in Tunisia

MAIN REGISTERED PARTIES WITH SEATS IN PARLIAMENT

Governing Coalition

1. Nidaa Tounes (ca. 2012). Secretary General Mohsen Marzouk. "Big Tent Party," economically liberal. (86 seats in 2014 legislature)
2. Ennahdha Party (ca. in 2011). President Rachid Ghannouchi. Islamist, economically liberal. (69 seats in 2014 legislature)

3. Free Patriotic Union (ca. 2011). Chairperson Slim Riahi. Populist, economically liberal. Fused with Nidaa Tounes in October 2018. (16 seats in 2014 legislature)

4. Afek Tounes (ca. 2011). President Yacine Brahim. Centrist, economically liberal. (8 seats in 2014 legislature)

Parliamentary Opposition

1. Popular Front (ca. 2012). Secretary General Hamma Hammami. Socialist. (15 seats in 2014 legislature)

2. Congress for the Republic (ca. 2001). Secretary General Imed Daïmi. Nationalist, socialist. (4 seats in 2014 legislature)

3. Democratic Current (ca. 2013). President Mohamed Abbou. Nationalist, socialist. Schism from CPR. (3 seats in 2014 legislature)

4. People's Movement (ca. 2011). Secretary General Zouhair Maghzaoui. Nationalist, socialist. (3 seats in 2014 legislature)

5. National Destourian Initiative (ca. 2011). President Kamel Morjane (Minister of Defense and Minister of Foreign Affairs under Ben Ali). Centrist, economically liberal. (3 seats in 2014 legislature)

Actors and Participation

The Tunisian Revolution successfully overturned a system of controlled contestation within the political arena that had persisted and matured since the early beginning of the Tunisian state. Since independence, Tunisian political space was effectively controlled by a one-party state, despite cosmetic efforts to introduce a multiparty system in 1981 and following Ben Ali's 1987 constitutional coup. Despite these changes, Tunisia continued to operate as a de facto single-party state until the January 14, 2011, Revolution, as indicated in [Table 23.1](#).

Postrevolution Elections

2011 National Constituent Assembly Elections

One of the lynchpins to widening the political arena was the establishment of the independent High Authority of Elections, which organized the 2011 NCA elections, the freest elections held in Tunisian history.

Of the 8.3 million eligible Tunisian voters at home and overseas, 4.3 million, or 51.7 percent, registered to vote. Representatives of seventeen parties, one coalition list, and thirty-two independent lists were elected. Of the total vote count, 68.2 percent of voters cast ballots for successful parties, revealing that 1.3 million voters cast ballots for small or local parties and lists. Most of the political parties that participated were either not registered or banned during the Ben Ali years. Ennahdha won the elections, capturing 89 of 217 seats, revealing the success of the network it kept alive under Ben Ali's repression. This, and the movements' perceived distance from the single-party state, garnered it popular legitimacy. The top secular parties—one social democratic (Ettakatol) and the other leftist-(Arab) nationalist (CPR), likewise performed well because of long-standing oppositional status. Parties along the liberal-secular lines, including clusters of fractured leftist fringe parties and well-established loyal oppositional parties, performed poorly, in part because of their staunch and ill-perceived anti-Islamist rhetoric.

2014 Assembly of the People's Representative Legislative Elections

In October 2014, Tunisia organized its first elections under the framework of the new constitution. The elections were viewed as a plebiscite on the Troika government's performance. Unlike the 2011 elections, where Ennahdha opponents were largely divided into a coterie of small, disorganized movements and newly accredited political parties, the 2014 elections were marked by recently founded

Nidaa Tounes's campaign to "vote strategically." The slogan set out to remind voters of the futility of voting for small parties, while underscoring the party's own campaign promises to competently run government.

With a relatively high 66 percent turnout, the October 26 legislative elections reconfigured the political landscape in a number of ways—with both Tunisian and regionwide significance. First, the results showed that political Islam could be defeated at the polls. Nidaa Tounes, a big-tent, anti-Ennahdha party, carried the election, with close to 38 percent of the vote, translating into 86 seats. Though coming in second, Ennahdha received 10 percent fewer votes than its rival, with close to 28 percent of the ballots and 69 seats. Ennahdha's defeat marked the first time in the history of the Arab world that an Islamist political party lost power in a free and fair election. Following the presidential elections, Nidaa and Ennahdha formed a coalition government, which led to the initial leadership split within Nidaa and defections by deputies, resulting in Ennahdha becoming the largest bloc within Parliament. The Nidaa-Ennahdha coalition lasted until 2018, as the balance of power was significantly tilted when Ennahdha beat Nidaa at the polls during the May 2018 municipal elections.

Second, the 2014 election results revealed the continued salience of populism and workers' issues in postauthoritarian Tunisia. A populist party, the Free Patriotic Union, which ran on money and soccer, came in third, with 4 percent of the vote and 16 seats (mirroring the Popular Petition's 2011 results), closely followed by the Popular Front, a party that combined multiple schisms of the former Tunisian Communist Party and which received close to 4 percent and 15 seats.

Finally, and linked to the first point, the incumbent Troika government was punished for transitional instability. Speaker of Parliament Mustapha Ben Jaafar's Ettakatol failed to win a single seat, while the Congress for the Republic, of which President Marzouki was the

founder, garnered just over 2 percent of the vote, securing only 4 seats.

Elections in the Post-2011 Period

A month later, Tunisia organized its first postauthoritarian presidential elections. Though the presidency had been relegated to a largely symbolic post by the 2014 Constitution, the presidential elections nevertheless underscore the continuously dynamic Tunisian political landscape. A telling dynamic has been the strengthening of the presidency and executive by Beji Caid Essebsi, mirroring executive strengths in the regimes of Bourguiba and Ben Ali. The power game in Tunisia since 2014 has morphed into a struggle between Essebsi, Ghannouchi, and more recently Prime Minister Youssef Chahed, which will serve as an indicator for the scheduled 2019 legislative and presidential elections. A number of noteworthy and telling observations, taken in conjunction with the October legislative elections, can be drawn from the 2014 polls. First, Tunisians did not shy from voting for a candidate with links to the authoritarian era. In the first round of elections, 39 percent of Tunisians voted for former Interim Prime Minister Beji Caid Essebsi, six points ahead of incumbent President Moncef Marzouki, who won 33 percent. The gap widened in the second round where Essebsi won close to 56 percent of the vote compared to Marzouki's 44 percent. Second, the 2014 presidential elections splintered the Troika, revealing the extent to which Ennahdha was willing to reconfigure its own positions to reflect current political trends: Having evaluated the causes (and possible effects) of the Nidaa Tounes legislative victory, Ennahdha later joined Nidaa Tounes in a coalition National Unity government, distanced itself from political Islam by calling itself a Muslim Democratic party, and most recently split from the Nidaa coalition, though it continues to support Prime Minister Youssef Chahid against President Essebsi. The May 2018 municipal elections, in which independents (many with ties to Ennahdha) came in first, followed by Ennahdha and Nidaa, significantly shifted the Nidaa-Ennahdha balance on the national level, eventually leading to an end of the coalition.

Around the 2011 elections, the political spectrum was widely divided along two broad dimensions: Islamist-secular and liberal-socialist. Following the 2011 electoral outcomes and preceding the 2014 legislative and presidential elections, the political field was largely represented as a more simplistic Islamist-versus-secularist axis, though some observers examined more complex political configurations along policy, region, and ideology. Nidaa Tounes won the 2014 legislative elections, while Beji Caid Essebsi was elected president of the republic in January of 2015. Then again, Ennahdha fared strongest in the May 2018 local elections, tilting a three-year-long power balance. In sum, Tunisia's political spectrum swayed from a secular-Islamist coalition formed by long-standing oppositional movements and actors to a secular-liberal consortium over a four-year period of massive fragmentation and coalition building.

Civil Society

Following independence, the Tunisian state shaped social organization rather than integrating independent societal interests. In the 1960s and 1970s, the state created institutions and policies that lent themselves to creating organizations and shaping associational interests. Two cases of state-sponsored development are most often cited and are not dissimilar from other postcolonial state-building projects in the Arab world: women's organizations following the Personal Status Code revisions at independence and the rise of a Tunisian business-entrepreneurial class that benefited from private-sector promotion policies since the 1970s. In both cases, demands for policies and institutions originated within the state and did not emanate from society. The Neo-Destour party specifically dominated social organizations with overlapping leadership in both state positions and societal organizations. The state otherwise destroyed and resuscitated groups, such as the UGTT in the 1980s.

Under Ben Ali, civil society was largely state sponsored and co-opted. Few associations enjoyed any distance or autonomy from the regime, and many became co-opted over time at different political

moments, exemplified in the relationship between the UGTT and the Tunisian state. The corporatist and repressive response of the state to associational life was marked by state security infiltration and surveillance to control criticism and contestation within Tunisia's civil society. Direct and indirect critiques of the Ben Ali regime led to harassment, arrest, detention, and torture. Independent civil society organizations were denied accreditation. Only state-sanctioned organizations qualified for state support. In this restricted space, an independent and multilayered civil society that could stand as a buffer between the state and society was highly limited.

The culture of opposition and independent associational life that developed in Tunisia despite heavy state repression has played an important role in mobilizing masses and orienting political discussion during and after the revolution.

Expanded Civil Society

Since the revolution, civil society has played a crucial role in shaping Tunisia's political environment. During the March 2011 to October 2011 period preceding NCA elections, the number of civil society organizations increased exponentially.

Seven years into the country's democratic transition, civil society had repositioned itself within the Tunisian public sphere. Millions of democracy assistance dollars through bilateral and multilateral development streams as well as local, regional, and global foundations have assisted in the creation of a sustainable civil society that is autonomous from the Tunisian state. While the majority of funds are directed toward supporting the democratic transition, homegrown associations have been able to garner popular support and public prestige. Most notably, a set of transparency-focused organizations observing the work of the National Constituent Assembly, such as *Al-Bawsala* (Compass) and I-Watch, have used creative and low-cost tools to build popular legitimacy and respect from Tunisian citizens and state. Global organizations, including Amnesty International, the Carter Center,

Human Rights Watch, the National Democratic Institute, and Transparency International, have established local networks of organizations and strengthened their work through training, education, and skill-building activities. Finally, newly established observatories or policy institutes on issues such as transitional justice, judiciary reform, elections, economic and social development and justice, and election data collaborate with clusters of civil society organizations that have the technical know-how as well as the local expertise across issues and regions to strengthen the work of these policy initiatives.

Tunisia's civil society has also played a major role in navigating political crises that have threatened to derail democratization since the revolution. In 2011, the social movement Ekbes ["Get a move on"], for instance, was formed by a youth wing of Ennahdha and successfully pressured the interim government to fire former regime members via the "purge campaign." Following Mohamed Brahmi's assassination in the summer of 2013, organizations supporting secular and leftist political factions joined in the protest against the government. Long-standing civil society actors were likewise crucial in negotiating the country out of its 2013 political crisis through a national dialogue (*hiwar al-wataniy*) in which the Bar Association, the UGTT, and the largest business association, UTICA, mediated between the Troika-government and its opponents, resulting in a road map that led to adoption of the 2014 Constitution, the replacement of the Troika by a technocratic government, and the legislative and presidential elections in late 2014.

In summary, Tunisia's burgeoning civil society has been able to carve out an important public space to inform the work of government, policy institutions, think tanks, and citizen programs as well as participate and navigate the country out of political crises. Despite criticisms by activists and civil society leaders of harassment and shutting down of some organizations, civil society has nonetheless been able to reposition itself in Tunisia's political landscape at a scope that the country has never experienced before.

Religion, Society, and Politics in Tunisia

Tunisia is 98 percent Sunni Muslim, with very small indigenous Jewish and Ibadi communities. Traditionally, Islamic jurisprudence was based on Maliki legal interpretation,³² which is enshrined in Article 1 of the 2014 Tunisian Constitution. However, since the late nineteenth century, permutations of a reformist movement originating in Egypt, called *al-Nahda*, have marked Tunisian Islamic thought. Later, the intellectual thought of the Muslim Brotherhood inspired a new generation of activism, while more recently individual preachers and small groups called Salafis³³ have drawn from the Hanbali tradition of Islamic jurisprudence, which originated in the Arabian Peninsula.

Table 23.2 Political Mobilization of Civil Society around Issues

Table 23.2 Political Mobilization of Civil Society around Issues

Women's organizations and youth*	Transitional justice and judicial reform	Labor and social justice	Popular protest, strikes, social movements
ATFD (secular, formerly state co-opted) <i>Nisaat Tounsiyat</i> (social justice, former political prisoners,	Observatory for Transitional Justice Al-Kawakabi Jasmine Foundation	UGTT Forum for Economic and Social Justice	Regional protests Thala and Kasserine and Siliana—popular protest: jobs, compensation of families of the

Women's organizations and youth*	Transitional justice and judicial reform	Labor and social justice	Popular protest, strikes, social movements
<p>regional inequity)</p> <p>LED—League des electrices democratiques (youth, mainly secular)</p>	<p>Observatory for Judicial Reform</p> <p>Bar Association</p> <p>Association of Tunisian Judges</p> <p>Tunisian Union of Judges</p> <p>Network for Transitional Justice</p> <p>Truth and Dignity Commission</p>		<p>victims of the revolution</p> <p>Regular and daily strikes and protests across country</p> <p>Gafsa—protests and strikes in southern mining basin since December 2010 and in years following the revolution; many supported by rank-and-file UGTT</p> <p>2015 teacher and student strikes</p> <p>Neglect by state of regional disparities in development and opportunity; absence of services and rights</p> <p>Winou El Petrol? Movement</p> <p>FEMEN</p>

Women's organizations and youth*	Transitional justice and judicial reform	Labor and social justice	Popular protest, strikes, social movements
			Rahil Movement Tamarod

Women's organizations and youth*	Transitional justice and judicial reform	Labor and social justice	Popular protest, strikes, social movements
Long-standing organizations	Outlawed movements	Transparency organizations	
Tunisian League of Human Rights (LTDH) National Council for Tunisian Liberties (CNLT) UGTT General Union of Tunisian Workers called for national strike on	Ansar Al-Sharia: Salafist Islamic movement of scholars and jihadists advocating Islamic reform, shari'a law, and jihad; radical Islamists formerly imprisoned Okba Ibn Nafaa Brigade	I-Watch (nonpartisan, anticorruption, transparency, voter awareness) Al-Bawsala (nonpartisan, transparency) Mourakiboun (election related) Tunisian Election Data	

<p>January 13, 2014; negotiated 2013 political crises between different political factions</p> <p>UTICA</p> <p>Union of Tunisian Magistrates</p> <p>Association of Tunisian Magistrates</p> <p>Tunisian Bar Association</p>	<p>AQIM</p> <p>ISIS/ISIL</p>	<p>SAWTY</p> <p>Le Labo' Democratique (The Democracy Lab) Management and disposition of regime's secret police files</p> <p>OpenGovTN: Transparency of the National Constituent Assembly (related issues)</p> <p>Youth Decides</p> <p>Nawaat (oppositional bloggers; exposing inaction on new constitution)</p>	
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* Note: This list is not exhaustive, but rather includes examples of the wide range of associations representing these four interests.

Election	Winning party	Percentage of popular vote/Number of seats
Municipal 2018	Ennahdha	Turnout: 33 percent Ennahdha: 28.6 percent of votes, 2,139 seats Nidaa Tounes: 20.85 percent, 1,600 seats
Presidential 2014	Beji Caid Essebsi	Turnout (Second Round): 60.1 percent Beji Caid Essebsi: 55.7 percent Moncef Marzouki: 44.3 percent

Election	Winning party	Percentage of popular vote/Number of seats
Parliamentary 2014	Nidaa Tounes	<p>Turnout: 66 percent</p> <p>Nidaa Tounes: 37.6 percent of votes, 86 of 217 seats</p> <p>Ennahdha: 27.8 percent of votes, 69 seats</p> <p>Free Patriotic Union: 4.1 percent of votes, 16 seats</p> <p>Popular Front: 3.6 percent of votes, 15 seats</p>
<p>Constituent assembly</p> <p>Prime minister 2011</p>	<p>Moncef Marzouki (CPR) (president chosen by the NCA)</p> <p>Hamadi Jebali (Ennahdha)</p>	<p>Turnout: 51.4 percent</p> <p>Ennahdha: 41 percent of votes, 89 of 217 seats</p> <p>Congress for the Republic (CPR): 29 seats</p> <p>Ettakatol: 20 seats</p> <p>Progressive Democratic Party (PDP): 16 seats</p>

Election	Winning party	Percentage of popular vote/Number of seats
Presidential 2009	Ben Ali (RCD)	Turnout: 89.4 percent Ben Ali: 89.6 percent of votes
Parliamentary 2009 (bicameral)	RCD	RCD: 161 of 214 seats (75.2 percent) Independent opposition: 2 seats

Women's organizations and youth*	Transitional justice and judicial reform	Labor and social justice	Popular protest, strikes, social movements
Election	Winning party	Percentage of popular vote/Number of seats	

Women's organizations and youth*	Transitional justice and judicial reform	Labor and social justice	Popular protest, strikes, social movements
Election	Winning party	Percentage of popular vote/Number of seats	
Presidential 2004 Parliamentary 2004 (bicameral)	Ben Ali (RCD) RCD	Turnout: 91.5 percent Ben Ali: 94.5 percent of votes RCD: 87.6 percent of votes RCD: 152 of 189 seats (80.4 percent) Progressive Democratic Party (PDP) withdrew	
Presidential 1999 Parliamentary 1999	Ben Ali (RCD) RCD	Turnout: 92 percent Ben Ali: 99.2 percent of votes RCD: 148 of 182 seats (81.3 percent) Prime Minister: Mohammed Ghannouchi	

Women's organizations and youth*	Transitional justice and judicial reform	Labor and social justice	Popular protest, strikes, social movements
Election	Winning party	Percentage of popular vote/Number of seats	
Presidential 1994 Parliamentary 1994	Ben Ali (RCD) RCD	Turnout: 95.5 percent Ben Ali: 99 percent of votes RCD: 97.73 percent of votes RCD: 144 of 163 seats (88.3 percent)	
Presidential 1989 Parliamentary 1989	Ben Ali (RCD) RCD	Turnout: 76.5 percent Ben Ali: 99.27 percent of votes RCD: 141 of 141 seats (100 percent) 40 percent abstentions/Islamists 15 percent–20 percent in independent vote	

Women's organizations and youth*	Transitional justice and judicial reform	Labor and social justice	Popular protest, strikes, social movements
Election	Winning party	Percentage of popular vote/Number of seats	
Parliamentary 1986	Patriotic Union (PSD, UGTT, the employers', farmers', and women's unions)	<p>Turnout: 82.9 percent</p> <p>PSD: received near totality of votes</p> <p>125 of 125 seats (100 percent)</p> <p>Opposition party boycott; independent candidates (15) withdrew prior to elections; Prime Minister: Rachid Sfar</p>	

Election	Winning party	Percentage of popular vote/Number of seats
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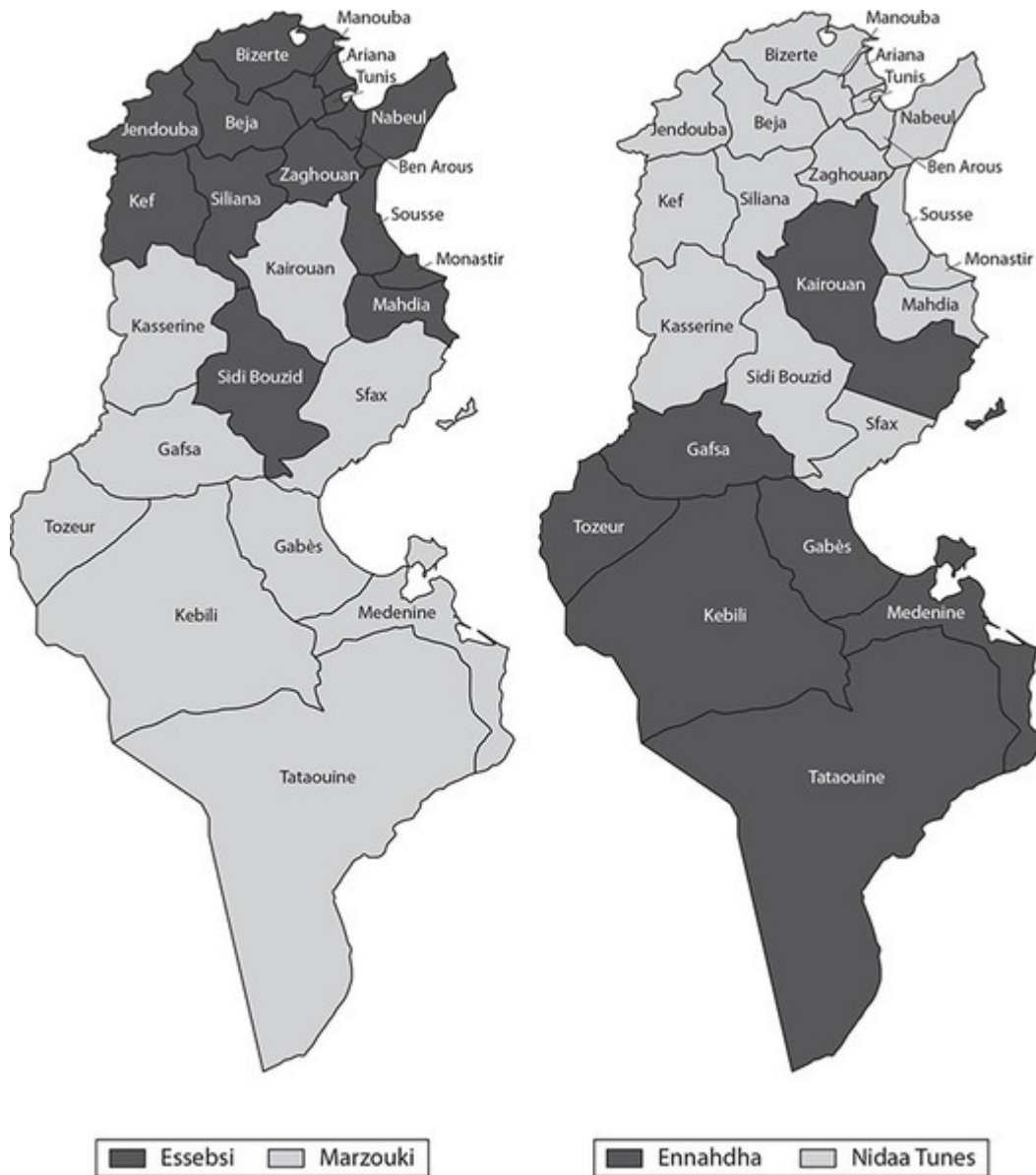
Election	Winning party	Percentage of popular vote/Number of seats
Parliamentary 1981	National Front (PSD and UGTT; UGTT split on participation)	<p>Turnout: 84.5 percent</p> <p>PSD/National Front: 94.8 percent of votes</p> <p>PSD/National Front: 136 of 136 seats (100 percent)</p> <p>No cabinet changes; Mzali remains prime minister</p>
Parliamentary 1979	PSD	<p>Turnout: 81.4 percent</p> <p>PSD: 121 of 121 seats (100 percent)</p> <p>Boycott by opposition groups; Mzali (1980) named prime minister</p>

Election	Winning party	Percentage of popular vote/Number of seats
Presidential 1974 Parliamentary 1974	Bourguiba (PSD; later declared president for life)	Turnout: 96.8 percent PSD: 112 of 112 seats (100 percent) PSD unopposed; civil servants (60) over half of deputies
Presidential 1969 Parliamentary 1969	Bourguiba (PSD) PSD	Turnouts: 94.7 percent legislative, 99.8 percent presidential 101 of 101 seats (100 percent) Bourguiba unopposed; PSD unopposed Bahi Lagham (1969); Hedi Nouria (1970) prime ministers

Election	Winning party	Percentage of popular vote/Number of seats
Presidential 1964	Bourguiba (PSD)	Bourguiba: 96 percent of all votes
Parliamentary 1964	PSD	PSD: 90 of 90 seats in parliament
Presidential 1959	Bourguiba (Neo-Destou)	(Unopposed)
Parliamentary 1959	Neo-Destour/National Front (UGTT, unions of farmers; craftsmen and merchants)	Neo-Destour/National Front: 90 of 90 seats (100 percent) Communist Party fielded list in Gafsa and Tunis; later banned in 1963

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/2321_arc.htm.

Map 23.2 2014 Legislative and Presidential Election Results, by Governorate



Source: Maps derived from Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:President_Tunisia_2014_2_round.svg and <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2014-parliamentary-election-results.png>.

Because the vast majority of Tunisians are Muslim, to many, distinguishing the interaction between religion and politics from the larger phenomenon of politics would seem strange. To some, the two

are discreet: Islam is a religion, politics are politics, and the two should not overlap. To others, religion provides a road map for a more just society and way of ruling. These mutually exclusive perspectives on the place and role of religion in public life graft onto Tunisia's turbulent history of political Islam, which has swung from periods of contradiction to conflict, co-optation, repression, and most recently, agreement. Indeed, since 1956 the debate over the role of Islam in public policy has shifted from total separation (*laïcité* in the French sense of the term) to inclusion (secularism in the American sense of the term).³⁴

Contradiction, 1956–1981

For Habib Bourguiba, religion and politics were a contradiction: Politics were politics, and religion was an individual set of beliefs to be excised from larger communal obligations. This perspective informed the new regime's modernizing policies, which included the transfer of personal code from shari'a to positive law, the corpus of laws known as the Family Code (1957), the liquidation of public (1956) and private (1957) religious foundations, the transfer of authority over mosques and imams to the Ministry of Religious Affairs (1958), and the dismantling of the Zaytouna mosque—the most important site of religious learning in the Maghrib—as an independent-leaning institution and transferring the teaching of theology to the Ministry of Religious Affairs (1958).

While segments of Tunisian society and international observers celebrated Bourguiba's modernizing reforms, a distinct subset strongly resented what they believed to be an authoritarian denaturing of their society. Many, including Ennahdha founder Rachid Ghannouchi, were later drawn to pan-Arabism's selective rejection of Westernization, but they increasingly gravitated to reformist Islamic thought and the more politicized arguments proposed by Saïd Qutb and Hassan al-Banna. Initially a group of small, like-minded, informal student groups on university campuses, they quickly coalesced.

Conflict: 1981–1987

In 1981, Rachid Ghannouchi and Abdelfattah Mourou filed for Ministry of Interior accreditation for the Movement of Islamic Tendency (MTI), a party built around a student movement called the Association for the Protection of the Quran.³⁵ Their request for accreditation was denied, and within a month, Ghannouchi, Mourou, and hundreds of supporters were arrested and sentenced to prison. Released in 1984, Ghannouchi was again arrested in 1987, and as the leader of a major social and political movement opposed to Bourguibism, he was sentenced to death. For Bourguiba, the MTI was an affront to the modernity and the state he had created: While Islam and politics were to be distinct, public religion remained the monopoly of the state. And the state was the monopoly of Bourguiba.

Co-optation and Repression: 1987–2011

While supporters of Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali's November 7, 1987, coup have argued that he acted from fear that Bourguiba's policies would lead to civil war, the new president's honeymoon with political Islam was short lived. The new regime refused to give the MTI party accreditation, which had changed its name to Ennahdha to avoid religious connotations in the party name. The party ran independent candidate lists in the 1989 legislative elections but failed to win a single seat. Ballot stuffing and the majoritarian electoral rules set in place precluded significant opposition gains. The 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and American build-up to intervention provided the MIT, along with other anti-Ben Ali groups, an opportunity to take to the streets and revealed, perhaps for the first time, the size and power of the movement.

The crackdown was swift and violent. Leveraging fear of the rise of the Islamic Salvation Front in neighboring Algeria, in February 1991 the regime decapitated Ennahdha's leadership, arresting thousands of militants, many of whom were given harsh sentences by military tribunal. Repression against Ennahdha increased following the passage of the 2003 antiterrorism law, which effectively superimposed the term *terrorist* onto *political prisoner*, and permitted the regime to mete out harsher prison sentences on suspected opponents. Tolerated as a movement from 1987 to 1991, membership in the group would remain a serious crime until the revolution on January 14, 2011. Ben Ali attempted to perfect Bourguiba's monopoly over religion and religious thought; he systematically removed independent spheres of thought or symbolic practice, and when possible, incorporated it into the state apparatus through the Ministry of Religious Affairs as well as into the commercial sector through initiatives such as Banque Zaytouna and Radio Zaytouna.

Ferment: January 14, 2011–October 2014

The collapse of Ben Ali ended the state's monopoly on Islamic thought in the public sphere. Ennahdha quickly reemerged as a political force, symbolically highlighted by the euphoric crowds that met Rachid Ghannouchi at Carthage International Airport on January 31, 2011, upon his return from exile. Ennahdha was the most popular political party in the immediate postrevolution phase. Having worked with the legal and illegal opposition during the Ben Ali years, Ennahdha played a major role in the transition from authoritarianism to the National Constituent Assembly elections in October 2011.

Ennahdha won the 2011 elections, forming a coalition government with two secular parties, attempting to reform key parts of the judiciary, security apparatus, and economy, while simultaneously drafting a constitution for a democratic Tunisia. The coalition government was unable to maintain its standing in popular opinion: Political, economic, and security instability were increasingly linked to the Troika. The assassination of two leftists in 2013 served as a catalyst that solidified a broad anti-Troika movement, culminating in the Bardo protests during the summer of 2013.

Following a protracted political crisis, the Troika government agreed to sit at the table with its harshest critics and negotiate a road map for the adoption of a new constitution, the handover of power to a technocratic government, and the setting of a new election schedule. While Ennahdha agreed to hand over power, the political battles that were waged during the 2011 to 2014 transitional period marked the political end of Bourguibism on a pure separation of religion and politics, as well as an end on the state monopoly over religion. In May 2017 during its second post-2011 party Congress, Ennahdha surprised with its announcement to separate religion from politics within the party and change its political label from Islamist to Muslim Democrats. This was both as a result of its unity government with Nidaa but also a clear effort to distance itself from other Islamist movements and create its own Tunisian brand of a conservative political party. One year later, Ennahdha beat Nidaa in Tunisia's first

postrevolution municipal elections, once again reconfiguring its position in Tunisian politics by democratic means.

Muslim Democrats and Tunisian Politics in the Future

Though defeated at the polls in the October 2014 elections, that Ennahdha could still capture close to 30 percent of the popular vote revealed two important aspects of Tunisian politics. First, it underscored the vitality of Ennahdha as a political party, which was most evident in its success in the 2018 local elections. Its membership base and institutional structures effectively mobilized party turnout. Second, it confirmed political conservatism in Tunisia's political arena, alongside economic liberalism, socialism, and Arab nationalism. These factors, in addition to its legislative seats, allowed it to enter into a coalition government as a junior partner, following Nidaa Tounes's failed and heavily criticized first attempt to negotiate an Ennahdha-free coalition in January 2015. The coalition government has confused many Tunisians: Only a few months earlier, the two parties had led political campaigns based on seemingly mutually exclusive political platforms, best summed by a total war between secularism and Islamism.

The alliance has left many critics wondering whether the amplified secularist-Islamist divide of the 2011 and 2014 elections might not have hidden other equally important aspects of politics in the postrevolution period. Many Tunisians viewed the October 2018 Ennahdha and Nidaa Tounes split as a cynical reconfiguration in anticipation of the 2019 legislative and presidential elections. For some, including youth in Ben Guerdane, Gafsa, Kasserin, Redeyef, and Sidi Bouzid, demands for greater social justice and the redistribution of wealth via a new developmental pact have been occulted. Not surprisingly, demands of wealth redistribution as well as state performance around social service policy have only increased. Writing on the night of the 2014 legislative elections, Laryssa Chomiak reminded us of this:

In Gafsa, the phosphate-rich epicenter of southwest Tunisia, and the neighboring mining town of Redeyef, lofty debates about religion and secularism means very little to residents. Unemployment in the area soars, and disgruntled residents complain of no improvement since the 2011 toppling of Ben Ali, blaming Ennahdha's governance as much as the corrupt interests of the lingering old guard in Tunis.³⁶

For others, like Nadia Marzouki, the 2014 current government was a "rotten compromise" and was the result of undue focus on debates over secularism and Islam during the constitution-drafting process and subsequent elections that turned focus away from three crucial goals of the revolution and democratic transition: legislative reform, transitional justice, and renewal of the political field.³⁷ And with that loss of attention, the fundamental goals of the January 14, 2011, revolution have been derailed.

Political Economy

While much has been written on the economic effects of the 2011 revolution, Tunisia's economy has been in flux for much longer. In 2008, for instance, a prolonged labor dispute in Gafsa virtually ground the mining of phosphates to a halt, while the manufacturing and tourism sectors of the economy suffered from the effects of global economic contraction. The country's economy was challenged again with the revolution.

According to a World Bank report, GDP growth fell to 1.6 percent in 2011. While it partially recovered, running at 4 percent in 2014, the 2015 terrorist attacks on the tourism sector contributed to another drop. In 2017, Tunisian GDP grew by 2 percent, whereas GDP per capita only grew by .8 percent. Unemployment continues to be high, though it has fallen to 15 percent from 18.1 percent in 2011. FDI continues to fluctuate and has yet to reach prerevolution levels. In 2017, the country attracted \$809 million. As the economy continues to be contracted, labor unrest has spiked. This has had a major effect on both manufacturing and mining industries.

Given these overlapping challenges, it remains surprising that Tunisia's economy is not in worse shape and that more social unrest has not occurred. Tunisia has been able to navigate recent economic pressures, in part, due to good rainfall at home and poor olive harvests in Europe. More importantly, skilled economists and technocrats were appointed to key ministerial posts after the revolution, who were able to push through a 2013 \$1.75 billion IMF Stand-By Arrangement (SBA).

Historical Overview: “A Good Pupil”

Tunisia’s various postindependence governments have cautiously managed the Tunisian economy. And in doing so, Tunisia has historically been considered a “good pupil” of international financial institutions. In the 1950s and 1960s, Tunisia built infrastructure and attempted to rationalize its agriculture sector (then the largest employer to the economy). In the 1970s and 1980s, Tunisia developed its private sector, especially promoting industries in textiles and food processing as well as a nascent tourism sector. Since the late 1980s to present, Tunisia has engaged globalization and managerial rationalization, marked by limited structural reforms and deepened finance reform and regional and global market integration.

Postindependence Rationalization (1956–1969)

After independence, the government implemented economic policies that included the nationalization of foreign-held sectors and the establishment of Tunisia’s economic institutions. The 1960 Social Security Law served as an economic road map, defining the relationship between the private-sector and labor interests. The law required the private sector to make contributions to the state for employees, while guaranteeing employee rights to social security and protection from employer abuse. Those policies, however, failed to draw capital from the real estate, small-business, and agriculture sectors into light and heavy industry, forcing the state to assume investment and management leadership in utilities, transportation, and mining. For its part, the UGTT called for more robust state-led development, even if it came at the expense of the private sector.

In 1961, President Bourguiba nominated former head of the UGTT (1954–1956), Ahmed Ben Salah, to be minister of planning, finance, and economy. Ben Salah promoted the modernization of agriculture, the nationalization of heavy industry, and, ultimately, the forced state-led development of commerce. In 1961, the state nationalized

foreign-owned land and the phosphates sector a year later. At the 1964 party congress, the Neo-Destour changed its name to the Socialist Destourian Party (PSD) to reflect a socialist outlook, and Ben Salah announced the forced collectivization of state land and surrounding tracts of private land. In 1966, the government nationalized rail services between Gafsa Mining Basin and industrial ports of Sfax and Gabes (1966). Between 1964 and 1969, the government expanded the collectivization to agriculture to include nearly all of Tunisian land and proposed a similar state-led collectivization plan for commerce. Following a critical 1969 Central Bank report on the underperformance of the cooperative movement, and in a climate of growing opposition to Ahmed Ben Salah, Bourguiba sacked his minister and in 1970 appointed the head of the Central Bank, Hedi Nourira, as prime minister.

State-Managed Private-Sector Development and Labor Unrest (1970–1985)

While Ben Salah's dismissal marked the end of Tunisia's socialist experiment, it did not end state-led development. Nourira dismantled the collective farms and embarked on an economic policy to promote private-sector investment in agro-industry and tourism, while encouraging its nascent textiles industry through foreign direct investment. In 1972, Bourguiba's government liberalized the foreign-investment code and provided a ten-year tax exemption to exporting firms. The state increased investments in phosphates, consolidating phosphate mining, transport, and processing into the Compagnie des Phosphate de Gafsa (CPG) in 1976. Phosphate production grew from 2.7 million to 4.0 million tons during the decade and would double production by 2007 (8.005 million tons). Tunisia's economy became outward oriented and mixed, encouraging private investment, while the state supplied infrastructure, utilities, heavy industry, and products linked to national food security.

Despite growth, primary-sector commodities provided unstable contributions to GDP; Tunisian manufacturing increased its share of GDP behind gains in textiles, food processing, and leather

production. Small family firms with fewer than ten employees dominated manufacturing, comprising 90 percent of the sector. These firms were closed, inexperienced, and focused on producing those goods that, as merchants, they once sold. The export manufacturing sector preferred flexible labor, including young women who worked prior to marriage. Many manufacturers owed their start to agricultural rents and state loans.

Manufactures did not keep macroeconomic difficulties at bay: fluctuations in oil, phosphate, and wheat prices and rising international lending rates deteriorated Tunisia's fiscal budget and foreign debt. Inflation renewed labor militancy for cost-of-living increases. In 1977, the unions negotiated terms for inflation-adjusted wage setting, but a January 1978 general strike by the UGTT sparked widespread civil violence and vocal expression of dissatisfaction with autocratic rule. By 1982, the signs of state austerity planning were visible, and by 1983 to 1984, a deep recession in France coupled with an international liquidity crisis prevented Tunisia from securing the credit and exchange on private, international markets needed to float debt and repay loans. The economic crisis turned social on December 29, 1983, when the government increased the price of semolina, setting off protests in southern oases and in poor communities. Through January 3, rioting spread throughout secondary cities, reaching Sfax and Tunis. Rioters targeted government officials and property and directed anger toward the upper and middle classes. Two days of rioting left more than 150 people dead and thousands wounded, as the government rolled out military forces to quell it. On January 6, President Bourguiba annulled price hikes for bread, and calm returned.

Structural Reform and Globalization (1985–Present)

In 1985, Tunisia approached the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for an emergency loan and introduced a program to stabilize its current account and fiscal deficits. Foreign exchange and trade

balances were corrected through monetary devaluation, making imports more expensive and exports more competitive abroad. Fiscal deficits were stabilized through reductions in subsidies and in government spending. Given the shallowness of the deficits, the World Bank program stressed structural adjustments in agriculture, industry, finance, public enterprise, and trade. The state pursued stabilization by privatizing state-owned assets; limiting public-sector employment; and raising subsidized prices for foodstuffs, utilities, and services. To cushion the immediate crisis, Tunisians turned to networks of family and social solidarities.

Economic liberalization increased under the Ben Ali presidency. In 1993, the government reformed its investment code to promote foreign investment in “offshore” export sectors, while it protected domestic Tunisian majority ownership in “onshore” markets.³⁸ In 1994, the Tunisian government enabled the convertibility of the dinar for current account operations. The government also established free-trade zones, where designated companies import raw or semifinished goods without customs duties or taxes for reexport. By 2008, foreign direct investment by 2,973 foreign firms and joint ventures accounted for one-third of all exports and one-fifth of employment (290,000 workers).

In 1995, Tunisia entered the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (Barcelona Process), which progressively removed tariffs on industrial products (over a twelve-year period), with a progressive reduction in tariffs on agricultural, agro-food, and fisheries products. A decade later in 2006, the government ratified the Agadir Agreement, setting into place the Euro-Mediterranean free-trade area, removing tariffs on trade between the EU, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco.

Tunisia's Economy Today

While postrevolution governments have made efforts to kick-start the economy, IMF efforts to push investment deregulation and labor code reforms have been mired in debate between ruling parties, on the one hand, and with opposition and labor groups, on the other. As a result, postrevolution economic reform measures have been largely limited to dismantling the regime-supported private-sector oligopolies created by previous regimes. Unsurprisingly, then, while the 2018 World Bank Doing Business Report ranks Tunisia at eightieth out of 190 countries on the *ease of doing business*, the Heritage Foundation classifies Tunisia's economy as mostly *unfree*, ranking it at ninety-ninth out of 180 countries.

While the estimated 50 percent of the population that constitutes the middle classes has eroded over the past decade, it nevertheless outperforms the Middle Income Country (MIC) average in GDP per capita. In 2017, national unemployment stood at 15.4 percent, youth unemployment hovered at around 35 percent, and regional unemployment in the disadvantaged regions of the South and West ranged from 20 percent to 40 percent. In 2000, the richest 20 percent of the population accounted for 47.3 percent of all expenditures, while the poorest 20 percent accounted for only 6 percent of expenditures. Disparities in wealth and opportunity remain significant.

Tunisia's GDP per capita in 2017 (adjusted for purchasing power parity) stood at \$11,911, which remains high in comparison with non-oil-exporting nations in the MENA region and to MIC averages. Growth has been led by manufacturing, which first surpassed agriculture's contribution to total domestic product in the 1980 to 1990 period. Industry (25.6 percent) and services (64 percent) remain important economic contributors (see [Table 23.3](#)).

Tunisia's trade regime is open. In 2017, imports and exports comprised 99.9 percent of Tunisia's GDP, with a bias toward imports

over exports. Benefits from remittances from Tunisians living abroad amount to \$1.89 billion in 2017 (4.7 percent of GDP) and small exports of oil ease the current account deficit. Finally, Tunisia benefits from substantial foreign direct investment (FDI), which is concentrated in export sectors (\$809 million in 2017). Prior to the revolution, FDI increased with liberalization of telecommunications, bank privatization, and investments in newly developing sectors. It fell in 2009, following the 2008 global financial crisis. While FDI spiked briefly in 2011, it has yet to recover to the 2000 to 2009 average.

Sectoral Overview

Tunisian tourism, which accounts for anywhere between 7 percent and 10 percent of GDP, is underperforming and recovering from crisis. Already a sector earning less revenue per tourist than tourism sectors in Egypt, Morocco, and Turkey, the number of tourists and tourism receipts dropped following the revolution. Tunisia’s 2014 tourism receipts came close to those of 2010, but recovery efforts were shattered following the March 2015 Bardo Museum attack and the June 2015 Sousse attack, in which nineteen and thirty-eight tourists were targeted and murdered, respectively. Following the June Sousse attack, the United Kingdom, which accounted for nearly half a million visitors to Tunisia in 2014, declared Tunisia off-limits. From 7.16 million arrivals in 2014, the number of tourists dropped to 5.36 million in 2015 and 5.72 million in 2016. Rallying in support of Tunisia, Algerian citizens created a “visit Tunisia” campaign, saving the industry from implosion. Numbers were up again in 2017, to 6.73 million (2.32 million of which were Algerian), though they still have not reached 2010 levels.

Table 23.3 Major Economic Indicators for Tunisia

Table 23.3 Major Economic Indicators for Tunisia

Indicators ³⁹	Year	Current data	Year	Comparative data
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Indicators ³⁹	Year	Current data	Year	Comparative data
Gross domestic product (US\$ billion)	(2017)	40.26	(1980)	8.74
GDP growth (percentage)	(2017)	2.0	(1970–1980) ⁴⁰	7.5
Agriculture (percentage)	(2017)	9.2	(1965)	23.74
Industry (percentage)	(2017)	24.2	(1965)	21.94
Manufacturing (percentage)	(2017)	15.4	(1965)	9.24
Services (percentage)	(2017)	N/A	(1965)	54.32
Current account (US\$ million)	(2017)	–4.05	(1999) ⁴¹	–442
Exports (US\$ million)	(2017)	17,635	(2001)	6,606
Imports (US\$ million)	(2017)	22,583	(1999)	9,521
FDI (US\$ million)	(2017)	809	(2000)	752.18

Indicators ³⁹	Year	Current data	Year	Comparative data
FDI (percentage of GDP)	(2017)	2.01	(2000)	3.50

Source: Unless otherwise indicated, all figures are taken from the World Bank World Development Indicators Databank and the Central Intelligence Agency *World Fact Book 2017*.

The textiles sector, which constitutes approximately 17 percent of value-added in manufacturing, has fared slightly better. The 2005 expiration of the Multi-Fiber Arrangement slowed textile sector growth prior to the revolution, but Tunisia produces high-end textiles for European markets. As a result, it was not as hard hit by the 2008 economic crisis as the low-end package tourism sector. While the Revolution itself did not directly affect the textile sector, continued international pressures as well as an increase in strikes in postrevolution Tunisia have decreased productivity. Such structural and contextual pressures, moreover, have forced foreign investors to reassess their willingness to invest in the country, as indicated in declining FDI receipts—monies that are crucial to the continued modernization of that sector.

Export agriculture has advanced but faces competition in the southern Mediterranean. In the late 2000s, Tunisia produced on average one hundred thousand metric tons of olive oil per annum—close to 10 percent of Tunisia’s exports—in a sector that employs 267,000 people (20 percent of all agriculture labor) directly and more than one million people indirectly. During the 2017 to 2018 harvest season, Tunisian cultivation of *Deglet Nour* dates in the Djerid oasis (Tozeur, Nefta) had a record 305.25 tons—up 26 percent from the previous season.

Table 23.4 Tunisia’s Major Demographic Indicators

Table 23.4 Tunisia’s Major Demographic Indicators

Indicators ⁴²	Current Data		Comparative Historical Data	
	Year	Data	Year	Data
Population	2017	11.53 million	1975	5.61 million
Population growth (percentage)	2017	1.1	1980–1984	2.50
Age dependency ratio	2017	47.1	1960	84.56
Unemployment rate ⁴³ (percentage)	2017	15.4	1980–1989	13.6
Primary school net enrollment rate (percentage)	2013	99	1995–2004	97
Secondary school net enrollment rate (percentage)	2013	91	1995–2004	72
GDP per capita (PPP, \$)	2017	11,911	1999	5,581

Source: Unless otherwise indicated, all figures are taken from the World Bank World Development Indicators Databank.

Reshaping the Economy

In 2013, the Tunisian transitional government signed a Stand-By Arrangement with the IMF to offset the costs of political transition. The agreement committed Tunisia to reform its macroeconomic framework, restoring fiscal and external buffers, applying deregulation to support private-sector growth, and strengthening social-assistance mechanisms to reduce income disparities.

Discussed at length in the World Bank's groundbreaking *All in the Family* report⁴⁴—which underscored the degree to which the Ben Ali clan of families and associated businesses used market regulation, expropriation, and cronyism to amass billions of dollars—Tunisia is in great need of financial sector and regulatory reform. Prior to the revolution, Tunisia's private sector was dominated by holding companies with close relations to political power and to financial institutions.⁴⁵ Of the more than 500 buildings, 300 companies, and 370 bank accounts that were seized following the revolution,⁴⁶ for example, 220 belonged to the Ben Ali family and alone appropriated 21 percent of all private-sector profits and accounted for 3 percent of private-sector output. In December 2012, for example, the government generated \$10 million from the sales of a single Ben Ali estate.⁴⁷

An overhaul of the banking sector is a critical component of laying the groundwork for a productive, postrevolution economy. Currently, close to 20 percent of public-sector bank loans are nonperforming, nearly double the private sector, or 14 percent of all bank assets.⁴⁸ To a significant degree, this public-sector portfolio is likely linked to loans given to the Ben Ali family or political allies. Additionally, public-sector banks are overexposed to the ailing tourism sector. The financial system's first priority is establishing and abiding by a more uniform regulatory environment that is aligned with international norms, while increasing both the financial and human resources dedicated to financial-sector management.

Foreign Relations

A small country neighbored by Algeria, Libya, and Italy, Tunisia has always positioned itself at a crossroads—linking Africa, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East—and has enjoyed strong relations with its neighbors. Tunisia is a member in the Arab League, African Union, Maghrib Union, and Mediterranean Union, while also participating in larger international initiatives when they suit its immediate and long-term interests.

Inter-Arab Relations and the Arab League

Tunisia joined the Arab League in 1958, and in 1979, the Arab League moved its headquarters from Cairo to Tunis in reaction of Egypt's participation in the Camp David Accords, where it would remain until 1990. In 1982, Tunisia agreed to host the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), which had been expelled from Lebanon. PLO headquarters would remain in Tunis until 1994, when PLO leader Yasser Arafat returned to Ramallah following the Oslo Accords.

Tunisia does not have formal relations with the State of Israel. Following the Oslo Accords in 1996, the two countries opened "interest sections." In 2000, however, Tunisia ended the relationship following then-Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's provocative visit to the Al-Aqsa Mosque in occupied Jerusalem.

Inter-Maghribi Relations and the Maghrib Union

During colonial occupation, nationalists from Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia considered their national struggle as a collective, regional cause. The collective struggle ended with national independence: Morocco and Tunisia gained independence in 1956, while Algeria won freedom after a brutal war of independence in 1962. While collective political positions were untenable in the postindependence era, cooperation between Algeria and Tunisia has generally been good, whereas an attempted political union with Libya in 1974 failed, creating tense relations that would last until the late 1980s, culminating in a Libyan-sponsored attempted revolution in Gafsa in 1980 and expulsion of thirty thousand Tunisian workers in 1986.

In 1989, leaders from Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia announced the formation of the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA). Ostensibly the institutional framework for eventual economic and possible political unity, the Maghreb Union has never come to fruition: Tensions between Algeria and Morocco over the Western Sahara effectively block integration of the region's two largest markets. Further economic or political cohesion has broken down altogether.

Despite these setbacks, Tunisia retains good relations with Algeria, and military cooperation is increasing along their shared borders, especially since 2011. In May 2014, Algeria agreed to a financial package worth \$250 million—two loans for \$100 million each, and a further \$50 million in nonreimbursable aid money—to stabilize the economy, adding to the 2013 IMF loan. Relations with post-al-Qadhafi Libya were also initially very good. However, contact between the two states is currently limited, in large part due to Libya's current political crisis pitting a UN-recognized government in Tripoli against a self-proclaimed government in eastern Libya. Currently, Tunisia is constructing a berm, or earthen wall, along the Libyan border, while Algeria is doing the same along the Tunisian border.

Relations with Europe and the European Union

Notwithstanding episodic crises, relations between France and Tunisia have been warm along economic trade and aid lines since independence. A 1957 preferential trade relationship between France and Tunisia has ensured that Tunisia's number-one trading partner remains France. France's leading role in the European Community has expanded this preferential relationship to EU countries. In 1969, Tunisia signed a bilateral agreement with the European Community that imposed quotas rather than tariffs on Tunisian-manufactured items, promoting investment in Tunisia's then-nascent textiles industry. The agreement also allowed for the importation of citrus and olives. The bilateral agreement was modified in 1976, with the European Community's Global Mediterranean Policy (GMP), which expanded economic exchange to trade in financial protocols.

Tunisia was the first country to sign a European-Mediterranean Association (EU-MEDA) agreement as an outcome of the 1995 Barcelona Accords that ended the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. EU-MEDA provides European economic assistance to Tunisia (and other countries) to support building free trade with neighboring European countries. From 1996 through 2007, Tunisia and Europe agreed to progressively liberalize the trade of goods over the twelve-year period, with Brussels providing funds to support Tunisia's economic reforms. The European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI; 2007–2010), and its more recent corollary, the Union for the Mediterranean, continue to govern Tunisia-EU economic and political relations. In October 2012, Tunisia was granted "European Partner" status, which provided between €400 and €600 million over a period of five years.

In addition to economic cooperation, Tunisia has engaged the European Union on security and immigration issues. In April 2011, Italy granted Tunisia €200 million to buttress its security in the wake

of spiked illegal immigration following the flight of Ben Ali. This offer was matched by a €400 million grant to promote joint EU-Tunisian immigration measures. The EU-Tunisia cooperation accords reduced illegal migration substantially, and in September 2011, an EU-Tunisia joint task force met to determine the EU's contribution to supporting the 2012 through 2016 development plan, with EU pledges of €150 million for a €1 billion multidonor plan.

Relations with the United States

True to its position of Souverainism, the Tunisian government did not support the 1991 Gulf War, the 2003 invasion of Iraq, or the 2011 NATO strikes against Colonel Muammar al-Qadhafi's military apparatus.

However, the Tunisian government has maintained a close relationship with the United States following the September 11, 2001, attack and subsequent US-led War on Terror. Former President Ben Ali leveraged the US-led War on Terror to classify elements of opposition as domestic terrorists, as per the 2003 Tunisian antiterrorism law. Using the War on Terror, thousands of opponents to the Ben Ali regime were arbitrarily arrested, imprisoned, and often tortured, despite the fact that they did not belong to terrorist groups. The regime also strengthened the Ministry of Interior's monitoring of the country's political and civic elite, consolidating Tunisia into a police state. The regime also cooperated with the United States, relaying information on known terrorist networks, such as the Tunisian Combat Group.

In 2011, the United States pledged a \$100 million cash transfer to alleviate the burden of debt payments. US-Tunisian relations symbolically frosted briefly following the September 2012 attack on the US Embassy in Tunis; however, the United States continued to assist Tunisia, especially through its democracy promotion program, and relations have once again strengthened since the 2014 and 2015 elections. Tunisian President Beji Caid Essebsi visited Washington, DC, in May 2015. The event was epitomized in *The Washington Post's* joint op-ed by the two heads of state, US President Barack Obama and Essebsi. During the visit, President Obama pledged to support Tunisian democracy financially and militarily. Shortly after the visit, Tunisia was declared "a major non-NATO ally," which permits greater military cooperation between the two states.

Domestic Conflict

Tunisia's postrevolutionary institutional development—through the Ben Achour Commission, 2011 NCA elections, 2011 to 2014 constitution writing process, 2014 legislative and presidential elections, and 2018 municipal elections—has set up a framework that largely limits domestic conflict to political institutions. However, calls for greater economic redistribution increasingly take the shape of social movements that organize loud protests.

Politics within Institutions

Street protests and demonstrations throughout the transition period have abetted, not hindered, the development of an institutionalized democratic political system, epitomized by the 2014 Constitution. During the period of the interim government, popular protests excluded former autocrats participating in the transitional process; contention during the NCA transitional government pushed staunch secularists and Islamists to negotiate with each other, initiating denser discussions and laying the groundwork for the 2015 Nidaa Tounes-Ennahdha coalition government, which unraveled in October 2018.

Protests over socioeconomic as social justice issues have been on the rise since 2015. Nationwide social movements, including *Manish M'Sameh* ["I will not forgive"] and *Fech Nestanew* ["What are we waiting for?"], have organized large-scale campaigns against a presidential proposal to amnesty corrupt Ben Ali-era businessmen and for increases in basic subsidies, respectively. Both movements are popular with Tunisia's young educated and unemployed population. Other campaigns, such as the Jemna oasis workers' self-management scheme, have challenged the legitimacy of state management over land and resources that have long belonged to local populations.

Outside of the loud claim making seen in social movements, protests, and strikes, Tunisian politics are institutionalized. Domestic conflict is resolved through elections. While largely excluded at the early stages of the revolution, members of the dissolved RCD party have been free to participate in new political parties. Indeed, Ben Ali's former Minister of Defense and Foreign Affairs, Kamel Morjane, was permitted to found a political party, the National Destourian Initiative, which participated in and won 5 seats in the October 2011 NCA elections. In the November 2018 government reshuffle, he was named Minister of Public Administration. Within the current political system, Ansar Al-Sharia is the only movement that is actively

banned from politics. It was declared a terrorist organization in August 2013 in connection to the role it played in the 2012 attack on the US Embassy and for its alleged links to the 2013 assassinations of Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi.

Terrorism and Spillover Effects

A weakened postrevolution state has permitted the growth of armed groups who are currently fighting the state, though it is difficult to situate these groups outside of a larger regional context. Groups linked with terrorist organizations located in Algeria to the west and Libya to the east have expanded into Tunisia. In western Tunisia, along the Algerian border, the Okba Ibn Nafaa brigade has been attacking military convoys, police, and customs agents since 2012. Linked to al-Qaida of the Islamic Maghrib (AQIM), based in eastern Algeria and led by an Algerian, the group's range is congruent to existing smuggling channels between Algeria and Tunisia. Cross-border movements have pushed the Algerian and Tunisian governments to militarily collaborate against the group, with some success.

While less-organized groups exist along the Libyan border, an Islamic State branch in Libya has claimed responsibility for Tunisia's most notorious violence since the revolution: The March 2015 attack at the Bardo Museum in Tunis and the June 2015 attack at a resort in Sousse collectively killed fifty-seven tourists. Young Tunisians who had trained with groups rallied to the Islamic State in Derna carried out both attacks. Tunisia's experience with terrorism has been horrific and its impact important to national politics, but terrorist groups are hardly expressions of deep-seated domestic conflict in the country and should be taken in a regional context.

Conclusion: Democratic Consolidation or Reversal?

Tunisia's transition from dictatorship to democratizing polity is remarkable and clearly distinguishes the North African nation from the rest of the Arab world. Tunisia nevertheless faces a series of highly placed hurdles. For many of Tunisia's citizens, democracy means jobs, social justice, and economic redistribution. For others, democracy is the right to free speech, political association, and elections. While these are not mutually exclusive demands, overfocusing on the claims of one group to the detriment of another in the transition process is fraught with risk. How the victors of the 2019 legislative and presidential elections are able to address these issues will likely tilt the country toward democratic consolidation or to the possibility of reversal to authoritarianism.

The new governing coalition's most daunting challenges will be reviving the economy and maintaining domestic security. While Nidaa Tounes ran both legislative and presidential campaigns based on the interlaced security-economy nexus, recent security-related events have profoundly altered the course of democratic consolidation. For critics, the new security focus represents a dangerous formula reminiscent of the repressive Ben Ali years, when economic security was traded for the protection of human rights and social justice, what Béatrice Hibou calls the "security pact." Policies rooted in the security-economy nexus are dually perilous because expansive and vaguely defined national-security imperatives can be used to suppress democratic expression, while at the same time used to impose unpopular economic development projects.

Many fear that the 2015 attacks that targeted foreign tourists at the Bardo National Museum in Tunis and the beach resort in Sousse have revived elements of the security-economy nexus. Although the tourism sector has recovered significantly, foreign investment has slowed. Unemployment has expanded while the government has

opted for a security-first approach to rebuild Tunisia's image amid fears of instability and a lax security system. Indeed, Beji Caid Essebsi's July 4, 2015, declaration of a state of national security—renewed to the time of this writing—has generated great fear of arbitrary arrest, prolonged detention, and the targeting of religious groups. Similarly, policies to amnesty Ben Ali-era state cadres and businessmen with links to the Ben Ali regime have been viewed as attacks on the important Truth and Reconciliation process. Balancing security and protections guaranteed in Tunisia's new constitution will be a delicate matter for Tunisia's political future.

Tunisia's ailing economy will also be a major focus in both domestic and international politics, which are greatly needed to address concerns the effects of rising unemployment will have on domestic stability. In today's Tunisia, major political debates no longer fit along the 2011/2014 axis of mutually exclusive secularist and Islamist visions of a political order, but rather on the economy and the protection of rights enshrined in the constitution. Contention, debate, and resolution around these issues will define Tunisia's new political future and the shape of the country's nascent democracy.

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24 Turkey

Mine Eder

Most scholars used to see Turkey as an exception in the Middle East. Save a brief occupation and the subsequent war of liberation in the 1920s, the country has never been colonized. Despite frequent interruptions from military coups, Turkey's democratic experience had been relatively persistent since its foundation as a unitary republic in 1923. On the global stage, Turkey's membership in NATO, the Council of Europe, and the OECD cemented its place among Western democracies and within the globalist economy; the country's economic success in terms of diversification, export orientation, and private-sector development, along with its continuous efforts to combine democratization with economic growth, set the country apart from its Middle East counterparts. Yet the continuous democratic backsliding and growing economic fragility have dispelled notions of Turkish exceptionalism.

Problems with state formation, democratization, and long-lasting patronage politics, as well as stop-go conflict cycles over the Kurdish issue (Turkey's major ethnic minority), plague Turkish politics. These troubles, coupled with the recent democratic breakdown and the institutionalization of authoritarian control, indicate that Turkey has taken a turn away from the West. Its economy is still diversified and globalized, but the country's economic problems such as poverty, informality, and inequality—coupled with corruption and clientelism—further separate it from the other functioning democracies of the world.

History of State Formation

Modern Turkey descended from the Ottoman Empire (1299–1922), a patrimonial monarchy based on the extensive power of the sultan. Starting as a small principedom, the empire expanded to unseat the Byzantine Empire and take over Constantinople (later Istanbul) in 1453. The Ottoman Empire collapsed in 1922, leaving two important legacies for the new Republic of Turkey in 1923: (1) the elaborate system of public administration, heavily centralized in Istanbul around the sultan’s court and palace, and (2) the multicultural nature of the empire based on the *millet* system.

The nature of the imperial court and the degree to which the Ottoman state was able to centralize its power and extend its control over society have come under particular scrutiny from those focusing on the rise and fall of absolutist states.¹ Lacking a European feudal legacy, the sultan had direct control of the land, with the ability to co-opt and cajole his subjects—both preventing a European-style peasant uprising—and managed to incorporate “potentially contentious forces.”² Such early centralization of the state power, combined with the absence of much social resistance, shaped state-society relations in the subsequent Turkish republic.

The *madrassa*, an Islamic education system catering to developing cadres for the palace and the courts, and the *devşirme*, an annual conversion of some three thousand Christian boys from the Balkans to serve in the sultan’s court and royal army known as *janissaries*, further hampered the development of any social resistance. The combination of *ilmiye* (religious authorities), *seyfiye* (the army), and *kalemiye* (a primitive bureaucracy), all led by the palace entourage, constituted the heart of the Ottoman state.

The second legacy was the *millet* system. All monotheistic religious communities in the Ottoman Empire formed distinctive *millets* with their own laws, institutions, and religious leaders, be they

Armenians, Greeks, or Muslims. The *millet*s were established by retaining each area's individual religious laws, traditions, and language under the general protection of the sultan. Although this plurality was important for the longevity of the empire, each area was subject to the sultan's full authority. The attempt to create a common and equal citizenship based on a vague notion of Ottomanism in the latter half of the nineteenth century failed, perhaps worsening relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in the empire. Ironically, it was the attempts to centralize the power of the state in the midst of rising nationalism, as well as the attempt to create an Ottoman identity and a modern state first through the Tanzimat (reorganization) reforms from 1839 to 1876 and later with the 1908 Young Turk revolution and the political ascendance of the Committee of Union and Progress (1908–1919), that contributed to the decline of the empire (see [Chapter 1](#) of this volume). The 1915 deportation of Armenians during World War I, which has led to intense debates over genocide, and the voluntary and involuntary departure of non-Muslims during the 1920s and 1930s substantially tainted the empire's image of benevolent multiculturalism. Immigrant policies that prioritized Turkic origins and Muslims also became heavily intertwined with the nation-building processes during the early years of the republic.³

Key Facts on Turkey

AREA 302,535 square miles (783,562 square kilometers)

CAPITAL Ankara

POPULATION 81,257,239 (July 2018 est.)

PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION UNDER 25 40.14

RELIGIOUS GROUPS (PERCENTAGE) Muslim, 99.8; other (Christian, Jewish), 0.2

ETHNIC GROUPS (PERCENTAGE) Turkish, 70–75; Kurdish, 18; other, 7–12

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE Turkish; Kurdish, other minority languages

TYPE OF GOVERNMENT Republican parliamentary democracy (Turkish-style presidentialism since 2018)

DATE OF INDEPENDENCE October 29, 1923 (successor state to the Ottoman Empire)

GDP (PPP) \$851.2 billion; \$27,000 per capita (2017)

PERCENTAGE OF GDP BY SECTOR Agriculture, 6.8; industry, 32.3; services, 60.7

TOTAL RENTS (PERCENTAGE OF GDP) FROM NATURAL RESOURCES 0.6

FERTILITY RATE 2 children born/woman

Source: Central Intelligence Agency, *CIA World Factbook*, 2017,
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tu.html>.

From Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic

The causes for the decline and eventual collapse of the Ottoman Empire are myriad, including shifting trade routes, diffusion of French Revolutionary thought, and growing antipathy among increasingly secular institutions within the existing *millet*s. Perhaps most important was the rise of nationalism. The devastating Balkan Wars of 1912 to 1913 and the loss of World War I finally made collapse inevitable.⁴

Map 24.1 Turkey



After their victory in World War I, the Allies—Britain, France, Italy, and Greece—negotiated a complex and at times vague partition to divide Anatolia among themselves, eventually formalized as the Treaty of Sèvres. The government of Sultan Vahdettin, who had succeeded Reshad in 1918, accepted the plan in August 1920, but a movement of national resistance led by Turkey’s most distinguished general, Mustafa Kemal, decisively opposed the treaty. In April 1920, members of the last Ottoman parliament gathered in Ankara after escaping arrest by Allied forces in Istanbul. With newly elected deputies, they proclaimed their sovereignty “in the name of the nation” as the Grand National Assembly (GNA) of Turkey, in effect

launching a rebellion against the sultan's government as well as the occupying powers.

In the resulting war of national resistance, the French and Italians decided that it would not be worth fighting another war for the sake of their territorial claims in Anatolia, and they withdrew their forces in 1921. To the east, the new Bolshevik regime in Russia reversed the policy of its czarist predecessors by establishing cooperative relations with Kemal's government, supplying it with arms and money. This left Greece as the only one of the wartime allies prepared to press its claims by force of arms. The Greeks overreached, however, occupying far more territory than they could defend or justifiably claim. By August 1921, they had advanced into Anatolia, fifty miles west of the Turkish nationalist base in Ankara. It was at this point that the Turks turned the tide in a massive battle, halting the Greeks in their tracks.

By October 1922, the Turks achieved military victory. Essentially within its present borders, Turkey was recognized as sovereign by the Lausanne peace treaty. The struggle in Anatolia from 1920 to 1922 had profound effects on Turkey's internal political structure and established Mustafa Kemal, who assumed the surname Atatürk (father-Turk) in 1936, in a position of virtually unchallengeable national authority. He used it to affect a sweeping reconstruction of the state and launch a determined campaign of cultural reorientation.

Atatürk's Cultural Revolution

Turkey was declared a republic on October 29, 1923, with Atatürk its president and Ankara its capital. With the abolition of the sultanate came the separation of the office of the caliph from the head of state; soon afterward, in a dramatic step toward secularism, an act of the GNA abolished the caliphate and closed the *madrasas*.⁵

A new constitution incorporating these momentous changes was proclaimed in April 1924. In addition, the wearing of the fez—at the time, the symbol of male Turks' attachment to Islam—was banned by law in 1925, and the sufi religious orders (*tarikats*) were officially closed. Although a reference to Islam as the state's religion remained in the constitution until 1928, the new order swept away the Islamic legal system in 1926 and replaced it with secular criminal, civil, and legal codes copied with little alteration from western Europe. Turkey also became the first Muslim country, well ahead of its Western counterparts, to accept virtually equal legal and voting rights for women.

In 1928, as a symbol of modernity and an aid to literacy, a version of the Latin alphabet replaced the Arabic script that had been used for writing Turkish. This change represented part of a sustained attempt to nationalize culture by promoting the principle that the Turks stood culturally and historically apart from the Muslim world. The campaign was not entirely successful among the rural population, but it significantly affected the educated elite and, as time passed, nonelite groups as well.

Atatürk's regime proved to be culturally progressive but politically authoritarian. A fundamental political debate in contemporary Turkey revolves around the interpretation of the Atatürk era. While revisionist historians emphasize its authoritarian and elitist aspects—what has been called an example of “modernization from above”—more staunch defenders of republicanism and secularism have

emphasized the progressive aspects of Atatürk's reforms and cultural transformation.⁶

Changing Society: Turkey's Tumultuous Modernization and Contestations

One of the major challenges in the transition from an empire to a modern republic was to create a secular, Turkish national identity. Nation-building has proven difficult due to four overlapping cleavages: center-periphery cleavages, economic cleavages, ethnic cleavages, and secular versus Islamist cleavages. This final cleavage has become particularly deep with the rise of the pro-Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) in 2002.

Center-Periphery Cleavage

Şerif Mardin argues that the primary social cleavage and confrontation that originated in the Ottoman Empire and has continued into the Turkish republic has been the center-periphery cleavage.⁷ Largely understood as a critic of the state-led, top-down modernization of the country, Mardin argues that, unlike in Europe, the state and society linkages during the Ottoman Empire, relying heavily on religion, were not sufficiently institutionalized. The unique Ottoman “state tradition” and the patrimonial nature of the sultan’s rule were largely to blame. In the secular republic, a bureaucratic class, coupled with an elitist intelligentsia, constituted the center of Turkish society; the masses occupied the periphery and are characterized by religious heterodoxy, localism, and regionalism. The more religion was ousted from the central cultural system, Mardin argued, the more removed the center became from its periphery.

Although criticized as orientalist and heavily influenced by the modernization theories of the 1970s, Mardin’s center-periphery terminology has reemerged with the intensification of debates on political Islam and the rise of the pro-Islamist AKP in Turkey in 2002.⁸ For some, the AKP’s rise to power meant the periphery had finally become the center.⁹ Others had long pointed out the failure of the secular republican state elite to establish institutionalized channels with the society and provide basic services such as education and health.¹⁰ With a brief exception in June 2015 elections, the voters on the so-called periphery systematically vote for the AKP, while those in the center vote for the CHP (Republican People’s Party).¹¹ Still others suggested that with the AKP, the periphery has become the modernizing, progressive force, while the “old” center has turned against liberalization and democratization, becoming the conservative antimodernists.¹² The AKP’s authoritarian tendencies increased following the failed coup of 2016. The April 2017 constitutional referendum granted vast executive

powers to the president and raised genuine concerns over how Turkey's "new" center is increasingly rolling back most of the initial liberalizing, antimilitarist, and democratizing trends, drifting instead into an autocratic regime.

Poverty, Regional Disparity, Gender Gap, and Informality

An exclusive focus on the center-periphery, however, does not capture Turkey's regional and class divisions. Absolute poverty appears uncommon, thanks in large part to strong family ties and solidarity networks. Though, despite significant decline over the last fifteen years, an estimated 22 percent of the country's population still live below the poverty line, as defined by TUIK (Turkish Statistical Institute). Regional inequalities between East and West are also of grave concern. The top-five provinces with the worst human development indicators and the thirteen provinces with second worst are all located in eastern and southeastern Anatolia.¹³ In contrast, the western portion of Turkey is far more integrated into the world economy in terms of trade and tourism, enjoying higher levels of investment and infrastructure and accounting for 78 percent of the total gross domestic product (GDP). Significant regional differences in terms of access to quality education also signal that these social and economic differences are sticky.¹⁴

Added to these regional differences is a significant gender gap, forged in part by early marriages and cultural stigmas. Turkey has seen significant improvement since the 1990s, but there remain significant gaps in the education of girls at all levels, leading to higher illiteracy rates and lower participation in the labor force. The proportion of illiterate women has dropped from 33.9 percent to approximately 9.4 percent (still more than four million women), and the percentage of women with university education is still 11 percent.¹⁵ Women are also marrying at a later age and mothering fewer children. However, more than forty thousand girls under eighteen get married in the country every year, one of the highest rates in the world.¹⁶ Turkey has also long struggled with extremely high levels of domestic violence.¹⁷

Perhaps most striking, women's economic conditions remain poor. The 32.2 percent women's labor force participation as of 2017 is the lowest among OECD countries, where the average is 62 percent. Though a third of the working population, women produce only 10.4 percent of earned main-work income. Only 18.7 percent of salaried wage labor is female, producing only 15.1 percent of total main-work income. Of all the employers in the country, 97.2 percent are male, creating 98 percent of main-work income; on average, men earn four times what women earn.¹⁸ The rate of women's wages in Turkey compared with those of men who work in similar jobs is 0.62. Overall, in 2017 the World Economic Forum's global gender gap report ranked Turkey as 131st out of the 144 countries surveyed.¹⁹ Political representation of women is no better. After the 2007 general elections, the percentage of women in Turkey's parliament doubled to fifty women, or 9.1 percent of total seats. A weak knowledge of political and electoral processes, combined with a lack of resources to run effective campaigns, are among the challenges stifling female political representation. Not surprisingly, in the Human Development Report of 2017, Turkey ranked sixty-ninth out of the 155 countries in terms of gender inequality index.²⁰

Another major problem is the informal nature of Turkey's economy. Though declining, almost half of those working are doing so informally, without any coverage by social insurance. High-dependency ratios also indicate a strikingly low employment rate in the country. The wage gap between those employed formally and those in the informal sector has also widened considerably.

Finally, income distribution is a persistent problem in the country. As of 2016, income share of the top decile in Turkey was 32.1 percent, while the lowest was 2.2 percent, making it the second-highest country after Russia in terms of the top decile's share of the country's wealth.²¹ Income disparity increased by 21 percent in Turkey between 2000 and 2014, making it the third-fastest country in terms of deterioration in income equality after Egypt and Hong Kong in that period. The country's lopsided tax system, which draws two-thirds of its revenue from indirect taxes while collecting only a small

portion of income tax from wealthier people, is blamed for Turkey's social inequality. Limited trade and labor union rights and high unemployment remain major issues for Turkey.[22](#)

Debates Over Secularism, Religion, and Politics

Four revolutionary legal reforms between 1924 and 1926 were at the forefront of the new secularization agenda of the early republic: (1) the elimination of the caliphate and the closure of religious courts, sects, shrines, convents, and monasteries; (2) the replacement of the Ministry of Religious Law and Pious Foundation by the Directorate of Religious Affairs; (3) the unification of the education system; and (4) the reworking of the Turkish Civil Code.

Women were among the primary beneficiaries of the new republican agenda. Abolishing shari‘a law, prohibiting polygamy, and ratifying a “new civil code (based on Swiss code) that gave women equal rights and equal opportunities of education and employment,” Turkey set a new precedent for workforce gender equality in Muslim nations, and indeed many Western countries, by the 1930s.²³

The most important consequence of this secularization program was the emergence of two wildly different groups: secularists and Islamists. In effect, these two contrasting groups that emerged *sui generis* are the same that color the Turkish political landscape today, albeit with very different political powers. The secularists, consisting of the educated, the business community, the mainstream press, the judiciary, and—most importantly—the army, were all committed to minimizing the role of Islam in public life. The other side, the Islamists, opposed these republican reforms and, marginalized on the bases of their religious and provincial backgrounds, were pushed out of political power.

The political rise of the AKP sparked a debate on the relationship between not only Islam and democracy, but also Islam and modernity. The transition to a more open-market economy along with the economic reforms of the then-prime minister, Turgut Özal, in the 1980s was already reshaping the economic landscape in the country. The rising socioeconomic profile of small Anatolian producers facilitated greater franchise for peripheral groups,²⁴

especially for Muslim conservatives and political Islamists. By increasing Islamists' participation in business, media, and education, economic liberalization reshuffled their interests from confronting the state to constructing a network of microtransformations operating within civil society.

These changes ushered in arguments that Islamism did not have to be revolutionary but could entail the gradual shift of norms and everyday practices.²⁵ Implicit in these arguments was a strong criticism of the secular state. Secularists, in contrast, have argued that a democracy without secularism, and the guarantee of universal and equal rights regardless of religious faith or identity, is simply impossible. They suggest that the language of political moderation from the AKP is simply a *takkiye*, hiding genuine intentions and beliefs. They suggest that, with the monopolization of power by the Islamists²⁶ and the Islamization of social practices, the fate of democracy is at stake.²⁷ The lifestyle concerns and mounting criticisms of too much “social engineering” (bans on alcohol consumption, admonishment of public kissing, incursions into family planning, etc.) also constituted one of the fundamental themes of the May 2013 Gezi Park Protests. Even today, after seventeen years of incumbent rule and executive aggrandizement, most of the political debates during the AKP government still revolve around recasting, redefining, and “defending” secularism in the country.²⁸

Headscarf Controversy and Education “Reform”

The headscarf issue had been a source of tension long before the tenure of the AKP government. Since the 1960s, Turkish governments have sporadically implemented a headscarf ban in public office. The rise of Necmettin Erbakan's pro-Islamist Welfare Party and the coalition government formed together with the True Path Party in the aftermath of the December 1995 elections and increased the political tensions over secularism and the headscarf. In pressuring Erbakan to resign from his post in 1997, the sensibilities of the Turkish army and its self-acclaimed mission to

guard the secularist foundations of the republic were underscored. It was then, too, that women were banned from wearing headscarves during state employment, in elected posts in the parliament, and, most importantly, while attending universities.

The attempt of a member of parliament (MP) to enter into the parliament with a headscarf caused much controversy in 1999. The Islamists framed the entire issue in terms of individual rights and liberties. The secularists voiced concerns that the presence of a woman wearing a headscarf in parliament posed both a symbolic and real threat to the secular foundations of the republic.

Although lifting the headscarf ban was one of the AKP's electoral promises before the 2002 elections, the party initially kept a low profile on the issue. The injustice of not having access to higher education on the basis of wearing a headscarf was voiced frequently, but the AKP government was careful not to take on the Higher Education Council directly, the council that was designed to coordinate (or, according to some, control) universities in Turkey, staunch defenders of secularism at the time.

In 2007, mainly because his wife wore a headscarf and he was an Islamist, the prospect of having Abdallah Gül, then minister of foreign affairs, as the new president became problematic. This was enough not only to mobilize millions of people into joining street demonstrations and protest rallies but also to trigger a so-called "e-coup." The Turkish army put a memorandum on the Internet on April 28, 2007, to "urge" the Constitutional Court to refuse Gül's presidential bid on the grounds of insufficient parliamentary votes. The decision of the court to declare the vote unconstitutional made choosing a president impossible, paving the way for new elections.

The 2007 elections were largely an attempt to respond to the military's efforts to block the election of Abdallah Gül. The subsequent 46.6 percent electoral victory gave the AKP a comfortable margin to elect Gül and remains a major victory against the tutelary powers of the military. Though considerably relaxed before then, the headscarf ban was officially lifted for all public

officials (with exceptions of security personnel and judges) in 2013. Women MPs with headscarves started appearing in the parliament from 2013 onward. In 2015, the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK) lifted the ban on female judges and prosecutors. In 2017, women were allowed to wear a headscarf as a part of their uniform both in the police and the army, in effect ending this controversy.

Another controversy on the nexus of religion and politics emerged over the issue of the educational reform package that was literally forced through the lower-parliamentary commission with fistfights and voted on in the national assembly in 2012. The reform package lowered the minimum age for starting primary school to five and changed the uninterrupted eight years of compulsory education (merging the primary and middle school) into an interrupted twelve-year (four + four + four) system, which the secularists saw as an attempt to bring back the religious middle schools (*imam hatips*), hence starting religious education for younger children. The eight years' uninterrupted education law was passed shortly after the February 28 e-coup in 1997 and was largely seen as an attempt to reduce the role of religious middle schools and to relegate the religious high schools to a "vocational" status. The move was thus seen as retaliation to an earlier law with the aim of mainstreaming the religious educational institutions. Since the implementation of the reforms, some of the "regular" high schools have been converted to *imam hatip* schools, sparking intense controversy.

AKP and the Gülen Movement: Turkey's “(Parallel) State” Controversy

One of the most influential claims of the AKP as the party rose to power has been that, despite their electoral wins, political parties never fully controlled the state in Turkey. The AKP insisted that it was controlled indirectly by the military, a secular judiciary, and bureaucracy, sometimes referred to as the “Kemalist establishment.” AKP government also claimed that the military and the higher courts were politicized and that there were concealed clandestine activities

to remove nonsecular actors from the government, often referred to as the “deep (parallel) state.”

Putting an end to this tutelary democracy and rooting out this Kemalist establishment was also the common goal that brought together the Gülenist Islamist movement and the AKP. The Gülen movement, led by Fetullah Gülen, a preacher and Muslim scholar in self-imposed exile in Pennsylvania, was built through long and extensive investment in education in Turkey and abroad; it offered a Turco-Islamic synthesis. The movement (known as *Hizmet* [Service]) claims to have founded more than five hundred educational institutions in ninety countries. The admirers of the Gülen movement saw it as a liberal, moderate Islamic network built on cooperation, democracy, and interfaith dialogue: a “civic movement” with no linkages to Islamic extremism and with no political aspirations. Critics, on the other hand, saw the movement as a nontransparent, chameleon brotherhood, whose supporters had begun to control Turkey’s courts and police as well as its intelligence community.

It was clear that what started as a reactive movement against Kemalism and modernism has turned into a proactive social movement attacking the major actors of the ancient regime. The first attack on the military establishment began in 2008 through an investigation into this “deep state.” This was followed by various waves of mass arrests that included some high-level retired and active-duty army officials, intellectuals, civil society leaders, and media figures and pundits, all of whom were charged with involvement in a secret network that came to be known as *Ergenekon*.

The Gülenists alleged that Ergenekon was responsible for, among other things, secret plots to bomb mosques, assassinate prominent figures, and start wars to stir chaos. Having taken control over the judicial system through political appointments to the court (all initially welcomed by the AKP), prominent journalists, activists, academics, and businesspeople, known for their views opposing the AKP, were arrested for having alleged linkages to Ergenekon. Islamists have

hailed the Ergenekon trials as an effort to “clean out” the deep state, while secularists have claimed that Ergenekon is mostly manufactured to threaten and silence opposition and that the AKP has created its own deep state with the help of the Gülenists.

The year 2010 saw a new wave of arrests with the aim of revealing an alleged coup plot against the AKP government. The September 12, 2010, constitutional amendments, which empowered the civilian courts to prosecute and try military personnel, widened the scope and rank of arrests—culminating in legal charges against the architects of the 1980 coup and even the arrest of former army chief in January 2012. More than three hundred military staff at all levels, charged with plotting a coup, were arrested in 2010, and most were sentenced with the maximum penalty, ranging from twenty to thirty years.

The Islamists have argued that this is the final step in the democratization and demilitarization of Turkish society; secularists, on the other hand, have characterized these steps as a political strategy to intimidate the political opposition and completely eliminate the independence of the judiciary system. The fact that these cases were handled by specialized “heavy penal courts” with questionable “due process” and that these generals are known for their staunchly secular, anti-AKP views, they argued, proves that these trials were intensely political and revanchist.

The corruption scandal over a recorded phone conversation of Erdoğan ordering his son to tuck away millions of dollars was when the long-standing alliance between the Gülen movement and the AKP utterly collapsed. The AKP government as well as Prime Minister Erdoğan saw the charges as a direct attack to overthrow the government and as part of an international (US and Israeli) conspiracy. Erdoğan started a legal battle to remove or transfer all the prosecutors, judges, and the police officers involved in the graft investigation and accused the Gülenists and his sympathizers of forming a “parallel state.”

The complete turnaround of the old battle between the secularists/military and the Islamists into a battle between the two major political actors within political Islam in Turkey had major legal and political consequences. As if going on a legal merry-go-round, 2014 saw Turkey's highest criminal court order the release and retrial of 230 military officers who were convicted by pro-Gülenist judges and prosecutors. Most of the sentences and court decisions made by Gülenist judges and prosecutors started to be overturned.

Gülenists were also widely acknowledged to have orchestrated the failed coup of July 2016 by infiltrating the upper echelons of the army—a charge Gülenists have repeatedly denied. The “state of exception” rule established right after the coup, which gave extensive powers to the government enabling them to rule by decree and by circumventing parliamentary scrutiny, ushered an era of massive purges against the Gülenists across civil service, education, journalism, judiciary, and military. Under this emergency rule, which was extended until July 2018, an estimated 160,000 judges, prosecutors, high- and low-level soldiers, police officials, teachers, academics, and civil servants were suspended or dismissed. Likewise, more than seventy-seven thousand people had been formally charged with various degrees of crimes, ranging from attempt to overthrow the government to terrorist propaganda. These waves of purges largely targeted (but were by no means limited to) the Gülenists, which were then categorized as a terrorist group.

Meanwhile, determined to root out the movement, the Turkish government continued to pressure various states to close international schools and universities opened and operated by the Gülenists. It also appointed trustees to more than five hundred high-profile, pro-Gülenist business corporations, confiscating their assets and transferring them to Savings Deposit Insurance Fund (estimated at around \$US13 billion), and formally demanded the extradition of cleric Gülen himself from the United States.²⁹ The degree of infiltration of the Gülenists into a wide range of state apparatus (increasing revelations about secret communication channels, manipulations on entrance exams to enter into the army and civil

services, and shady appointments based on mafia-like loyalties and paybacks), which was initially accepted and even welcomed by the AKP for harvesting the fruits of the joint victory over the Kemalist establishment, has now become a liability. The large-scale cutbacks of business and financial privileges that the AKP itself had long provided to the Gülenists also suggest that the AKP is likely to continue to target Gülen supporters and replace them with party sycophants.

Ethnicity and the Kurdish Question

The Kurdish question has been closely connected with both the building of the nation and its identity based on civic Turkishness during the early years of the republic. Many scholars have argued that the Kurdish question and Kurdish identity have been inextricably intertwined with the very definition of *Turkishness*.³⁰ The trauma of the Sèvres Treaty, which included the prospect of establishing an independent Kurdish state, framed the discussion of the Kurdish question as a threat to national unity and the territorial integrity of the republic. According to the 1923 Lausanne Treaty, the only minorities that are officially recognized are non-Muslims, Armenians, Greeks, and Jews, in line with the earlier *millet* system of the Ottoman Empire. It was not until the 1990s that Turkish politicians actually came to terms with the Kurdish reality.

Today, an estimated fifteen million Kurds live in Turkey (up to 19 percent of the population), although Kurdish nationalists claim much higher numbers. Approximately half live in the Southeast, while the rest of the Kurdish population is spread about the eastern region and throughout major cities (these figures often include as Kurds the Zaza people, a similar yet ethnically and linguistically different group).³¹ Obtaining reliable figures has proven difficult, as the Kurds were categorized as *mountain Turks* until the 1990s.

This nonrecognition, or “deliberate neglect,” of the Kurdish identity, regional disparity, and economic deprivation in heavily Kurdish-populated regions of the Southeast, combined with the harsh treatment of the Kurds in the aftermath of the 1980 military coup, fueled an armed conflict led by the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) against the Turkish state.³²

Between 1984 and 1999, the PKK, led by Abdallah Öcalan, who combined leftist, Marxist rhetoric with Kurdish nationalism, launched a series of terrorist attacks in the region. The conflict led to greater military involvement, bringing a declared state of emergency within

the region until 2002, forced displacement of populations, and human rights violations. Significant depopulation also occurred in the region, thanks to PKK atrocities against Kurdish clans they could not control, the poverty of the Southeast, and the Turkish state's military operations. It is estimated that more than forty thousand people have died since the beginning of this conflict. The PKK also shifted strategies during these years, targeting urban areas and accelerating its terrorist tactics.

Despite ongoing political tensions, the conflict subsided between 1999 and 2004, when Abdallah Öcalan, leader of the PKK, was captured and imprisoned for life. But the US invasion of Iraq and a souring relationship with the EU (and its declining anchor role) “conflated into a new anti-Western brand of Turkish nationalism.”³³ Negotiations slowed, and the international community's ability to influence domestic reforms dwindled. The fighting between the Turkish army and PKK during the 2004 through 2012 period continued as a low-intensity conflict, with offenses and counterattacks and temporary unilateral ceasefires by PKK. The AKP's new Kurdish initiative (peace process) to open a dialogue raised new hopes and ushered in a new era. Yet cessation of conflicts proved difficult amid increasing arrests of Kurdish activists, journalists, and political leaders. Nevertheless, the Kurdish conflict subsided as the government launched negotiation rounds with Abdallah Öcalan in İmralı, the island where he is serving his life sentence, and the PKK.

However, the civil war in Syria rapidly pushed the internationalization of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict, as it created an opportunity for the PKK to develop alliances with the Kurdish movement in Syria (PYD) and the security wing of the party, the People's Protection Unit (YPG). In addition, the military aid received from the United States raised hopes for the sequestering of an autonomous region and eventually a state for the Kurds. The Turkish government became increasingly uneasy about this international support.

A concomitant push occurred on the political front, beginning with the first-time entry of the pro-Kurdish Party, the HDP (People's Democratic Party), into the parliament. The interim government accused HDP of not severing its ties with PKK, while PKK called off the cease-fire. The unprecedented speed of escalation of the conflict in between two elections, June 7 and November 1, 2015, revealed the fragility of the peace process.

While the HDP accused the government of security failures in the Southeast and directly blamed AKP, AKP launched a widespread campaign against "all terrorism," citing security threats from both ISIS and PKK bombings. The clashes between the army and the PKK took a particularly violent turn in urban sites during December 2015 through April 2016 and marked a radicalization of both PKK strategies, moving from rural to urban sites, but also remilitarization of the conflict. According to the International Crisis Group, more than four thousand casualties have been reported in the conflict since July 2015.³⁴ This remilitarization also led to Turkey's cross-border military operations into Syria. While on paper this was in response to the threat of ISIS, the prospect of preventing a Kurdish enclave across the border was not lost.

Remilitarization played a significant role in the major challenges pro-Kurdish parties have faced in the country. Every pro-Kurdish political party has been systematically closed by Constitutional Court decisions because of their alleged links to the PKK. The highly controversial 10 percent national threshold, which requires all the parties to have a minimum of 10 percent of the popular vote to have parliamentary representation, had also kept the Kurdish parties out of parliament. The pro-Kurdish parties had either to form a preelection coalition with existing parties or enter independent candidates from their respective districts, allowing the party to form a group within the Grand National Assembly (GNA) afterwards. Because the national threshold does not exist in local elections, a significant number of Kurdish local representatives were able to come to power, particularly in southeast Turkey.

The HDP, the most recent pro-Kurdish party, emerged in 2014 and started an initiative to launch the party as an all-inclusive party with the aim of democratizing the country. At the forefront was presidential candidate Selahattin Demirtaş, who called for a coalition against AKP, citing the authoritarian measures of Erdoğan. Following the coup attempt of July 2016 and the crackdown on pro-Kurdish political representatives, Selahattin Demirtaş was jailed. In the June 2018 presidential elections, Demirtaş was a candidate again for HDP but had to run his campaign from jail. Meanwhile, 90 out of the 102 elected HDP majors in local municipalities were removed from office and replaced by “trustees” appointed directly by the government. Many pro-Kurdish journalists and activists were also detained and jailed; media outlets closed. Despite these political pressures, HDP managed to pass the national threshold in 2018 parliamentary elections and captured 67 seats.

In short, violent urban encounters between the army and the PKK, with several bombs exploded by the militant flank of PKK throughout 2016 (killing civilians), coupled with the closure of all venues for a political dialogue and complication of the issue with Syria and YPG, means that a resolution of the Kurdish problem in Turkey remains highly unlikely.

Political Institutions, Governance, and Turkey's Democratic Backsliding

Turkey's democratic experience was interrupted several times. Four military interruptions and four transitions to democracy have occurred since the 1923 to 1945 single-party era. While concerns over Turkey's democracy were formerly centered on the military's influence on democracy, the attempted coup in 2016 and the ensuing purge of high-ranking officers has neutered the military's political role. Since the rise of AKP as the single-dominant party, winning consecutively six national elections (2002, 2007, 2011, June 2015, November 2015, and June 2018), the focus of concerns over Turkey's democracy have gradually shifted away from the military toward issues like freedom of expression (with jailing and silencing of journalists and political opponents), escalating police violence (as was evident in the case of Gezi Park Protests), and executive aggrandizement. Mirroring the rhetoric associated with the military threat, opposition parties have characterized the personalization of power by President Tayyip Erdoğan and the AKP's entrenchment as a "civil coup."

The failed coup of July 15, 2016 (which resulted in 248 people dead and 1,400 people injured, as civilians, upon a dramatic call from President Erdoğan to the public through FaceTime, took to the streets to fight against the coup-makers) can be seen as a turning point when all these democratic backsliding processes sped up significantly, resulting in an evident democratic breakdown and full-blown transition to autocracy. The coup attempt and the heightened security threat created a fertile ground for executive aggrandizement. The declaration of a state of exception and its extension for two years allowed the government to avoid all institutional checks and balances; the urgent need to address the problem of Gülenists also gave the government an opportunity to silence all the opposition,

Kurdish party members, activists, journalists, and academics without any legal liability and often without due process.

In the aftermath of the coup attempt of July 2016, the two-year long “state of exception”—essentially characterized by the suspension of rule of law, massive public-sector purges, widespread rights abuses, and suppression of political opposition—set the stage for the transition into an executive presidency in 2017. The concentration of so much executive power in the office of the presidency has generated a growing consensus that Turkey, after decades of multiparty politics, is no longer a democracy. Freedom House registered the Turkish case as the largest one-year decline in freedom in the world in 2016 and the largest ten-year decline in 2017. In 2018, it updated Turkey’s status to *not free*. Largely thanks to reports of election fraud, especially during the April 2017 referendum on transition to presidentialism and the June 2018 national/presidential elections, the country failed to meet even the basic requirements of an electoral democracy.³⁵

The coup also fostered rapprochement between the AKP and the Nationalist Action Party (MHP), which had started with the militarization of the Kurdish conflict and collapse of the Kurdish peace process in 2015. It was, in fact, the MHP that announced in October 2016 that they would support AKP’s bid for a presidential system and initiated the parliamentary vote to take the issue to referendum. The rise of this Islamist-Nationalist power-sharing arrangement culminated in an electoral alliance known as *Cumhur İttifakı* (People’s Alliance). In June 2018, joint presidential and national elections were held, in which the MHP supported the reelection of President Erdoğan and the two parties prepared a common MP list for the parliament. In short, the failed coup, the state of exception, and the MHP’s decision to support Erdoğan’s bid for a presidential system, combined with the criminalization and weakening of opposition parties, ensured Turkey’s democratic breakdown.

Though different categorizations are used in describing Turkey's democratic decline (majoritarianism, illiberal democracy, competitive authoritarianism), the question as to why and how Turkey turned from a formal democracy (even upheld as a democratic model for the rest of the Middle East) to an autocratic regime remains a crucial question. Whether this was a result of slow process of executive aggrandizement or sudden breakdown at various crucial political moments (e.g., the Gezi protests or 2013 corruption scandals) remains highly contested.

Whether incremental or sudden, the emerging literature offers various explanations as to why Turkey has suffered such a democratic decline. Some argue that after seventeen years of incumbent rule and political packing into the state institutions, the AKP and the state have effectively merged, allowing the party to use vast state resources to create and consolidate its own constituency. Others underscore how the AKP transformed Turkey's political economy, creating its own business elite through privatization, public procurements, and public transfer of private capital from AKP-dissident businesses to those defending the AKP. This capital was used for political gain, increasing cash transfers and various social assistance programs in order to maintain the support of the urban poor.³⁶ Such a transformation (the growing dependence of business and urban poor on the discretion of the AKP) essentially raised the cost of replacing the AKP and, at the same time, reduced the costs of suppressing and silencing the opposition. Growing evidence of a personality cult surrounding Erdoğan and the entrenchment of clientelism, along with the 2017 constitutional referendum to confer executive and state power unto the president, made Turkey a case for institutional decay.³⁷ In effect, this decline revealed the dark side of majoritarianism, where once a political party receives the majority of the votes, it can systematically legalize and normalize the politicization of all institutions, eliminate all checks and balances, and renounce pressures for transparency or accountability. Politicization of the judiciary, as AKP loyalists replaced the Gülenist judges and prosecutors, for instance, effectively criminalized all opposition voices, packaging them as potential terrorists conspiring against the

government, severely curbing freedom of expression and undermining the rule of law.

Still, some academics argued that Islam is incompatible with democracy and how Islamists in Turkey were never democratic to begin with.³⁸ Others focused on how the severity of polarization, wherein opinions on even the most mundane issues were defined by political loyalties, might account for democratic decline.³⁹ The monopolization of all media outlets, either by the government or pro-AKP businesses, have also enhanced the ability of the government to “spin” all its policies, demonizing and silencing opposition. Such aggrandizement and abuse of executive power partially account for the weakening power of opposition parties and the disappearing civil society organizations that are critical of the government.

The last partial explanation for Turkey’s democratic decline is linked to weakening ties to the West. Dimming prospects of EU membership and the crucial gatekeeping role Turkey plays with regard to the Syrian refugee crisis diluted Turkey-EU relations, meaning that the EU can no longer play a major political anchoring role. Meanwhile, suspicions of US involvement in the 2016 coup, the row over sanctions on Iran, and the US arming of Kurds in Syria have strained relations with the Americans. Concerned over Turkey drifting to the “East,” as evidenced by increasing coordination between Turkey, China, Iran, and Russia on the international stage (e.g., the Syrian cease-fire agreement in 2016), the United States and the EU have clearly lost their leverage to promote democratization and liberal principles.

Constitution

The Turkish constitution, first ratified in 1921, has been revised (or rewritten) several times during its history: once in 1924, again in 1961 following the military coup of 1960, and in 1982 in the aftermath of the 1980 coup. The 1921 constitution ratified by the Grand National Assembly (GNA), which acted as both a constitutional convention and a parliament, established the basic principles of the republic. Following the proclamation of the founding of the republic on October 29, 1923, the new 1924 constitution defined Turkey as a parliamentary democracy and established the separation of powers. In less than a year, however, the country adopted a single-party rule by the Republican People's Party (CHP), which lasted twenty years.

The transition to a multiparty system occurred in 1946 when CHP deputies Celal Bayar (Atatürk's prime minister, 1938–1939), Adnan Menderes, Fuat Köprülü, and Refik Koraltan left the party to form the Democrat Party (DP) and went on to win the 1950 elections in a landslide. The 1924 constitution remained in effect until 1961, but with two major amendments: one eliminated the sentence "The religion of state is Islam" from Article 2 of the constitution in 1928; the other occurred in 1934 and gave women the right to vote and be elected to office. In 1937, six founding principles of the CHP—republicanism, nationalism, populism, etatism, secularism, and reformism—also made their way into the constitution.

Though dovetailing with the May 27, 1960, coup, the 1961 constitution is ironically considered the most democratic and "liberal" in terms of its emphasis on individual rights. This particular constitution is also known for establishing an upper chamber—the Senate—as a way to counterbalance the political dominance of the majority parliamentary group in the GNA, a change largely seen as a response to the problems, power abuses, and intolerance of opposition observed during the majoritarian control of the GNA by the DP. A Constitutional Court designed to supervise the

constitutionality of legislation passed by the GNA was also established. Finally, this was also the time the term *social state* first made its way into the constitution.

The last and current constitution was ratified in 1982, once again following a military coup. Approved by an overwhelming majority of the population in a national referendum, the 1982 constitution emphasized stability over liberties. It was largely a response to the political fragmentation, ideological polarization, instability, and ineffective coalition governments of the prior decade. The 1982 constitution abolished the Senate, returned to a unicameral GNA, kept the Constitutional Court and Higher Appeals Court but diminished their scope, and severely limited the autonomy of universities. The universities were targeted because they were considered polarized, divided along left-right ideological lines, and were sites for numerous legal, illegal, and paralegal youth activities before the coup. Political parties and associations were also put under strict regulation and control.

The 1982 constitution has been heavily criticized as undemocratic and restrictive. It has been changed a total of ten times, in effect changing one-third of the text. Most of these changes took place within the context of harmonization with the EU. One of the most important changes was the abolition of the death penalty in 2002. Other changes aimed at containing the political influence of the military and increasing the transparency of its budget, eliminating state security courts, and eliminating army representation in the higher education council. There were also changes that aimed to reinforce gender equality and freedom of expression, such as allowing for Kurdish broadcasting.

The 2007 constitutional reform followed the controversy over Abdallah Gül's presidential bid. The change was approved through a referendum and involved electoral reform: the president, formerly elected by a two-thirds majority within the GNA, will now be elected by popular vote. The presidential term will be reduced from seven

years to five, with eligibility to run for a second term, and elections will be held every four years instead of five.

In May 2010, the government also passed a series of constitutional amendment proposals from the parliament, which involved amendments to twenty-three articles of the constitution. Though the amendments included some noncontroversial items such as extending collective bargaining rights to government employees, privacy of information, allowing civilian courts to judge military personnel charged with criminal activities, and repeal of constitutional protection for 1980 coup-makers, the most controversial amendments involved changes in the institutional structure of the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK). Since the HSYK is the sole body overseeing the appointment of judges and prosecutors, under the new provisions the minister of justice and the permanent secretary became “natural members” of the board, paving the way for more political influence in judicial appointments and ultimately weakening the independence of the judiciary. Nevertheless, a referendum took place on the symbolic date of September 12, 2010 (the thirtieth anniversary of the 1980 coup), and resulted in a 58 percent yes and a 42 percent no vote.

But arguably the most significant constitutional change occurred through a referendum on April 16, 2017, in which the country’s parliamentary regime was in effect replaced by a Turkish-style presidentialism known as “executive presidency.” Though the political debates about a shift to presidentialism have long been around, mostly supported by Erdoğan (the new president had actively campaigned prior to June 2015 elections and appealed to the voters to bring a sufficient majority in the parliament to change the regime toward a presidential system), the AKP did not have the sufficient number of votes to pass it through the parliaments, where two-thirds majority is needed, or bring it to referendum. The debates mostly took place along partisan and highly ideological lines, where Erdoğan and AKP supporters claimed that a presidential system would ensure more effective and speedy governance, a process

better for stability and economic development. The opposition saw this as creeping authoritarianism, with Erdoğan formalizing his de facto powers and the country disintegrating into a one-man's rule.

The referendum was on eighteen amendments that gave extensive powers directly to the president. With the referendum, the president would serve both as head of state and as head of the executive; appoint the cabinet of ministers and a significant portion of high judiciary and senior public officials without any oversight from parliament; restructure all ministries and appoint top-level bureaucrats to public institutions; issue presidential decrees (albeit with some restrictions); and dissolve parliament by calling new legislative and presidential elections. All these amendments were approved by a thin margin (51.41 percent for and 48.59 percent against) amid electoral fraud allegations as the Higher Election Council declared unstamped ballots as valid in the midst of vote counting. As such, there was a significant shift of governing authority from the parliament to the presidency, with the concentration of executive power in a single individual.

Legislative Branch

Until the 2018 national elections when the number of MPs increased from 550 to 600, the General National Assembly was a unicameral parliamentary body comprising 550 deputies. The full term of the GNA was four years but increased to five years in 2018. The election of deputies is based on multimember districts where the parties entering the elections come up with the party list, and the voters vote for either independent candidates or party lists. Members who are at the top of the party list in a given district (who will have the highest chance of being elected) are often party insiders and in the leader's personal circles. Sometimes, local notables are so prominent that the parties promise them safe seats in order to get their constituent votes delivered. Powerful tribal leaders, religious brotherhood groups, or rich landed families, common in the East and Southeast of the country, can then deliver the votes for their respective parties. Such linkages reinforce patron-client relationships and political inequalities. The fact that the party leadership has almost unlimited power to draw up district party lists also means that party discipline is vital and constantly maintained. Internal party debates and pluralistic views within a party are very limited.⁴⁰

Historically, the GNA's power has risen and declined depending on the political context. Not surprisingly, the parliament was a rubber-stamp institution during the single-party era. With the DP's rise to power in 1950, the parliament became the arena of intense political contestation. With the legacy of the single-party era intact and with a very comfortable majority in the parliament, the DP was not at all attentive to the opposition, causing the easy fusion of executive and legislative powers.

In effect, the 1961 constitutional reforms reflected concerns over what happens when a majority party in the parliament goes unchecked and unopposed. To that effect, the 1961 constitution established a second house, the Senate, and the Constitutional Court to supervise the constitutionality of the laws passed by both

houses of parliament. Despite efforts to establish some degree of separation of powers, the 1961 to 1980 period is considered to have been a politically unstable period for the GNA, when the coalition governments and ideologically charged debates in parliament paralyzed the political system amid ongoing crises—the oil crisis in 1973, the Cyprus crisis in 1974, and the deepening economic crisis and escalating street violence—both foreign and domestic. In fact, it was the paralysis of the GNA and the inability of any of the parties to create sufficient consensus to get a president elected in the parliament that became the pretext for the military to intervene in September 1980. The 1982 constitution disbanded the Senate but retained the Constitutional Court with its supervisory powers.

Despite heated debates on the floor, the AKP's majority in the GNA since 2002 gave the party power to pass its legislative agenda, ultimately reducing the influence of the GNA. The AKP lost its majority briefly in June 2015, putting a hold on the ultimate transition toward presidentialism; however, by November 2015 the AKP claimed a new majority with 49.5 percent of the votes. With 316 seats, the AKP was positioned just 14 seats short of calling a referendum for constitutional change.

But when the National Action Party shifted its position in support of presidentialism, following the coup attempt in 2016, all political calculations changed, allowing the AKP's proposal for a constitutional referendum to pass through the parliament with 348 votes. The win of the 2017 referendum and formal shift to executive presidency in 2018 significantly reduced the power of the parliament. The parliament can now be dissolved directly by the president; it can no longer be tasked with overseeing the council of ministers; it no longer has the power to draft the state budget; and it has limited powers to amend the president's budget proposals.

The referendum also bridled the potency of any parliamentary checks and balances. The right to submit oral and written questions as a part of MPs' auditing processes was amended. As of now, inquiries are only allowed via "written submission" to vice presidents

and ministers, and none are allowed to be sent to the president, rendering the president, in effect, above legislative scrutiny—a major and dramatic break from past practice.

Another change is that the parliament needs an absolute majority of its entire membership (50 percent + 1) to re-pass a bill that the president sends back to the parliament for reconsideration, whereas the former constitution allowed the parliament to bypass the president's objections by a simple majority of the quorum. Last but not least, this shift also makes it very difficult to impeach the president. As long as the president's party enjoys a majority in parliament, which is the case with AKP, holding the president wields both executive and legislative powers.

Executive Branch

Prior to the shift to executive presidency in 2018, the president still sat at the top of the executive branch and was the commander in chief with the power to appoint the prime minister and approve the cabinet. The 1982 constitution gave the president the power also to appoint members of the Constitutional Court, judges, rectors of universities, and all other political appointments. Presiding over the National Security Council (NSC) and the cabinet was also within the powers of the office, should the president see it as necessary. That is why at the time Ersin Kalaycıoğlu had argued, “Such aggrandizement of power by the president somewhat undermines the parliamentary character of the Turkish democratic regime. . . . Turkey can be characterized as a hybrid of parliamentarism, and semipresidentialism or a semiparliamentary regime.”⁴¹

But prior to 2018, the office of prime minister and the ministries were still where most of the operational political power lay in Turkey. Particularly those prime ministers who enjoyed majorities in parliament had considerably fused executive and legislative powers. The power of the prime minister and the effectiveness of the cabinet were contingent, however, upon the party holding a majority in parliament. During coalition governments in Turkey (1961–1965, 1973–1980, and 1991–2002), the power of the prime ministers dwindled owing to their governments’ vulnerability to a vote of no confidence. Because of the majority of the AKP in the parliament, the power and the influence of the office of prime minister have increased considerably since 2002.

However, in 2014 the election of former PM Tayyip Erdoğan as the new, first-time popularly elected president of the country ushered in a new wave of debates on Turkey’s transition toward a de facto presidential system. The opponents had already started to underscore that the elected president in 2014 had already stepped on the boundaries of the existing constitutions by frequently

presiding over the cabinet, by giving indirect support to the AKP, and by issuing political statements rather than remaining neutral.

The 2017 referendum laid the framework for a new presidential system to begin after the following general elections. After the reelection of President Tayyip Erdoğan in June 2018 (winning in the first round with 52.6 percent) and his inaugural in July, the formal implementation of the eighteen amendments turned the de facto presidential rule into an enlarged, de jure one. With the post of prime minister and the twenty-six-member cabinet under him in the previous system abolished, Erdoğan restructured the cabinet by presidential decrees, appointed a vice president, and established sixteen ministers who report only to him. As the top bureaucratic post of undersecretary was eliminated in all ministries, two or three deputy ministers helped with the task of implementing presidential directives. In addition, sixty-five existing boards, committees, and commissions were merged into nine presidential policy boards on science, technology and innovation, education, economy, security and foreign policy, law, arts and culture, health care, and local administration and social policies. They all have a vice chair and two other members and report directly to Erdoğan. The new Finance, Human Resources, Technology and Investment Offices within the presidency also wield considerable influence in the coordination and implementation of Erdoğan's policies. At the same time, the restructuring of the key institutions of National Intelligence, Defense Industries Directorate, High Command of the Armed Forces, and the National Security Council under full presidential control have also strengthened Erdoğan's authority in security matters, giving unprecedented powers to the president and establishing one-man rule.

Judicial Branch

Since the 1924 constitution, the judiciary has been organized as an independent branch of government. The 1961 constitution established the Constitutional Court to oversee laws and resolutions of the GNA. The Supreme Administrative Court acts as the highest court on administrative, civil, commercial, and criminal matters in Turkey. The head of the Supreme Administrative Court is also considered the chief prosecutor in the country. Judges and public prosecutors are under the control of the Higher Board of Judges and Prosecutors, a five-member body of the higher-court judges.

Politically, particularly within the context of the 1982 constitution, the eleven-member Constitutional Court has had the power to shut down political parties for violating the principles of the constitution. Violating the principles of secularism in the constitution or threatening the “territorial integrity and national unity,” in the case of pro-Kurdish parties, have been sufficient reasons. Party closures have drawn criticism both inside and outside of Turkey and clearly disrupted the political process. Most parties have simply regrouped and reorganized the same constituencies, albeit with a different name and party symbol. One of the September 12, 2010, constitutional amendments finally made it much more difficult for the courts to shut down political parties, requiring a majority consensus of parties in parliament. Legislators from banned parties would be able to keep their seats and re-form under a new name after three years.

Another odd legacy of the 1982 constitution was the state security courts (DGMs in Turkish) that were designed to try cases involving crimes against the security of the state and organized crime. The three-judge panel included a military judge, which raised eyebrows particularly in the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), a body that has handed down severe penalties on Turkey for human rights violations. In 1999, the military judge was removed, and in 2005, DGMs were closed, replaced by “special Heavy Penal Courts.”

Though civilian, these courts enjoyed special prosecuting powers and played a crucial role in the arrest of many political and military figures accused of crimes against the state and the government. Under heavy criticisms of lengthy arrest periods, scanty evidence, and legal and procedural mishaps, the government passed a legal reform act in 2012, shutting down these special courts after their existing cases are completed. But the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors was now in a position to bestow on any court it sees fit “prosecuting powers” in accordance with terrorism law in the country. So the principle of courts with special prosecuting powers has remained, though the existing special courts have been shut down.

The most important change in the judicial branch of the government came with the 2010 constitutional amendments. These amendments expanded the Constitutional Court by six, to seventeen members, and expanded the powerful Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors to twenty-one members from the current seven. The president and parliament—both controlled by the AKP—received a significantly increased role in appointing members in judicial bodies, which raised serious questions over judicial independence.

Concerns over judicial neutrality heightened as the dispute between the Gülen movement and AKP government took a legal turn. Accusing the Gülen movement of forming a parallel state within the state in concert with police, prosecutors, and judges in the aftermath of the December 2013 corruption scandals, the AKP launched a counterattack, removing prosecutors and judges associated with Gülen. The purge drew out a series of revelations—relying on fabricated evidence, lack of due process, unwarranted arrests, jail sentences, and appeals, only to be followed by reversals, retrials, and acquittals—raising the level of mistrust in the legal system. Replicating the same Gülenist strategies of political packing, the judges and prosecutors accused of being Gülen supporters began to be systematically replaced by AKP loyalists, a process that escalated after July 2016, eliminating any semblance of judicial independence.

Another blow to an independent judicial system came with the transition to the executive presidency in which the president can directly appoint four of the thirteen members of the Council of Judges and Prosecutors (HSK; previously named as Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors [HSYK]), the highest body responsible for appointing judges and prosecutors (the other seven are appointed by the parliament, also controlled by AKP). Finally, the justice minister and his undersecretary, themselves already appointed by the president, are automatic members. This new institutional design thus puts HSK directly and indirectly under the control of Erdoğan and the AKP.

Last but not least, with executive presidency the power of the Constitutional Court is also likely to get curtailed. The Court already adopted a “hands-off” approach, declaring that all of the emergency decrees in the post-2016 coup period are outside the jurisdiction of the court. This signalled that the court is unlikely to serve as an effective check on the presidential system, especially during an emergency rule, which can be called by the president for a maximum of six months.

Contested Role of the Military⁴²

One of the most striking features of Turkey's political system has been the persistent and powerful role of the military, particularly after the 1960 coup. The Turkish army draws its legitimacy and power from the war for national independence, which led to the foundation of the republic in 1923.

The Turkish military did not indefinitely retain power after its interventions in government. Instead, it voluntarily returned power to civilians after short periods of time. During its interventions, the military also managed to maintain some degree of legitimacy. It intervened only during moments of genuine political anarchy and economic collapse, thus convincing the public that it was defending the general interests of the nation. On all three occasions, the public trust in civilian governments had waned considerably, and the GNA was unable to resolve political crises prior to the coups. This also explains why the military used to be the most trusted institution in the country.

On the negative side, the military regimes of 1970 to 1973 and 1980 to 1983 were responsible for serious human rights violations. The power of the military was also greatly expanded in these periods. As Samuel Valenzuela explains, such powers included "broad oversight of the government and its policy decisions while claiming to represent vaguely formulated fundamental and enduring interests of the nation-state."⁴³ Among the most visible institutions established with the 1961 constitution, and expanded by the 1982 constitution, was the National Security Council (NSC), placing the prime minister and the chief of the general staff under the leadership of the president of the republic. In line with the harmonization with European requirements, the powers of the NSC were significantly curbed in 2003.

The September 12, 2010, constitutional amendments empowered the civilian courts to prosecute and try military personnel. This

widened the scope and rank of arrests culminating in legal charges against the architects of the 1980 coup. Armed with a newly politicized judiciary, the antimilitary and anti-Kemalist coalition between the Gülen movement and the AKP could now target the upper echelons of the army, charging them with the conspiracy to overthrow the government. The ensuing arrests of military personnel allowed the Gülenist to staff those positions with their own supporters. For some, these were successful signs of demilitarization. For others, this was a deliberate, political move to clean the “secular elements” within the army.

The status of the military in Turkey dramatically changed in the aftermath of the 2016 coup attempt. Convinced that the Gülenists who had infiltrated the army were behind the coup and feeling “deceived” by their Islamist brothers, Erdoğan and the AKP launched a major purge, dismissing and arresting more than half of the generals and high-level military personnel, closing all the military academies, reorganizing military hospitals, and placing the chief of the army firmly under the government’s control. Though the political role of the military was effectively ended, the fact that a particular faction within the army could break the chain of command, fire upon civilians, and bomb major buildings (including the parliament building) all taking place while the commander in chief was detained in secret dealt a serious blow to the credibility of the military. What exactly happened on the night of the coup still remains a mystery along with questions on whether there are still Gülenists within the army.

Even with this breakdown of institutional structure and the major overhaul, the Turkish army (NATO’s second largest) continues to play an important role in the country’s international entanglements. With the escalation of the Kurdish conflict and humanitarian and military operations across the borders—exacerbated by the instability and uncertainty in Iraq and Syria—this role is here to stay.

Actors, Opinion, and Political Participation

Despite these periodic interruptions of military coups and the seemingly patronage-based, clientelistic party system in the country, political participation in Turkey has been vibrant. Until the recent democratic breakdown, various actors, from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to political parties, had continuously expanded opportunities to influence and actively shape policymaking.⁴⁴

Elections and Voting Behavior

Turkey has had seventeen multiparty national elections since 1945. Those in 1946, 1961, and 1983 took place under extraordinary circumstances, as they were the elections of democratic transition. The first multiparty election of 1946 took place under unfair electoral rules and has been the only election, until 2017, showing widespread electoral fraud. Elections in Turkey have been under the legal supervision of the Higher Electoral Board since 1950.

Turkey's electoral laws changed significantly over the years. From 1945 to 1960, a majoritarian, multimember district electoral system created landslide victories for the DP, producing single-party governments after the 1950, 1954, and 1957 elections. After years of persistent majoritarian authoritarianism, the electoral system was changed to allow proportional representation, specifically in multimember districts. After 1961, more minor, radical, and fringe parties could elect their representatives to parliament. The 1980 coup brought this parliamentary pluralism to an abrupt end.

The 1983 elections, this time concerned with political instability and fragmentation, introduced a national threshold requiring a minimum of 10 percent of the popular vote to achieve parliamentary representation. Voting also became mandatory, even though the participation ratio in elections had been systematically high—lowest in the 1969 elections at 64 percent and highest in the 1987 elections at 93 percent.

One of the most striking features of Turkey's political system has been the increasing volatility of electoral behavior, particularly in the 1990s,⁴⁵ suggesting that party identification is no longer a strong determinant for voting behavior. Instead, as shown in Yilmaz Esmer's study of the 1995 and 1999 elections, ideological self-placement in the left-right spectrum emerged as the primary predictor of voting.⁴⁶ Among the social cleavages, religiosity and ethnicity have the highest correlation with party preferences.⁴⁷

Although some pocketbook voting exists, confessional affiliations play a significantly larger role in determining and shaping political behavior.

Turkish voters have usually placed themselves on the Right.⁴⁸ The DP in the 1950s and its replacement, the Justice Party, have been hugely popular among the electorate. The strongest showing for the center-left parties emerged in 1977 with a little more than 40 percent, but even then the center-right parties enjoyed a 60 percent presence.⁴⁹

The ideological polarizations also became evident as voter profiles for the parties became sharply divided. Staunch secularists have systematically supported the CHP. The pro-Kurdish parties have enjoyed considerable support, particularly in the Southeast. The Kurdish parties have not, however, performed all that well outside the Southeast, probably owing to strategic voting and the less pressing nature of identity issues outside the region. In fact, most electoral studies have found that the voters in the Southeast diverge significantly from the national political preferences.⁵⁰ The Nationalist Action Party (MHP) has consistently drawn voters among the Turkish nationalists who have adopted a hard-line strategy toward the Kurdish issue. Finally, those who identify themselves as Sunni Muslims and have high levels of religiosity have systematically voted for a variety of center-right parties and pro-Islamist parties, including today's AKP.

The 2016 failed coup remarkably changed the electoral landscape. Armed with emergency rule powers, the AKP started using its power to systematically silence opposing political parties, especially the pro-Kurdish politicians. After lifting the immunity of the MPs, the AKP initiated a wave of political arrests, curtailing and often criminalizing regular party activities. Both the April 2017 referendum and the June 2018 presidential and national elections took place under emergency rule, giving the AKP an unprecedented incumbent advantage. The AKP's growing control over the media, including the highly politicised National Public Television (TRT), also meant that the election

campaigns were taking place under highly asymmetric conditions. Erdoğan was given 181 hours of coverage during the campaign by the state broadcaster TRT, while Muharrem İnce, CHP's candidate, was accorded fifteen hours. Demirtaş's campaign, coordinated from his jail cell, was given just thirty-two minutes.

Worse yet, there was growing evidence of electoral fraud, dating back to the 2017 referendum when the Higher Election Council, seen as above politics until then, changed the rules of validating ballots—unstamped votes would also be accepted as valid. An estimated 1.5 million to 2.5 million unstamped ballots were counted as valid votes, enough to change the results of the referendum. In the June 2018 elections, the decision to count the unstamped ballots as valid was left to the chairs of some 180,000 Ballot Box Committees who are all civil servants. But since civil servants, unlike their European counterparts, are also highly politicized in Turkey, this raised serious concerns about the safety and neutrality of voting and vote counting. Many irregularities were indeed reported, especially in the southeast pro-Kurdish party provinces. Despite record-breaking 87 percent electoral participation in the country, the legitimacy of electoral results from the last two electoral cycles were called into question. Ironically, after losing in two major cities (Ankara and Istanbul) in local elections in March 2019, it was the AKP that cried foul play and forced the Higher Election Council to schedule a new election for the Istanbul mayor in June.

Political Parties and Party Systems

The early years of the republic were based on the single-party rule of the CHP. The legacy of Atatürk and İsmet İnönü, the second president and the longtime leader of the party, sealed an image of the CHP as a state party. After the transition to a multiparty system, Turkey experienced a typical two-party system. For years, the main parties were the CHP and the DP. After the 1960 coup, the army banned the DP from the political scene for violating the constitution. The unnatural death of the DP and its leadership led to intense competition among parties seeking to claim the DP legacy.⁵¹ In the 1965 and 1969 elections, Süleyman Demirel was able to establish the Justice Party (AP) as the DP's legitimate heir, and the party won comfortable majorities in parliament. The elections in the 1970s again produced fragmented parliaments. The two leading parties, the Justice Party and the CHP, found parliamentary competition in the National Salvation Party (MSP) and the Nationalist Action Party (MHP), two highly ideological parties, leading most political analysts to characterize the 1970s as a time of extreme and polarized multipartism.⁵²

The ensuing turmoil helped legitimize the military coup of 1980, which closed down all political parties without exception. Furthermore, the military imposed a ten-year ban on party leaders and five-year bans on incumbents of the central party institutions. The 1983 election was a transitional election in which only three new parties were allowed to enter: the Nationalist Democracy Party (MDP), the Populist Party (HP), and the Motherland Party (ANAP). The ANAP received an absolute majority in parliament and went on to win the 1987 elections as well. From 1983 to 1991, Turkey was politically stable, led by a single-party government, the ANAP.

To the dismay of the military, the political ban on the pre-1980 political leaders was lifted after a 1986 referendum, which led to the emergence of new parties under old leadership. So by 1991, political fragmentation and polarization in the party system had made a

comeback. The Kurdish parties and the Islamist parties during this period faced continuous constitutional bans, only to follow suit and regroup under different names. Following each of the AKP's five electoral victories, with the exception of the June 2015 to November 2015 period, the AKP garnered enough seats to remain in power as a single-party government. As such, the 2002 through 2018 period can be characterized as a single-dominant party system in which AKP enjoyed and exercised significant incumbent power. The only novelty has been the ability of the HDP to enter into the parliament, passing the national threshold in 2015 and 2018.

There are three main reasons why the Turkish party system has proved so volatile. One is the legacy of the military coups, rupturing the entire political process, and the decisions of the empowered Constitutional Court to close down several political parties. Second, until recently the political parties lacked the voters' trust because of their reputation as centers of patronage and clientelism and their inability to address economic and social difficulties.⁵³ Third and perhaps most important, as Ergun Özbudun points out, is the failure of political parties to develop links with civil society groups or nongovernmental institutions, although the AKP and HDP parties may be exceptions.

Overall, party membership remains very low and is often associated with being a mere party supporter. Local-party organizations often only become alive prior to elections and do not get involved in day-to-day political activities and indoctrination. However, the AKP, since its rise to power, has developed a powerful party machinery at the local level. Nevertheless, internal party pluralism remains considerably low, a phenomenon common to most parties in Turkey.

Finally, although AKP is a splinter party from the pro-Islamist Welfare Party before coming to power in 2002, it is an exception to the rule, as forming a splinter party and developing a bottom-up party organization remain a major challenge. The most recent example is the formation of İyi Party (Good Party) in 2017 which was led by Meral Akşener, a former MHP MP who disagreed with MHP

leadership in its support of presidentialism and Erdoğan. However, neither Aksener's presidential bid in 2018 nor the national election results turned out as expected despite the temporary alliance called *Millet İttifakı* (Nation Alliance) the party struck with CHP to overcome the 10 percent national threshold.

Civil Society Groups, NGOs, Social Movements, and Gezi Park Protests

Until the 1970s, Turkey's associational life could largely be seen as corporatist rather than pluralist, centering on major business associations and chambers and much less on powerful unions. The 1980 military coup severely dampened prospects of a pluralist associationalism. The 1980s witnessed a diversification and expansion of noneconomic-interest groups, which had increased their voice, only to be severely silenced since 2013.

Business Groups

Business interests at first were represented by the Turkish Union of Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Maritime Trade and Commodity Exchanges (TOBB), which held a monopoly over the certification of every enterprise and could represent all businesses, big and small. Unhappy with the TOBB's representation, the Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen Association (TUSIAD) was founded in 1971 to represent a group of large, select businesses, including a significant segment of the manufacturing industry. TUSIAD's initial aim, along with the Turkish Confederation of Employer Associations (TISK), was to create a united front against the growing power of labor unions in the 1970s.

These associations tried to influence policymakers through press conferences and research reports, particularly on democratization and political and economic conditions in the country. TUSIAD usually avoided confrontation with the government. The only exception was its all-out campaign against Ecevit's government of 1979, which is largely believed to have contributed to the government's fall. Relations between the current AKP government and TUSIAD are also lukewarm, as TUSIAD has been outspokenly critical of some of the AKP's policies.

A newer group, the Independent Industrialists and Businessmen Association (MUSIAD), is closer to the AKP. Some have called MUSIAD the rising "Islamist bourgeoisie," representing small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and Anatolian small-town entrepreneurs with some connections to Islamic capital abroad.⁵⁴ In addition, the Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists (TUSKON) was established in 2005 and is organized in all eighty-one provinces in the country. TUSKON, often associated with the Gülen movement, was initially close to the AKP government and represents a parallel or alternative organization to TUSIAD. Relations have soured since the fallout between Gülenists and the AKP, and TUSKON has been shut down, as pro-Gülen businessmen

who had initially accumulated significant wealth under AKP government faced a reversal of fortunes. Their assets were confiscated and placed under government-appointed trustees. With democratic backsliding in the country, the business associations have also become increasingly weary of openly criticizing the government's economic policies.

Unions

Unions have always been weak in Turkey, both organizationally and politically. Strikes, lockouts, and collective bargaining only became legal in the liberal atmosphere of the 1960s. The 1960 to 1977 period can be seen as the apex of union activity in the country, although demonstrations on May 1, 1977, led to chaos and many deaths, ending the period on a bleak note. At the height of unionization in 1979, membership reached not quite 27 percent of workers, well below counterparts in Europe. The union membership ratio has since hovered around an estimated 10 percent of the working population. One explanation is a lesser degree of large-scale industrialization in Turkey. There are also serious limitations to union activities, such as strict restrictions on any form of political activism. Unions do not have the right to organize in workplaces with fewer than fifty workers, and they are also strictly under state tutelage.

There are three major trade union confederations in the country. First is the Confederation of Trade Unions of Turkey (TÜRK-İŞ). Founded in 1952, TÜRK-İŞ is seen as a cooperative umbrella confederation, focusing on wage issues rather than political concerns. The Confederation of Revolutionary Trade Unions (DİSK), formed in 1967 because of dissatisfaction with TÜRK-İŞ, has been more radical and politically active. DİSK was banned in the aftermath of the 1980 coup, and its leadership was arrested, only to regroup and reorganize in 1986. The Confederation of Real Trade Unions (HAK-İŞ) was established in 1976 and became quite active in the 1980s. The union has claimed Islamic brotherhood as the basis of its organization rather than conflict-ridden unionism. Not surprisingly, HAK-İŞ has been politically close to the AKP. Finally, the Confederation of Public Servants (KESK) became quite active and vocal in the 1990s.

After the 1980 coup, unions were saddled with additional limitations and supervision of their activities; for example, strikes were outlawed

in some “crucial” sectors. More important has been the liberalization of the economy since the 1980s, which accelerated the search for cheap, nonunionized workers, leading to a subcontracting boom and informal employment that have challenged the unions.

The new labor law passed under the AKP in 2003 introduced short-term contracts, established temporary employment agencies, and significantly curtailed the collective rights of workers. This was designed to create more flexible labor markets. Under the emergency rule after the post-2016 coup attempt, most strikes were indefinitely postponed or banned in the name of national priorities.

Other Social Movements: Islamism, Feminism, and the Alevi

Turkey's history of social movements is quite short and fragmented. Still, Islamism can be considered one of the oldest social movements in the country. There have been countless Islamic revolts against the central authority during both the Ottoman and the Republican periods. But it is after the 1980s that Islamism became much more widespread and organized, beginning to influence the political process. What started as slow, libertarian-right claims of women university students to wear headscarves have gradually progressed with increasing numbers of *imam hatip* (religious) schools in the 1980s, as well as a proliferation of religious presses, publications, and TV channels. Establishment of nonalcoholic cafés, a rise in Qur'an courses, and increased success in pro-Islamist local governments as well as a rise in Islamist charities all point to the success of the Islamist movements. These Islamist movements were crucial in the eventual political success of both the Welfare Party and the current AKP.⁵⁵

Similar trends are visible in Turkey's feminist movement. The early Turkish feminist movement, called Kemalist feminism, in the 1930s tied the prospects for women's empowerment to secularization and modernization. Before organizing as autonomous "new" social movements in the 1980s, women were very active among leftist organizations, coupling women's issues to those of socialism and anti-imperialism. But it was in the rather depoliticized atmosphere of the post-1980 coup that a diverse set of feminist groups and associations began to flourish, ranging from Kemalist feminists to liberal feminists to Marxist feminists to Islamist feminists. While the liberal and Islamist feminists have cooperated in protesting the ban on the headscarf, significant disagreement and very little communication between these groups exist, so much so that they have their separate journals and run different seminars and conference series. Though some significant progress has been

made in women's rights, the rise in reported domestic violence, violence against women, sexual harassment, and rape cases suggests that patriarchal norms still remain.

Also forming among the new social movements in Turkey are the Alevi. A religious sect, the Alevi are a community whose beliefs combine elements of Shi'i Islam and pre-Islamic folk customs and who constitute 15 percent to 16 percent of the population in Turkey. Historically, Alevi—both Kurds and Turks—have embraced the secular ideology, particularly during periods of the rising influence of Sunni Islam, but they have mostly kept a low profile publicly until the 1980s. After the military coup of the 1980s, however—partly as a response to the military's implementation of a Turco-Islamist policy as a way to address the left-right political cleavages of the earlier decade, partly as resistance to the military's rather assimilationist approach toward the Alevi community (building mosques in Alevi villages, for instance)—the Alevi movement and identity became much more visible. Just like the Islamists, Alevi began forming their cultural and religious foundations and associations (e.g., Cem Vakfi) and setting up journals and TV stations. This Alevi revivalism has never managed to translate into political success, as Alevi-based political parties were either closed down or did not succeed at the ballot box. Nevertheless, since the Alevi movement has its origins in the leftist movement in the country, and largely because of its commitment to secularism, Alevi have predominantly voted for the People's Republican Party (CHP), and though never pronounced, CHP's leader since 2010, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, is an Alevi and a Kurd.⁵⁶

Gezi Park Protests and the Decline of Civil Society

The Gezi Park Protests started on May 27, 2013, as a peaceful sit-in by less than one hundred environmental activists contesting the demolition of Gezi Park near Istanbul's Taksim Square and its conversion into a complex of shopping malls and residences. The protest spread nationwide in a matter of days, mainly with the outrage triggered by police violence. Contestations over the Taksim Square and Gezi Park lasted more than a month and managed to bring together a variety of voices of discontent, ranging from the simple demand for more parks and inclusive public spaces to resistance against residential gentrification, commercial upscaling, and violent urban transformation. But the movement was also significant as it was the first large-scale political protest against the government under the AKP rule. Turkish government and its policies, as well as the prime minister's authoritarian style, particularly interventions into the lifestyle of the citizens (alcohol, abortion, etc.), became the major themes of the protests. The disproportionate use of police violence, tear gas, and cannons, which led to ten deaths and left many wounded, and the dismissal of protestors as looters and losers and marauders (known as *çapulcu*, from which the protestors coined the term *chapulling* meaning "fighting for rights") by the government, widespread arrest of the protestors, and severe media censorship and disinformation during the protests raised serious concerns about the country's freedom of political participation and expression. Mass arrests of protestors with charges of overthrowing the government and prolonged trials in their aftermath also raised questions about judicial independence. But the Gezi Park Protests were still significant, as they were the first public unrest of this magnitude under the AKP rule, bringing together widely different political/apolitical, organized/unorganized, and young/old participants.

Although most of the legal charges against Gezi participants were dropped in the aftermath of the protests, the 2016 coup attempt and

the subsequent emergency rule have again criminalized Gezi Park protestors, labeling them as either Gülenists or collaborators with international forces, aiming to overthrow the government. In fact, criticism of Gezi Park Protests became a signal for widening the scope of criminalization in the country, where President Erdoğan and the AKP, in effect, equated journalists, academics, and pro-Kurdish groups (and anyone highly critical of the government's policies) as potential terrorists engaged in act of treason. Public protests and marches are regularly banned. The changes to the criminal law in 2018 vastly broaden the definition of *terrorism* and *antistate activities* and gave the governors vast powers, which in effect meant the emergency rule that was adopted as "a state of exception" has now become normalized and legalized and remains instrumental in this regard. The ease with which one can become criminalized (even for sending antigovernment or anti-Erdoğan tweets) also raises grave concerns over freedom of speech, human rights, and due process in Turkey.

Media

Media ownership remains concentrated in the hands of a few large, private holding companies that earn the majority of their revenue from nonmedia assets. These were Doğan Media Group, which used to own widely circulating mainstream newspapers and TV channels, Doğuş Media Group, Turkuvaz Media Group of Çalık Holding, Çukurova Media Group of Çukurova Holding (taken over in 2013), and Ciner Media Group. Because of dominant business interests of these media groups, governments have found various ways to pressure and control the media conglomerates. During AKP's rule, however, the centralization of public procurement decisions within the prime minister's office has led to increasing use of economic leverage against these holding companies to force them to toe the party line. The prime minister's office directly controls the Privatization High Council (OİB), the Housing Development Administration (TOKİ), and the Defense Industry Executive Committee, which together account for tens of billions of dollars in procurement contracts per year. Wiretap recordings leaked in December 2013, for instance, indicated that the government dictated which holding companies would purchase the Sabah-ATV media group in exchange for a multibillion-dollar contract to build Istanbul's third airport. The Savings Deposit and Insurance Fund (TMSF) has also been used to transfer media assets to supportive businessmen, as in November 2013 when Ethem Sancak, a Turkish businessman with close ties to Erdoğan, bought three media outlets previously owned by the Çukurova Group from TMSF. The most blatant takeover, however, occurred in 2018 when the pro-AKP Demirören Group bought the entire Doğan Media Group, the largest mainstream media conglomerate in the country, with credits extended by a major public bank, in effect allowing the AKP to monopolize almost all of the media outlets.

According to Freedom House, media freedom in Turkey has deteriorated since 2010, rising from fifty-four in 2010 to sixty-five in 2014 (with 100 as the worst) and shifting from *partially free* to *not*

free in 2013.⁵⁷ Since then, hundreds of journalists have lost their jobs, most jailed on either charges of terrorism or charges of “insulting the president,” a crime under the Turkish Penal Code (TCK), Article 299. Currently, about eighty thousand websites in Turkey are blocked. Twitter, YouTube, and Wikileaks bans are common. In sum, as Freedom House reports indicate, intimidation, mass firings, bans, buying off or forcing out media moguls, wiretapping, and imprisonment have been widely used again in silencing the media in the country.⁵⁸

Turkey's Political Economy

In broadest terms, Turkey's economic transformation can be divided into five periods: etatism (1930–1950); rural modernization (1950–1959); the import substitution industrialization (ISI) regime (1960–1979); liberalization (1980–2013); and a shift toward patrimonial economy under the AKP (2013–present). Over these periods, Turkey transformed from a rural, agrarian economy to a largely urban economy, with significant increases in per capita income, life expectancy, and adult literacy.⁵⁹ Although it does not have petroleum to offer the world, its dynamic export sector and its customs union with the EU have integrated it into the global markets in terms of trade, production, and finance. Yet regional inequality, a fragile, highly-indebted economy, and a ranking on the Human Development Index well below countries with a similar per capita income result in a report card on Turkey's political economy that is mixed at best.

Etatism

Turkey's nation-building project, coupled with top-down modernization efforts in the 1930–1950 period, meant that bureaucratization and state-building occurred long before private-sector development and that the private sector remained largely “state dependent.”⁶⁰ The early years of the republic focused on jump-starting the economy, with particular emphasis on agricultural recovery in war-ravaged Anatolia. In 1923, Turkey had an agrarian economy with very rudimentary industries and abundant, uncultivated land.

Rapid economic growth and recovery were important; they would legitimize the new republican project and help pay the Ottoman debt, extensively negotiated in the 1923 Lausanne Peace Conference and the Paris Conference of 1925. The large population exchange agreement between Greece and Turkey did not help the situation: 1.2 million Greeks left Anatolia, and 500,000 Muslims came from Greece and the Balkans to settle in Turkey. Losing a quarter of its population, including much of the merchant class, decreased Turkey's agricultural production by 50 percent and the GDP by 40 percent.⁶¹ The absence of a Turkish bourgeoisie to replace this merchant class meant economic recovery would require heavy state involvement.

The period from 1923 to 1929 was a market-friendly interval of successful economic recovery. Yet Turkey's economy was badly hit by the Great Depression in the 1930s, and demand for Turkey's agricultural exports dropped dramatically.⁶² Purchasing power also dropped significantly. In parallel with the trends in the developing world and largely as a response to the Great Depression, Turkey entered a period of etatism. During this time, a combination of strict import controls, a protectionist trade regime, and balance of payment controls were put in place. Public investment also shifted toward industry, education, and agriculture. State monopolies emerged in alcohol, sugar, tobacco, oil, and explosives. Despite its neutrality

throughout World War II, Turkey maintained a fully mobilized army during the war years, which proved costly and led the CHP government to adopt draconian measures to cope with wartime economic crises.

Rural Modernization

Transition to a multiparty system in 1950 and the DP's rise to power was, in part, a response to the deterioration of the living standards of the peasantry. Thanks to the DP's influence, the redistribution of some state-owned land to landless peasants and the Marshall Plan following World War II nearly doubled agricultural production from 1947 to 1953.

But extensive state intervention in the economy through infrastructure investments and the expansion of state economic enterprises (SEEs) remained unchanged. The DP's economic liberalism proved short lived. As agriculture prices collapsed, the huge price support program of the government triggered unsustainable inflation. Uncontrolled expansion and fiscal indiscipline made adjustment inevitable and highlighted the limits of state-financed agrarian development. Then, in 1958, Turkey faced its first currency crisis and encounter with the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Import Substitution Industrialization Regime

The abrupt and dramatic end to the DP's populism came through the 1960 military coup and not the IMF programs, marking the bureaucratic elite's return with a vengeance. A new governing coalition comprising the military, the bureaucracy, and the increasingly powerful urban-middle class took over. On the economic front, the 1960 to 1979 period witnessed the return of full-fledged etatism. State-sponsored ISI, domestic-market-oriented production, and protectionism marked a significant, albeit slow, transformation of Turkey's economy from strictly agrarian to increasingly preindustrial. Urbanization and rapid industrialization (industry grew annually around 9 percent throughout the 1960s) managed to meet domestic demands, although the common problems associated with ISI policies—entrenched business interests reluctant to shift to exports, problems of overvalued currencies, technology issues, and ultimately the foreign exchange crises—impeded the country's road to large-scale industrialism.

Turkey's Liberalization Experiment: What Went Wrong?

The authoritarian military regime from 1980 to 1983 reflects the aftermath of ISI exhaustion—that is, fiscal crisis and scarcity of foreign exchange. The government, with an economic team led by Turgut Özal (the deputy prime minister who, following the ANAP victory in 1983, became the country's prime minister and president), began implementing a typical IMF package, agreed upon in early 1980.⁶³ Elimination of price controls (including controls over interest rates), foreign exchange rate reforms, liberalization of trade and foreign direct investment (FDI), and the privatization of the SEEs were the main elements of this stabilization program. It was argued that etatism was finally dead.⁶⁴

Despite periodic setbacks, the transformation of the Turkish economy from an ISI-based development model to an open, liberal economy has been remarkable. What had started during the Özal years as a major adjustment program continued throughout the major coalition governments of the 1990s. For better or worse, the Turkish adjustment has accomplished a major reorientation of the economy. The financial markets were opened internationally and developed in depth. The Turkish lira became convertible in 1989, and a new wave of trade liberalization also occurred, particularly in the aftermath of Turkey's entry into the customs union with the EU in 1996.

However, Turkish economic liberalization in the 1980s was unorthodox in many ways.⁶⁵ While there was considerable liberalization in foreign economic policy, Özal's agenda was also accompanied by the expansion and concentration of the state's economic power.⁶⁶ It is, therefore, not surprising that the fate of economic reforms was very much linked to who was in power. Patronage played an extensive role in disbursement provision and financial support.⁶⁷ Center-right coalitions of the Özal governments

after 1987, as well as Demirel's and later Tansu Çiller's coalitions with the Social Democrats, focused mainly on their constituencies. With side payments and inconsistent economic policies, it makes sense that, in the 1996 World Bank report on privatization, Turkey was among the worst three performers among privatizing countries. Between 1987 and 1997, total revenue from privatization did not exceed \$3 billion.⁶⁸

Turkey's problems with economic reform are first associated with the nature of state-society relations in Turkey and the absence of what Evans has called "embedded autonomy of the state."⁶⁹ The absence of institutionalized channels of information and negotiation between state and society (embeddedness), along with a certain degree of insulation of state bureaucracy (autonomy) to provide for policy coherence, led to continuous policy oscillations and inconsistencies throughout the 1990s. At times, the Turkish state suffered from too much rent-seeking, falling prey to interest groups, and incumbents' electoral desires. At other times, it was the vast autonomy of the Turkish state, or the lack of "embeddedness," that proved problematic.⁷⁰

Second, and perhaps more importantly, populist pressures rose from the nature of distributional conflicts. Turkish liberalization created a number of losers. The agricultural sector, the urban workers, and the industrialists familiar with the import substitution policies were among those opposing the liberalization agenda. Various governments since the late 1980s and 1990s have tried to mediate these conflicts by distributing state rents to their respective constituencies. Regardless of what may have caused these populist strategies and the distribution of state rent by the political elite, increased state spending and growing public deficits had fully returned by the second half of the 1980s. Payoffs to constituents, particularly to the rural sector, and the financing of SEE deficits resulted in a relaxation of austerity measures and spiraling inflation, creating macroeconomic instabilities. The expected benefits of liberalization—increased capital flows, FDI, and exports—failed to materialize. That is why the 1990s are often described as the lost decade in

terms of unstable coalition governments and boom-bust cycles. Investor confidence declined, launching a well-known vicious cycle of rising interest rates and spiraling public debt. This only undermined macroeconomic stability, leading to further loss of confidence, higher deficits, and higher interest rates.

The 2000–2001 Financial Crisis and AKP Period

Unable to cope with its skyrocketing domestic and international debt, the fragile coalition government led by Bülent Ecevit requested an IMF loan and signed a Stand-By Arrangement (SBA). This 1999 to 2002 IMF SBA was the seventeenth of its kind in the history of the republic and envisioned severe belt-tightening measures, fiscal discipline, and an ill-fated pegged currency system that fixed the value of the Turkish lira vis-à-vis the dollar. The inability of the government to implement the bitter pill of structural reform, the false consumption boom that emerged with the pegged currency system, and the crisis in the Turkish banking system that failed to adjust to the low-interest environment ushered in the worst economic crisis in the republic's history.

With a 9 percent decline in GDP and more than one million jobs lost, it was no surprise that the political parties of the coalition were literally wiped out of the political scene in the 2002 elections. The AKP government came to power with the promise of economic stability. Fully implementing the IMF program, the AKP indeed brought down inflation to single digits, lowered the interest rates, and managed to achieve an average annual GDP growth of 6 percent during the 2002 to 2007 period before the global crisis hit the Turkish economy.

The most remarkable change occurred in external economic ties and the rising FDI, though mostly through the sales of SEEs and banks whose asset values more than halved after the 2000 and 2001 financial crisis, as well as in increases in international trade. More importantly, the government was able to implement some of the fundamental structural reforms envisioned in the IMF and the World Bank programs, such as elimination of product subsidies in the agricultural sector, closure or downsizing of the agricultural sales cooperatives, and liberalization of agricultural trade, which together ushered in an unprecedented and rapid decline in rural employment. The government also reformed the tax system to increase

compliance and passed a social security reform package under guidelines provided by the World Bank.

The shortcomings of this rapid transition were the persistently high unemployment numbers, the rapid pace of debt accumulation that makes the country extremely fragile in periods of financial uncertainty, and the softening of fiscal discipline because of the global economic crisis as well as the election cycles in the country. Though the current account deficits are still a problem in the economy, Turkey weathered the 2008 to 2009 global financial crisis surprisingly well, with real GDP growth of 9.2 percent and 8.5 percent in 2010 and 2011. However, rising private debt, which reached 60 percent of the country's GDP; extreme reliance on external financial flows, which led the analysts to call Turkey "the most" vulnerable in case of a drop in capital inflows among the "five fragile emerging markets"; and the declining GDP growth hovering around 3 percent since 2012 raised significant concerns about the country's economic outlook. Led largely by the construction boom, fueled by mega projects such as Istanbul's Erdoğan airport (world's largest), and the third Bosphorus bridge, rising consumer debt, coupled with the absence of long-term structural reforms in education and technology, have also led to debates over whether the country can avoid a "middle-income trap." As Daron Acemoglu and Murat Ucer sum up, Turkey's quality economic growth in the first half of the AKP's long tenure has been followed by an institutional slide leading to slower and low-quality growth.⁷¹ The political uncertainty, the escalating Kurdish conflict, suicide bombings, terror attacks, the Syrian conflict, and the refugee crisis followed by a dramatic coup attempt in 2016 have all led to a severe decline in tourism income and FDI, raising questions on long-term macroeconomic stability.

Toward Crony Capitalism?

The AKP has radically transformed Turkey's political economy during its seventeen years of incumbent rule. The first half of AKP rule was guided by economically liberal international pressures imposed in the aftermath of the 2000 and 2001 financial crisis. Notwithstanding the well-known social side effects of the liberal reforms, the country was receiving FDI, improving its exports, revolving its debt, and experiencing overall economic growth. With economic slowdown, the shrinking global liquidity following the 2008 world financial crisis, and the termination of ties with the IMF, the AKP began to loosen its fiscal discipline in order to generate growth. It openly started using public resources for consolidating its own political and economic power—so much so that the public procurement laws that were designed to make bids for public projects transparent were modified more than a hundred times in ways that promote pro-AKP businesses. Presumably nonpartisan licencing and regulatory boards were politicized, issuing licenses for supporters, and pro-AKP business were “encouraged” to donate to the urban poor (a major constituency of the AKP) in return for favors from the government. The AKP has also kept its urban-poor constituency by expanding social assistance and cash transfer programs, consolidating its own power both from below and above.

Clearly, Turkey's private sector has long been state-dependent, and every government has since tried to create its own supporting business elite. But the AKP has coupled this common strategy of preferential treatment by slapping opposing businesses with tax code penalties and/or regulatory harassments. With the escalation of the conflict with the Gülenists, the severe purges against pro-Gülenist businesses have pushed the AKP into this awkward position, having to eliminate the very foundations of the economic elite that it has helped flourish. The emergency rule following the 2016 coup attempt also raised serious concerns about the rule of law and due process in the country, scaring potential investors and lowering Turkey's scores by international rating agencies.

Last but not least, executive aggrandizement associated with the shift to executive presidency and concentration of enormous power in the hands of President Erdoğan also reinforced impressions of personalized, arbitrary, even sultanistic rule. The appointment of his own son-in-law, Berat Albayrak, as the new economic czar in the 2018 government, along with main ministerial appointments visibly based on absolute loyalty to the president rather than qualifications and merits, underscored the personalized nature of Erdoğan's governance. The nearly 10 percent currency plunge that Turkish lira suffered in August 2018, packaged again as a grand international conspiracy—a new economic war, as the president coined it—revealed rising concerns on the frailty of Turkey's economy. The subsequent economic downturn, liquidity shortages in the banking system, slowdown in GDP growth, and falling sales in the construction sector also underscored that the AKP's growth model based on cheap labor-based exports, the debt-financed construction sector, and consumption had come to an end. To what extent Erdoğan and the AKP can maintain their tight coalition based on pro-AKP business and the urban poor in the midst of an economic slowdown remains to be seen. The changing political economy under the AKP is clearly a testimony to the fact that liberal reforms are, in fact, quite compatible with possible authoritarian turns and can certainly disappear altogether from the agenda once the democratic breakdown occurs.

Regional and International Relations

Turkey's location has made it an important partner both regionally and internationally. Throughout the Cold War years, however, the overemphasis on the geostrategic importance of the country impeded a multidimensional foreign policy. After the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, as well as with the opening up of the former Soviet bloc countries, relative progress in the EU membership, and recent stronger ties with the Middle East and Africa, Turkey has clearly started to adopt a more multiregional foreign policy.

Turkey-EU Relations: A Tumultuous Partnership from the Ankara Agreement of 1963 to Accession

Turkey's prospects for converging with the EU will depend on the domestic political, economic, and social reforms the country is able to undertake. Turkey-EU ties have been problematic from the start. On the one hand, state-society interaction in EU-member states limits the EU's capacity to undertake commitments or impose sanctions with a view to anchor Turkey's convergence toward European standards. On the other hand, the type of state-society interaction in Turkey induces Turkish policymakers to engage in frequent deviations from the policy reform required for convergence. Thus, the EU's failure to act as an effective anchor increases the probability of policy reversals in Turkey—which, in turn, induces the EU to be even more reluctant about anchoring Turkey's convergence toward European standards.⁷²

Turkey applied for an association agreement with what was then the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1959, only a few months after Greece. Long rounds of talks led to the Ankara Agreement in 1963, making Turkey an “associate member.” In May 1967, based on the Ankara Agreement, Turkey asked to begin a transition to a customs union. But it was really with the Additional Protocol (AP) in 1970 and its aftermath that Turkey's populist tendencies became evident to the EU. The AP provided for a twenty-two-year transitional period that would end in a customs union, as specified in the association agreement. Then, the Turkish State Planning Organization began to argue that the AP was a barrier to ISI policies as well as to SEEs, which the Turkish political parties saw as crucial for dispensing state patronage to their respective constituencies.

Against this background of entrenched ISI interests, systematic demands for state patronage and particularistic privileges, and the vulnerability of the political parties to such pressures, the Turkish government first decided on the unilateral suspension of the AP in 1978 and also requested a five-year freeze of relations in 1979.

These policy reversals created serious credibility problems in terms of Turkey's commitment to the EU, scarring Turkey-EU ties in subsequent years.⁷³

The military coup in 1980 created yet another estrangement. Meanwhile, Greece gained full membership and subsequent veto power, creating yet another hurdle for Turkey. The association agreement was finally reactivated in 1986 and was followed in 1987 by Turgut Özal's application for full EU membership. The European Commission decided to defer the application, and it suggested a focus on the customs union and the association agreement. The acceptance and ratification of the customs union in 1996 was a watershed in Turkey-EU relations and became an integral part of Turkey's membership. But once again, within the context of the customs union, the typical problems of Turkish political economy held strong: circumventing institutions, lingering patronage politics, and hollowing out economics from the political and public debate. Not surprisingly, the results have been disappointing.

Relations hit rock bottom when the Luxembourg European Council in 1997 refused Turkey's candidacy while it threw the doors wide open to eastern European and central European candidates. Turkey thus broke off political dialogue with the EU. Finally, the Helsinki European Council reversed the Luxembourg decision by formally recognizing Turkey's candidacy in 1999, which meant Turkey would have to begin reform processes to meet the European criteria. After the EU Council formally accepted the Accession Partnership—essentially a road map for Turkey's accession—the Turkish government accelerated its reform processes considerably with a series of harmonization packages.

Three harmonization legal reform packages were passed in the GNA. Some of the major changes included abolishing the death penalty, easing restrictions on broadcasting and education in minority languages, short detention periods, and lifting the state of emergency in the Southeast. The AKP government passed six additional reform packages, including an overhaul of the penal code

and one that addressed human rights concerns. The AKP government's significant shift over the Cyprus issue, in which the Turkish side agreed to accept the Kofi Annan plan to reunite Cyprus as a bizonal federal republic, also eliminated a technically invisible although very much present barrier to Turkey's accession. In referendums on both sides of the island in April 2004, Turkish Cypriots accepted the Annan plan, but the Greek Cypriots rejected it.

Although the AKP government signed the AP in 2005, it refused to submit it to the GNA for ratification. In October 2005, the EU formally began accession negotiations with Turkey, but with the proviso that the Turkish GNA ratify the AP by the end of 2006. When December 2006 arrived, no progress had been made. The European Council decided to suspend some of its negotiations with Turkey.

It was clear that Turkey's path toward EU membership would be strewn with obstacles. The political victories of Nicolas Sarkozy in France and Angela Merkel in Germany, neither of whom favored Turkey's full membership, meant that there was mistrust on both sides, especially since both Sarkozy and Merkel have suggested an alternative "privileged partnership" for Turkey. Moreover, the European support for Turkey's EU membership has systematically declined in recent years.

However, the Syrian war, which triggered massive refugee inflow to Europe in 2015, began to change the mutually reluctant partnership between Turkey and the EU in 2016. Major European states have sought Turkey's cooperation in managing the crisis and persuaded Turkey not to allow passage for the refugees in return for opening some chapters on accession negotiations; they also offered \$3 billion in aid to help Turkey keep the refugees. To what extent this migration-based cooperation and coordination efforts can help revitalize Turkey's path toward Europe, however, remains to be seen.

Another major source of political tension was the 2017 referendum and shift to presidentialism that was heavily criticized by the European Council's Venice Commission, which saw it as a path

toward a personal rule with prospects of eliminating checks and balances. Both the European Council and the parliament warned that with these constitutional amendments, Turkey would no longer be able to maintain its status as a prospective member of the EU as it fails to fulfil the main Copenhagen criteria of a “functioning democracy.” To those criticisms, in highly charged political campaigns prior to the referendum vote, Erdoğan responded by calling the European leaders fascists for not allowing him and AKP ministers to appeal to the Turkish diaspora community in Europe. As such, Turkey’s likely accession into the EU largely remains an illusion.

Turkey-US Relations⁷⁴

Turkey and the United States were important strategic partners throughout the Cold War years. Turkey was a significant part of the US containment policy toward the Soviet Union and was a beneficiary of both the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan. The United States was also the major sponsor of Turkey's membership with NATO when it joined in 1952. The partnership was based on Turkey providing military bases in return for extensive military and economic aid. Toward the end of the Cold War, Turkey emerged as the largest recipient of foreign aid in the region after Israel and Egypt.

The Turkey-US relationship was tested three times throughout the Cold War: during the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 when the United States removed its missiles in Turkey, raising doubts about the US commitment; the humiliating letter that then-prime minister, İsmet İnönü, received from the US president, Lyndon B. Johnson, that in effect banned the use of US weapons in Cyprus and threatened withdrawal of support against the Soviet threat; and the US arms embargo that followed the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974.

Turkey-US relations recovered in 1980 with the signing of a defense and economic cooperation agreement in the aftermath of the fall of the shah of Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Relations between Turkey and the United States were particularly vibrant under the leadership of Turgut Özal, who envisioned a greater international role for Turkey through a closer partnership with the United States. But the end of the Cold War and the Gulf War in 1990 changed the security concerns of Turkey and changed the Turkey-US relationship in two major ways.

One change was that the source of threat shifted from the Soviet Union to issues related to Kurdish nationalism and the violence and instability in Iraq. During the first Gulf War, the Turkish government provided full support to the US military campaign with the

expectation of developing a strategic partnership and increasing its chances of entering the EU via EU support. But Turkey paid an economic and political price for this support, as it lost pipeline fees and trading opportunities in the Southeast, which many believe exacerbated Kurdish separatism and enhanced the activities of the PKK.

But the real change in the relations came with the US decision in 2003 to invade Iraq. The Turkish government had to decide how to react to the proposal, first put forward in July 2002 by the US deputy secretary of defense, Paul Wolfowitz, that in the event of war in Iraq, Turkey should allow significant numbers of US forces to enter Turkish territory to open a northern front against Iraq. The vast majority of Turkish opinion, including that of the military and the government, opposed the invasion of Iraq in principle, primarily on the grounds that it might allow Iraqi Kurds to establish an independent state, exacerbating Turkey's internal Kurdish problem.

By February 2003, Turkey's government had reluctantly decided that because the George W. Bush administration was determined to attack Iraq, Turkey would be better off inside the US tent than outside it, with the condition that Turkish troops should also be allowed to enter northern Iraq, as a counter to Kurdish militia forces. A substantial bloc of the AKP parliamentarians opposed the US plan, however, and it was defeated by three votes in the GNA. This result caused shock and anger in Washington.

Relations have since recovered, although anti-American sentiment and the fear of a US-backed independent Kurdish state still run deep among the politicians and the public. Nevertheless, in 2003 more than 70 percent of the military cargo sent to Iraq was flown through Incirlik Air Base, and some 80 percent of Turkey's arms purchases and defense industrial activity is still with the United States. Despite Turkey's growing unease with the collaboration between the United States and the YPG in Syria, which the AKP government categorically sees as a terrorist organization with ties to PKK, the two countries have started working closely, given the conflict in Syria

and the threat of ISIS. Turkey's decision to go ahead with the purchase of S400 missiles from Russian air defense system coupled with the US's refusal to extradite Gülen, whom the president holds personally responsible for orchestrating 2016 coup, continues to increase tensions.

Turkey's Regional Role: From "Soft Power" Balancer to Conflictual Entanglements? Syria and Beyond

Since the 1990s, Turkey's foreign policy has clearly become multidimensional, and the country has begun to adopt a much more active foreign policy, particularly with its neighbors. There are also significant Turkish investment flows to the neighboring countries. As Turkey relaxed its visa requirements for countries like Greece, Russia, and successor states of the former Soviet Union, the total number of people traveling to, from, and through Turkey had begun to increase.⁷⁵ "The total number of third-country nationals entering Turkey increased from just over 1 million in 1980 to around 25.5 million in 2009."⁷⁶ Turkey has not had a visa requirement for Iranians since the early 1960s and lifted visas for Syrian nationals in 2009. In terms of mobility of goods and people, Turkey had clearly become a regional hub.

A major part of the shift toward multidimensional foreign policy has been the growing ties with Russia and successor states of the former Soviet Union. Turkey-Russia ties have improved dramatically since the 1990s, despite intense disagreements over conflicts such as Nagorno-Karabakh and the war in Chechnya. Energy has been an important driver in this relationship. Russia supplies 65 percent of Turkey's natural gas imports, which are expected to rise in the next decade, and 40 percent of its crude oil imports.⁷⁷ Another region that is of great interest to Turkey is Central Asia. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkey has envisioned for itself a bridging role in the region, particularly in the early 1990s for the Turkic republics, an initiative that was led by President Özal. Although Turkey's interest in these republics died down toward the end of the 1990s, the AKP government has aimed to revitalize them and has envisioned a much more active role.⁷⁸

Another thorny issue in the region has been the Turkish-Armenian rapprochement, which is strongly supported by both the EU and the United States but is paralyzed, owing to intense and politically charged disagreements over how Turkey should address the events of 1915, which included a massive number of deaths and forced deportations of Armenians.

Finally, Turkey's revitalized ties with the Middle East also constituted an important dimension of its multiregional strategy. During the 1950s, Turkey's foreign policy and votes in international forums dismayed the Arab world, but these policies gave way to a more equidistant system in the 1960s and 1970s, when Turkey tried to remain neutral and outside the major conflicts in the region and favored the status quo. The eagerness of the republic to define itself as part of Europe rather than the Middle East, the emphasis on secularism, and the distancing of the country from its Ottoman past all contributed to this cautious and almost unengaged approach.

Turgut Özal started the transformation of Turkey's foreign policy toward the Middle East in the 1980s and early 1990s, emphasizing economic ties, trade, and relationships by playing a positive role in the return of Egypt to the OIC, in which Turkey became very active. Another major breakthrough occurred with the increased military and economic cooperation between Israel and Turkey. Trade and tourism between the two countries exploded in the 1990s, and the two countries signed a series of military and industrial agreements. Turkey became one of the few countries in the region that had close contacts with both Israel and the Arab world.

During the first half of the AKP government, Turkey has defined a much more active role for itself in the Middle East. This trend has also been supported by the United States, despite initial US reservations about close ties between Turkey and Syria and Iran. The active engagement of the AKP government included, first and foremost, the notion of going beyond the security questions and the Kurdish issue in the case of Iraq and developing close ties with the Iraqi government. Though Iraqi Kurdistan was initially perceived as a

possible threat, Kurdish regional government has become Turkey's major economic ally in the region, while Shi'i southern Iraq is largely perceived as being under the influence of Iran. As of 2011, Iraq has become the second-largest export market for Turkey. Second, the AKP initially aspired to play the mediator in conflict resolution between both Israel and the Palestinian Authority and Israel and Syria. But strains in Turkey-Israeli relations during the AKP government—particularly in the aftermath of the Mavi Marmara flotilla affair in May 2010, where Israeli naval commandos killed nine aid workers heading to Israeli-blocked Gaza—have since dimmed such prospects. Erdoğan's outspoken criticism of Israeli operations and its pro-Palestinian stance initially increased Erdoğan's popularity in the Arab world but strained Turkey-Israeli relations.

The political changes in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings began to highlight both Turkey's rising influence as well as the enormous challenges it faces. Turkey has supported the moderate Islamists in Tunisia (developing strong ties with the En-Nahda movement) and Egypt, where Turkey supported the Muslim Brotherhood. But in the cases of Libya and Syria, where Turkey had strong economic ties with the existing regimes, Turkey's position has been more dubious. Initially opposed to NATO's intervention in Libya, Turkey changed its position when it became clear that Colonel Muammar al-Qadhafi would be ousted.

A similar shift of policy occurred in Egypt as AKP-backed Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi was toppled in a military coup in 2013. Relations between the two countries strained sharply as Erdoğan became the staunchest critic of President Sisi and overall Western support offered to Egypt. An intense campaign started by Egypt and Saudi Arabia against Turkey made it lose its predicted easy victory of membership in the United Nations Security Council in 2014.

But the biggest policy reversal came with Syria, where Bashar al-Asad, once a close ally of the AKP government, failed to respond to Turkey's pressures for political opening. Asad's regime became a major enemy as Turkey actively began supporting anti-Asad forces

in Syria. Escalating tensions with Syria left Ahmet Davutoğlu, the architect of Turkey's foreign policy toward the Middle East, who initially coined the phrase "zero problems with neighbors" (the foreign minister of the country [2009–2014] and prime minister since 2014), faced with two enormous challenges. One is that the outbreak of a bloody civil war in Syria has triggered the largest refugee influx into Turkey⁷⁹ since World War II. As of January 2019, 3.6 million Syrian refugees have arrived to Turkey—only 250,000 of which reside in refugee camps spread across mostly southeastern Turkey (the rest are spread across the urban centers). The precarious conditions of these refugees, their accommodation problems, insufficient support for education, exploitative labor relations, and child and sex trafficking, along with legal ambiguities, pushed some of these migrants to take perilous boat journeys across Greek islands and across Europe in 2015. Aided by Turkey's open-door policy, which the EU urges Turkey to change, an estimated 750,000 migrants mostly from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan made this journey to Europe in 2015, with a death toll of more than three thousand triggering a serious migration crisis for Europe as well.

The second major challenge Turkish government faced has been the longevity of the Asad regime and the rising threat of ISIS. As fighting ISIS became a bigger priority than toppling the Asad regime, Turkey became increasingly intimidated by the international support the Kurds in the region, as they were the only ground forces available for fighting ISIS. That is why the government has been repeatedly criticized for bombing Kurdish targets along with ISIS targets under the rubric of fighting against terrorism. Involvement of Russia in the conflict with its support for the Asad regime also complicated the picture, culminating in Turkey's shooting down of a Russian jet for violation of its airspace in 2015—the first of its kind since the 1950s. Both sides have denied any wrongdoing, but the result has been significant economic sanctions by Russia and strained relations between the two countries that had developed a significant partnership since the 1990s. Turkey has also made persistent calls for the protection of ethnically affiliated Turkmens and Yezidis, which the government sees as part of the moderately Islamist forces

opposing Assad. In short, with an ongoing civil war in Syria, lukewarm relations with Shi'i Iraq's central government, an ambiguous relationship with ISIS that included a capture and release of Turkish diplomats in Mosul in 2014, uneasy relations with Iran further complicated by Iran-US rapprochement, and the sharp severance of ties with Russia, the policy of "zero problems with neighbors" appears to be in shambles.

Finally, Turkey has also introduced a major policy dilemma both for Europe and the United States. While they need the cooperation and coordination of Turkey in dealing with a wide range of issues such as the refugee crisis, the threat of ISIS, and the Syrian civil war, they have become increasingly wary of the declining quality of democracy and pluralism in the country and visible process of democratic decline.

Conclusion

After years of multiparty politics, Turkey's democratic backsliding and its eventual democratic breakdown raise a number of crucial questions: At what point in a given polity does the cost of losing power for the incumbent become too costly, while the cost of suppression of the opposition declines, in effect, opening the path toward autocracy where the autocrats become ready to do almost anything to stay in power? Is democratic backsliding a process of developing and "locking in" political and economic coalitions whose futures depend on the incumbent's continuous power? Or is it a story of institutional decline where parliaments, courts, and media can no longer constrain or countervail the use and abuse of executive power? In what ways do majoritarianism, frequent referendums, and elections all become instrumentalized for executive aggrandizement? Why and how does economic development not suffice to ensure democratic consolidation and might, in fact, be quite compatible with authoritarianism?

Indeed, Turkey has become a test case for exploring these questions. A set of major political and economic challenges in the country, such as extensive polarization between the Islamists and secularists, between Kurdish and Turkish nationalists, between Sunnis and Alevis, between those favoring ties with the EU and the West versus those with anti-Western sentiments, all combined with worsening income and regional inequalities, have clearly rendered "living differentially" and in harmony with the rule of law and democratic principles very difficult. Such cleavages and polarizations also offer a fertile ground for political instrumentalization and populist mobilizations. But it is precisely in such heterogeneous societies defined by deep cleavages and polarities where these democratic principles are most needed and can curtail such populist tendencies.

Can reconciliation, moderation, and peaceful resolution ever be possible without democratic principles—for instance, after years of

militarized Kurdish conflict in southeastern Turkey? How does one address the perils of radical nationalism and curb it? What is the role of third-party players in ensuring peaceful coexistence? As the Kurdish conflict becomes increasingly intertwined with the Syrian civil war, is it ever possible to solve such ethnic conflicts when they are so entangled in regional and international strategies?

Meanwhile, as a typical developing country with a huge debt burden and vulnerability in global financial markets, whether Turkey can maintain economic stability in the midst of rising polarizations and conflicts also remains an open question. With its social state capacity stretched thin, particularly since 2012, how can the economic vulnerabilities and uncertainties emerging from both war in the border, the refugee crisis, and globalization be addressed? The substantial transformation of Turkey's political economy from a relatively globally integrated, liberal, and market-driven economy during the early years of the AKP to an intensely more clientelistic, patrimonial economy after 2013 underscores, once again, that in the absence of fully functioning democratic institutions, liberal economic reforms are not likely to stick. A modern economy and liberalizing market cannot, in and of themselves, prevent or contain democratic breakdown.

As a country still pounding on the doors of the EU, albeit with less enthusiasm, Turkey also raises important questions on the identity and nature of the European project. Is the EU an economic and political project based on laws and agreements, or are there other factors defining the borders of the EU? Faced with the biggest refugee crisis since World War II, can Europe live up to its democratic and humanitarian ideals? Or is the EU bound to become an exclusive club of privileged citizens?

Ultimately, Turkey was an experiment in democratization—an experiment that has largely failed. With military interventions and weak party organizations, a lack of accountability, and long-standing military tutelage, Turkey was always a flawed democracy. The AKP's initial steps toward a more inclusive politics and increasing

demilitarization had raised hopes that the country was catching the wave of deepening democratization. However, increased corruption and excessive concentration of power in the executive branch—the shift to a Turkish-style presidential system under the unaccountable, personalized political style of Tayyip Erdoğan—have dimmed such hopes. More seriously, the rising authoritarian tendencies along with the erosion and suspension of the rule of law, civil liberties, politicized judiciary, and the silencing of the media and opposing voices, coupled with escalating police violence and intimidation as well as the remilitarization of the Kurdish conflict, all signal that Turkey’s democratic experiment has come to a screeching halt.

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25 Yemen

Sarah G. Phillips

The viability of Yemeni unity—and the ability of its citizens to simply survive—has never been so widely questioned as at the time of this writing. In September 2014, Ansar Allah militias (better known as “the Houthis,” after the family that has led the movement for over a decade) overran the capital city of Sanaa, having already seized military control in the northern governorate of Amran. They did so with the help of factions of the military (mostly the Republican Guard) still loyal to former President Ali Abdallah Salih, who was ousted in late 2011 but was granted immunity from prosecution under an agreement brokered by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)—the “GCC Initiative”—that provided a timeline for Yemen’s political transition. Despite his resignation as president, Salih remained politically active as the head of the former ruling party (the General People’s Congress, GPC), a position that he used to undermine his successor, President Abd Rabbuh Mansoor Hadi. In January 2015, Houthi militias surrounded the presidential palace and placed President Hadi and other senior government figures under house arrest. In an apparent attempt to call their bluff, President Hadi and his cabinet resigned, leaving the Houthis (and their erstwhile allies, Salih and the Republican Guard) militarily dominant but politically overstretched and increasingly unpopular.

President Hadi fled to the southern city of Aden, declaring it to be Yemen’s new capital, and withdrew his resignation. On March 25, the Houthis, again drawing on parts of the military still loyal to the former president, captured the al-‘Anad Air Base just north of Aden and took Hadi’s defense minister hostage. Hadi fled to Saudi Arabia from where he called for the kingdom to lead a military campaign against the Houthis and former president Salih to restore his leadership. “Operation Decisive Storm”—a coalition of nine Arab states led by Saudi Arabia—began bombing targets in Yemen that night,

transforming a civil conflict into one that is ever-more internationalized, complex, and catastrophic for the civilian population. The United States and the United Kingdom have both openly—and controversially—supported the airstrikes (subsequently renamed to “Operation Renewal of Hope”) that have devastated civilian infrastructure and caused an unknown number of casualties. The combination of violent conflict and the coalition’s blockade on key ports of entry has caused levels of starvation bordering on famine, the world’s-largest outbreak of cholera in fifty years, and has left some twenty-two million (of approximately twenty-nine million) people in need of humanitarian assistance or protection. In 2018, the UN Secretary General referred to Yemen’s situation as “the world’s worst humanitarian crisis.”

The number of parties to the Yemeni conflict is large and in flux. Domestically, they include the ousted government of President Hadi, which is ostensibly backed by the GCC coalition; the Houthi rebels that control Sanaa and much of the North and who have waged an incredibly violent assault on the midlands city of Taizz for several years; factions of the military still loyal to former President Salih and his family; various movements calling for southern independence; violent extremist groups like al-Qa‘ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and ISIS; some Salafi groups fighting the Houthis; and a plethora of local militias defending their local areas against each of these groups.

In addition to GCC states and their Western supporters referred to previously, Iran is the other key international player, supporting and arming the Houthis (though their level of control over Houthi fighters remains debated). International parties to the conflict also include a number of proxy forces that are directly funded and trained by the United Arab Emirates, including the Hadhrami and Shabwani Elite Forces, the Security Belt Forces (*al-Hizaam al-Amni*), and the Giants’ Brigade (*al-’Amlaqah*). There is a growing and underreported contestation between the members of the GCC coalition as well, particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

As is often the case in war, alliances between these groups have been fluid and combustible. The most striking example of the latter came in late 2017, when Houthi fighters executed former President Salih as he fled Sanaa. This chapter must, therefore, apply the caveat that some of the issues it addresses are rapidly changing.

The Republic of Yemen was formed in May 1990 when North Yemen (the Yemen Arab Republic, YAR) united with South Yemen (the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, PDRY) in a move that took many observers at the time by surprise. The popular optimism that surrounded the union soon abated as the two sides were unable to find common ground over how they should share power. Each believed, probably correctly, that the other side was trying to outplay it, and by April 1994, the new state descended into a two-month civil war. The North was victorious, and the republic took on many of the outward characteristics of the North's neopatrimonial political culture. That perceived culture—and the belief that the North disproportionately benefited from the natural resources in the former South—contributed to the growth of a secessionist movement that, along with a litany of other challenges, was already jeopardizing the foundations of a unified Yemen before the civil war took hold.

While protests had been becoming more regular throughout Yemen since around 2006, their frequency and intensity surged following the removal of President Hosni Mubarak in Egypt in February 2011, culminating one year later in the removal of President Ali Abdallah Salih after thirty-three years in office. The violent response by the regime against the protesters throughout 2011 prompted high-level defections within the regime in March 2011, although the rifts among its power elite had also been apparent for some time.¹ In November 2011, an agreement was reached that mapped out a time frame for Yemen's political transition (the GCC Initiative). The GCC Initiative called for a hasty process of reform: elections for a new president within ninety days, a new transitional government of national unity to be comprised equally of ruling party and opposition members, amendments to the electoral system and constitution, an overhaul of the security apparatus, and the creation of a National Dialogue

Conference. However, the Initiative was principally driven by external actors, particularly Saudi Arabia and the United States, and left many Yemenis unconvinced that it was really likely to deliver the systemic changes they had demanded throughout the year. The National Dialogue Conference began in March 2013, with 565 delegates tasked with negotiating a new political framework for the country. However, the initial catharsis of the process gave way to frustrations over the exclusion of many of those who drove the 2011 uprising in favor of elites more amenable to perpetuating the status quo. These tensions remain unsolved and underpin many of the more proximate causes of the current violence.

The History of State-Building: Development of the Republic of Yemen

Early History

The territory of Yemen, known to the ancient Arabs as al-Yaman (the South), was once divided into kingdoms and enclaves of various sizes. Strategically poised at the junction of major trading routes between Africa and India and endowed with an abundance of fertile land, Yemen's kingdoms grew prosperous and powerful. Its centers of civilization included the fabled Kingdom of Saba, purportedly ruled by the Queen of Sheba of biblical fame.

Around 1000 BCE, the Kingdom of Saba was a great trading state with a major agricultural base supported by a sophisticated system of irrigation at the heart of which stood the large Marib Dam. In the northern part of Yemen, the Kingdom of the Mineans arose, coexisting with Saba and maintaining trading colonies as far away as Syria. During the first century BCE, the Kingdom of Himyar was established, reaching its greatest extent and power in the fifth century CE. Christian and Jewish kings were among its leaders.

Key Facts on Yemen

AREA 203,850 square miles (527,968 square kilometers)
CAPITAL Sanaa
POPULATION 28,036,829 (2017)
PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION UNDER 25 61.9 (2017)
RELIGIOUS GROUPS Muslim, including Shafi'i (Sunni) and Zaydi (Shi'a); very small numbers of Jews, Christians, and Hindus
ETHNIC GROUPS Predominantly Arab; some Afro-Arabs, Europeans, and South Asians
OFFICIAL LANGUAGE Arabic
TYPE OF GOVERNMENT Republic
DATE OF INDEPENDENCE May 22, 1990
GDP (PPP) \$44.00 billion; \$1,595 per capita (2016)
GDP (NOMINAL) \$18.21 billion; \$660 per capita (2016)
PERCENTAGE OF GDP BY SECTOR Agriculture, 24.1; industry, 14.3; services, 61.6 (2017)
TOTAL RENTS (PERCENTAGE OF GDP) FROM NATURAL RESOURCES 0.983 (2016)

FERTILITY RATE 4.09 children born/woman

CIVILIAN CASUALTIES FROM CURRENT CONFLICT

Unknown; the UN estimated around 10,000 casualties in the first year or so of the war. The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) recorded just over 60,000 conflict related casualties from January 2016–November 2018 but noted that the real figures were likely higher. Save the Children estimated that tens of thousands more have died from conflict-related causes like disease and starvation.

Source: Central Intelligence Agency, *CIA World Factbook, 2018*; World Bank.

Note: Due to the Yemeni conflicts, the representativeness and reliability of these figures is limited.

The growth of the Roman Empire primarily brought about the decline of pre-Islamic civilization in Yemen. New trade routes established by Europeans bypassed the old caravan trails, and the Yemeni frankincense trade died because Christian Romans did not use the resin in their funeral rituals as the pagans had. By the sixth century CE, the Marib Dam had collapsed, symbolizing the political disintegration in southern Arabia that helped pave the way for the followers of Islam to capture Yemen in around 630 CE, during the Prophet Muhammad's lifetime.

Map 25.1 Yemen



When the Shi'a split from the mainstream Sunnis in what is today Iran and Iraq, large numbers of persecuted Shi'a fled during the eighth and ninth centuries to the highlands of northern Yemen. One of their leaders, Yahya bin Hussein bin Qasim al-Rassi, claimed descent from Muhammad and proclaimed himself imam in 897 CE, establishing a Zaydi dynasty that existed in various manifestations until the overthrow of the 111th imam in the 1962 revolution.

In the sixteenth century, the Ottoman Turks captured the Yemeni plains and the port of Aden, but a young Zaydi imam led a successful resistance, forcing the Ottomans to conclude a truce and eventually leave Yemen in 1636. One of his successors unified the mountains and plains into a single entity extending to Aden, with the northern city of Sanaa as its capital, but war and upheaval soon returned to Yemen. In 1728, the sultan of the southern province of Lahej broke from the Zaydi regime, creating a division between North and South that prevailed until 1990.

The Ottoman sultan in Constantinople continued to claim suzerainty over all of Yemen, but Ottoman control was tenuous. Turkish administration of Yemen officially ended after the Ottomans' defeat in World War I. The Zaydi imam Yahya Hamid al-Din was left in control

of the coastal areas of the North evacuated by the Turks. He subsequently tried to consolidate his control over all of northern Yemen, but the British, their local protégés in the South, and the Saudis in the North opposed his efforts. The 1934 Saudi-Yemeni Treaty of Taif temporarily settled one war between Yemen and Saudi Arabia. Although it represented a humiliating defeat for Imam Yahya, the Saudi king allowed him to maintain control of much of northern Yemen.

With the development of large steamships in the nineteenth century and the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, the port of Aden gradually became a major international fueling and bunkering station between Europe, South Asia, and the Far East. In 1937, the British made Aden a crown colony and divided the hinterland sultanates in the South into the West and East Aden Protectorates; the Aden colony itself remained a separate entity. The British further developed the port facilities in Aden in the 1950s and built an oil refinery there. Aden, a densely populated urban area with a rapidly growing working class, consequently became the dominant economic center in southern Arabia.

Imam Yahya, whose isolationism and despotism had alienated a large number of Yemenis, was assassinated in a coup in 1948. He was succeeded by his son Ahmad. Growing nationalism among the Arab countries after World War II—exemplified by the rise of Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser as a pan-Arab leader—as well as better communications and the emergence of Arab oil wealth forced Ahmad to abandon the isolationist policies of his father. In 1958, he joined Egypt and Syria's ill-fated United Arab Republic, which was then renamed the United Arab States, and sought aid from communist and capitalist nations alike.

The Yemeni Republics

After the disintegration of the United Arab States, Imam Ahmad and the Egyptian government increasingly exchanged rhetorical hostilities. As the popularity of Arab nationalism grew throughout the region, Cairo sensed strong anti-imam sentiment building throughout the country as a result of Ahmad's repressive domestic policies. Ahmad died in his sleep in September 1962 and was succeeded by his son Muhammad al-Badr. On September 26, 1962, just one week after Badr's ascension to power, a group of junior army officers mounted a coup and announced the establishment of the Yemen Arab Republic in the North, with Sanaa as its capital. The coup brought an end to the imamate, one of the oldest and most enduring in history. Within days, Egyptian soldiers arrived in Yemen to assist the fledgling republic, and Egypt remained one of the two major external players (the other was Saudi Arabia) in the country's ensuing civil war.²

In southern Yemen, still under British colonial rule, the coup became a source of inspiration to underground groups agitating for their own political independence. The rise in nationalism, combined with severe problems in congested Aden, furthered instability in the South. The British, hoping to withdraw gracefully from the area while protecting their interests, persuaded the sultans in the West and East Aden Protectorates to join Aden in 1963 in forming the Federation of South Arabia, which was to be the nucleus of a future independent state.

Arab opponents of the British plan mounted a campaign of sabotage, bombings, and armed resistance. Britain, failing to persuade the various factions to agree on a constitutional design for a new independent state, announced early in 1966 that it would withdraw its military forces from Aden and southern Arabia by the end of 1968 (London had signed a treaty in 1959 guaranteeing full independence to the region by 1968). Britain's announcement turned the anti-British campaign into one of interfactional competition. The National Front

for the Liberation of South Yemen (or the National Liberation Front, NLF), backed by the British-trained South Arabian army, emerged as the victor among the various factions, and on November 30, 1967, Aden and southern Arabia became an independent state—the People’s Republic of Southern Yemen, later changed to the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen.³ Over the ensuing years, relations between Aden and Sanaa were soured by political and ideological differences, despite mutual advocacy of Yemeni unification.⁴

North Yemen

The Yemen Arab Republic civil war raged in North Yemen for eight years after the establishment of the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) in 1962. The last imam, Muhammad al-Badr, Imam Ahmad's son who had held power for one week, fled Sanaa after the coup and mustered support among tribal royalists to wage war against the new republican government. Aid from Saudi Arabia and Jordan helped sustain his resistance movement. In response, the new president, Colonel Abdallah al-Sallal, turned to Egypt's Nasser, who sent a large military force to support the new republic.

Hostilities between Badr and the republic continued. Meanwhile, fighting broke out among the republican leaders themselves, primarily about the future role of Egypt in Yemen. President Sallal was removed from office in 1967 and succeeded by Abd al-Rahman al-Iryani. Moderate republicans, led by General Hassan al-Amri, seized power and pushed back a serious monarchist offensive against Sanaa. After the withdrawal of Egyptian forces in late 1967, Saudi Arabia began reducing its commitment to the royalists, and in 1970, it recognized the YAR after the monarchists agreed to drop their claims and cooperate with the republican regime.

In the early 1970s, stability increased somewhat under the government led by President Abd al-Rahman al-Iryani. During this period, Saudi Arabia became a major provider of foreign aid, perhaps to forestall greater Soviet aid to Sanaa and to counter the growing Marxist orientation of the PDRY to the south, but also to counter unwelcome political changes in its largest neighbor. Relations between the two Yemens deteriorated and flared into sporadic border fighting, pushing the YAR closer to Saudi Arabia.

In 1974, Colonel Ibrahim al-Hamdi ousted the civilian government of President Iryani and set out to heal old factional wounds. A popular leader, Hamdi was assassinated in 1977 in an act believed to have resulted partially from his attempt to diminish the political power of

the tribes. It also remains widely believed within Yemen that Ali Abdallah Salih (who became president of North Yemen the following year) played an important role in Hamdi's assassination with the support of Saudi Arabia. Hamdi's successor, Ahmad al-Ghashmi, was assassinated just eight months later in 1978 by an envoy sent by PDRY President Salim Rubayyi' Ali. Lieutenant Colonel Abdallah Salih took over as president and remained in power until 2012. Under Salih's rule, the position of the northern tribes within the military and bureaucratic elite was greatly expanded, an issue decried among nontribal Yemenis and many in the former South who felt excluded. Salih's ability to accommodate, incorporate, and co-opt his rivals strengthened the regime and brought about a period of relative political stability. Under Salih, the army and the civil service were relatively modernized, and some outlying tribal regions were brought under a modicum of state authority.⁵

In March 1979, the YAR and PDRY announced plans to unify. Although the unification failed, Salih's government sought to reassure Saudi Arabia and the United States that its intention was not to abandon its traditional policy of nonalignment and that its proposed merger with the PDRY did not mean the emergence of a Soviet-oriented alliance.

Early on, the major threat to the Salih government came from the National Democratic Front (NDF), a coalition of opponents engaged in political and military action against the government and backed by the PDRY. Despite significant early NDF victories and occupation of much of the southern part of the YAR, Salih turned the situation around through military action and reached a political compromise with PDRY leader Ali Nasser Muhammad in May 1982. Muhammad agreed to halt support for the NDF in return for amnesty for and political incorporation of NDF elements. This agreement led to a gradual normalization of the situation in the YAR and strengthened Muhammad against his hard-line opponents in Aden who wanted to vigorously support NDF military operations.

With the increased central government control over workers' remittances in the 1980s and the discovery of oil later that decade, the Salih regime financed the building of schools, hospitals, and better roads and the creation of other jobs and services that increased his government's presence. The promotion of such infrastructure and the payments extended to a broad swath of tribal sheikhs helped to at least partially co-opt some once-autonomous tribes. This is not to say, however, that loyalties were necessarily diverted in whole, or in part, to the state in the tribe's stead.

In an attempt to institutionalize the prevailing political power structures, in 1982 Salih created the General People's Congress (GPC), which became the ruling party in the unified republic until the "transitional government" was instated in November 2011, whereupon it held 50 percent of cabinet positions. In 1988, Salih permitted elections to establish a long-promised People's Constituent Council. In the voting, 1.2 million Yemenis chose 1,200 delegates to the body, which had no authority to initiate legislation but could amend or critique laws enacted by the executive. The council merged with the Yemeni Socialist Party's People's Supreme Council upon unification in 1990 and formed a unified interim parliament.

South Yemen: The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen

At independence in 1967, the People's Republic of Southern Yemen had a strong socialist orientation. The ruling party, the National Front for the Liberation of South Yemen, preached "scientific socialism" with a Marxist flavor. Its first president, NLF leader Qahtan al-Sha'bi, sought closer ties with the Soviet Union and China, as well as with the more radical Arab regimes. Saudi Arabia joined the YAR in opposing the South's Marxist regime and backed opposition efforts there. The outward ideological schism endured until unification. Cleavages remained, however, and fueled increasing dissent in the South based on regional identities, the location of natural resources, and the perceived exclusion of southerners by the northern elite.

Sha'bi's orientation, however, was not radical enough for some elements of the NLF. In 1969, a group led by Salim Rubayy'i Ali overthrew him, and in 1970, the new regime, which gained a reputation as an austere Marxist government, renamed the country the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. The regime took extreme steps, including repression and exile, in an attempt to break traditional patterns of tribalism and religion and to eliminate vestiges of the bourgeoisie and familial elites, but these identities persisted under the surface regardless. Ideological clashes between northern conservatives and southern socialists persisted. Each side devoted considerable energy and resources to supporting opposition movements in the other. This mutual animosity developed into border wars in 1972 and 1979.

Ali had a powerful rival in Abd al-Fattah Ismail, secretary general of the NLF (renamed the National Front). Ali was considered a Maoist with pro-China sympathies, whereas Ismail was viewed as a pragmatic Marxist loyal to Moscow. He attempted to control society through tight police surveillance, but the factional violence among the leaders of the NLF severely undermined the regime's efforts to genuinely transform the PDRY. In June 1978, Ismail seized power

and executed Ali. He reorganized the National Front into the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP), became chairman of the Presidium of the People's Supreme Assembly, and named Ali Nasser Muhammad as prime minister. In October 1979, Ismail signed a friendship and cooperation treaty with the Soviet Union.

Ismail, however, was unable to hold on to power. In April 1980, he relinquished his posts as presidium chairman and YSP secretary general. The party indicated that he had resigned because of poor health, but it appeared that Ismail had lost an internal power struggle, in part because of his foreign policy positions. The YSP Central Committee named Ali Nasser Muhammad to replace him. Ismail had intended to further cement ties with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, and on this point, he and Muhammad had been in agreement. The latter, however, also wanted to improve relations with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries to end the PDRY's isolation in the Arab world, secure new sources of foreign aid, and facilitate union between the two Yemens. Muhammad began his tenure with visits to the Soviet Union and to Saudi Arabia, the YAR, and other neighboring countries.

Overall, Muhammad's regime pursued a more conciliatory path than had Ismail's, cultivating economic ties with the West, achieving political reconciliation with the YAR and Oman, and moderating some tribal rivalries. In the fall of 1985, Ismail returned to the PDRY, and a vicious power struggle for party leadership ensued. Ismail was reappointed as one of the secretaries of the YSP, which increased pressure on Muhammad to relinquish power. Concerned about his position, Muhammad called a meeting of Ismail's advisers and staff in January 1986. Once those unfavorable to Muhammad had gathered, Muhammad's bodyguards entered and opened fire, killing a number of officials, including Ismail, and setting off a brief but vicious civil war that led to thousands of civilian deaths. Muhammad fled to the YAR.

Haidar Abu Bakr al-Attas, the prime minister in Muhammad's government, who happened to be out of the country during the

conflict, returned to Aden on January 25 and was named provisional president. In October 1986, he was elected president for a full term. His government also followed a local brand of “pragmatic Marxism,” pursued a close relationship with the Soviet Union, discussed unification with the YAR, and supported mainstream Arab causes. Aden restored diplomatic relations with Egypt in 1988 and considered reestablishing ties with the United States.

The period after the 1986 civil war was one of soul searching for the regime, and the YSP allowed more pluralism in an attempt to recover from the massive societal and political rifts caused by the conflict. By the time of unification, the press in Aden had more freedom than anywhere else on the Arabian Peninsula.⁶

Unification

The YAR and PDRY pursued independent destinies in a climate of mutual suspicion throughout much of the 1980s. In the second half of the decade, however, fundamental changes in the global and regional geopolitical map set the stage for Yemeni unification. Most observers trace the beginning of the unification process to the spring of 1988, when presidents from both countries met to reduce tensions at their common border, create an economic buffer zone for joint investment, and revive discussions on unification. In 1989, the YAR initiated a series of talks with the PDRY aimed at fulfilling this goal.

The crumbling of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s undermined Moscow's capacity to provide economic and military aid and, coupled with regional instability in the wake of the Iran-Iraq War, led the PDRY to conclude that unification with the YAR was in its best interest. The PDRY's economy had sagged under the government's socialist principles. After independence in 1967, industrial production declined, the once-famous port of Aden lay in disrepair, and workers' remittances from the oil-rich Gulf states provided half of the government's annual budget. Due in part to substandard Soviet technology, the PDRY's oil sector, which had the potential to lift the country economically, sat in shambles. Only in 1989 did the PDRY begin exporting oil in significant quantities.

The YAR's leadership also had compelling reasons for considering unification. Salih saw a merger as a means of increasing the power and influence of his country as well as procuring his place in history as the broker of Yemeni unification. Furthermore, oil had been discovered along the border between the two states, and it became clear that any decision over exportation rights would be extremely tense. Finally, the prospect of unification was popular on both sides of the border. The northern and southern leaderships believed that achieving the long-held dream of Yemeni unification was a good way of bolstering their legitimacy.

Sanaa, the capital of the former YAR and the largest city, became the capital of the unified republic. Aden, the capital of the former PDRY and once one of the busiest and most significant ports in the world, was officially designated the economic and commercial capital of unified Yemen (Sanaa now dominates these sectors as well).

In their unification agreement, the two countries divided ministerial positions, although local bureaucracies in the North and South remained intact. Salih retained his position as head of state, and Ali Salem al-Baydh, leader of the YSP, became vice president. The militaries exchanged senior staff but left rank-and-file personnel unintegrated. In its early days, the new republic maintained two separate armed forces, a state of affairs that haunted the fledgling state when North and South fought a civil war in 1994.

Soon after unification in May 1990, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August compounded Yemen's domestic instability. At that time, Yemen held a temporary rotating seat on the UN Security Council. From this position, it condemned the involvement of Western forces, advocating instead an "Arab solution." By so doing, it angered its wealthy Gulf neighbors, upon whom it relied considerably for economic support. Saudi Arabia expelled nearly one million Yemeni workers, whose remittances were crucial to Yemen's economy. Unemployment and poverty rose significantly in 1991. Popular frustration and disillusionment with the new government, bloated and inefficient because of unification, mounted. A devalued currency and a rising cost of living resulted in protests throughout 1992. As tensions mounted and national elections loomed, high-level officials of various political persuasions became the object of harassment or assassination attempts, although southern officials undeniably bore the brunt.

On April 27, 1993, the Republic of Yemen held its first elections after a delay of several months. Thousands of candidates competed for 301 seats in the parliament. Before Election Day, members of the GPC-YSP interim ruling coalition traded accusations of vote buying, inflating the electoral register, and unfairly using the media. The

government deployed more than thirty-five thousand troops on the streets of Sanaa to keep order on Election Day. With a large and generally peaceful turnout, Salih's GPC won the most parliamentary seats but failed to win an absolute majority. A new northern-based Islamist party, the Yemeni Reform Gathering (Islah), narrowly beat the YSP, which had been expected to pick up considerable support in the North while maintaining its position in the South. Despite problems with the process, international observers declared the vote relatively free and fair. Several opposition parties picked up seats—a step toward multiparty democracy that was, at least on the surface, unprecedented in the Arab Gulf region and was widely heralded as Yemen's first tentative move toward genuine democracy.

Rivalries within the new three-party government were strong, however, and were largely based on the old North-South division. Al-Baydh refused to be inaugurated as the vice president in the new government, and in August 1993, he boycotted the five-person presidential council and returned to Aden, accusing Salih of refusing to integrate the military and of hiding oil revenues. Al-Baydh subsequently charged Salih and his followers with responsibility for the assassination of key YSP officials and supporters.

Tensions continued to build between the two sides, and political assassinations remained frequent. Sporadic skirmishes between northern and southern troops began in February 1994, and observers believed both sides to be mobilizing for war. International mediators attempted to settle the dispute, but on April 27, 1994—exactly one year after the country's first elections—full-scale fighting erupted. On May 5, northern troops began attacking the territory of the former South. Al-Baydh declared a separate government on May 21 and established a presidential council and a rump parliament to lead the so-called Democratic Republic of Yemen—a state recognized only by the unrecognized Republic of Somaliland. The larger northern army invaded the South and pushed toward Aden and the oil port of Mukalla, about three hundred miles to the east. The northern forces dealt a crushing blow to the southern army, capturing Aden and Mukalla in early July, as southern fighters

abandoned the cities or melted into the populace. The civil war lasted just over two months, but it devastated Yemen's economy and caused at least \$2 billion in damage; some estimates put this figure much higher.

Because most Yemenis supported unification, there was widespread relief when the fighting ended. President Salih emerged from the civil war in a stronger position, though the way the war was fought—particularly the sanctioned looting of southern land and property by northern elites, forces, and irregulars—created a level of acrimony that continued to simmer. (Indeed, after tensions reignited in the mid-2000s, southerners widely recalled the abuse.) Thousands of southerners returned to Yemen under a general amnesty, and some southern leaders engaged the Sanaa government in discussions on recovering from the war. The conflict decimated the southern Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP), and the northern General People's Congress (GPC) and Islah quickly formed a new coalition government. With the YSP no longer a major political obstacle, the new government amended the constitution in September 1994, considerably expanding the powers of the presidency and introducing shari'a, Islamic law, as the "sole basis" of legislation.

The 1994 civil war reversed the optimism that had surrounded the unification of North and South Yemen in 1990, and discontent slowly gathered momentum in the South. Southerners charged that northern elites built their survival on the extraction of the South's natural resources, while entrenching a system that excluded southerners from government employment and other benefits. Southerners argued that they were stripped of their once-robust system of law and order (*nizam*) and were subsumed by the chaotic and personalized rule (*fawda*) of the North.

In 2007, that discontent became more organized, and by 2008, some had begun to openly call for secession at protests and were raising the flag of the former southern state. The early protests were against a set of specific grievances, particularly the forced retirement and insufficient pensions of southern military officers, but they quickly

spread into a much wider phenomenon, moving into the northern governorates of Taizz and Ibb, where they involved much broader issues of regime legitimacy.

Societal Challenges

Yemen's population is estimated to be nearly twenty-nine million, according to 2018 figures, making it the second-most-populous country on the Arabian Peninsula, after Saudi Arabia, whose census data are widely thought to be inflated. Its population is growing rapidly at a rate of 2.3 percent annually, which is one of the highest rates in the world.

Yemen ranks lowest among Arab states on the Human Development Index. Before the war, figures from 2014 suggested that life expectancy in Yemen was about sixty-three years (61.8 for men and 64.5 for women). The average Yemeni woman gave birth to 4.1 children, compared with an average of 1.9 in the United States and 1.4 across Europe. The literacy rate was approximately 66 percent; roughly 50 percent of the women are illiterate. Each of these figures has likely changed since the violence, displacement, starvation, and disease increased from 2014, though there are no accurate figures about the degree to which they may have done so.

Malnutrition and poverty were rampant even before the current crisis, particularly in the hinterlands of the South and in the Tihama on the Red Sea. Then, Yemen's infant mortality rate previously stood at 5.47 percent (for children under twelve months old), compared with a world average of 4.2 percent, while the mortality rate for children under five years old was 7.3 percent. Approximately 45 percent of Yemenis were believed to live below the poverty line of two dollars a day in 2011, with the number of people considered by the UN World Food Programme (WFP) to be *severely food insecure* doubling between 2009 and 2011. The proportion of Yemenis considered to be *food secure* nationally was then only 56 percent. While there are again no reliable indicators of the new figures, conditions are deteriorating by the month. In 2018, United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres called Yemen "the world's worst humanitarian crisis" and stated that eighteen million Yemenis were

food insecure and that “a horrifying 8.4 million of these people do not know how they will obtain their next meal.” Yemen has also experienced the worst cholera epidemic the world has seen in half a century, with over one million people thought to have contracted the disease since September 2016.

Education and employment have not kept pace with the rapidly growing population. Yemeni women complete an average of seven years of formal education; men complete an average of eleven. Education and health services are largely confined to urban centers and remain quite inadequate—and the current conflict has caused serious disruptions to even these services, with many schools being forced to close and hospitals lacking basic medical supplies and electricity. At least one-third of Yemenis were unemployed, according to the WFP in 2012, though this figure did not include underemployment, which is also high, and has only worsened in recent years, though again estimates are difficult to verify.

Arabic is spoken nearly everywhere, although some people in the extreme eastern part of the country (in the governorate of al-Mahra) and on the island of Socotra speak the local languages of al-Mahri and Socotri, respectively. In terms of ethnicity, Yemenis pride themselves on being primarily Qahtani, or southern Arabs, with the most ancient roots, as opposed to Adnani, or northern Arabs. The vast majority of the population is Muslim, and in the former North Yemen, Muslims fall into two principal groups of roughly equal size: the Zaydis, a Shi'i sect found predominantly in the northern mountain areas, and the Shafi'is, a Sunni sect located primarily in the southern region and along the coastal plain. The Zaydi-Shafi'i division has been a source of some tension throughout Yemen's history, but the larger obstacles to inclusive development have been regional, tribal, externally fueled, or economic rather than sectarian. Yemen was also formerly home to a significant Jewish minority that traced its roots to biblical times and was well integrated into Yemeni society. Most of Yemen's Jewish population eventually immigrated to Israel, and as a result, Yemeni Jewish culture has largely disappeared, although some small communities remain in the northern Sa'dah governorate

and in al-Rawda, just north of Sanaa. Even these, however, have largely disappeared, with many taking up residence in Sanaa as a result of the ongoing al-Houthi insurgency in the Sa'dah governorate.

Yemen has not enjoyed nearly the level of socioeconomic development in recent decades that its neighbors in the Arabian Peninsula have. In part, this is because it does not possess as much oil and has a significantly larger population. Yemen's political leadership has also failed to invest sufficiently in the country's human capital; a significant portion of the country's oil wealth has been squandered through corruption, and modernization has been inconsistent.

Even before the war, Yemen had one of the most heavily armed populations in the world; carrying a weapon to guard against external authority is a tradition. Although the often-heard claim that there are "60 million guns and 20 million people" is certainly overstated, the Small Arms Survey estimated in 2003 that there were between six million and nine million small arms and light weapons in Yemen.⁷ The number of publicly owned firearms per capita in Yemen is second only to the United States. Again, definitive figures are not available, but the vast majority of Yemen's privately owned weapons are held by the tribes in the northern highland areas. Yemen is also known as one of the region's largest suppliers of illicit small arms.

Despite Yemen's large rural population, the World Bank estimates that rates of urbanization have fluctuated between 6 percent and 8 percent annually, which is at least twice the average annual rate for Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) countries. Greater urbanization has led to some increase in the opportunities for women in education and employment, but gender-based discrimination is still very widespread.

Institutions and Governance

When Yemen unified in May 1990, it declared that the new state would be democratic. The political sphere, repressive on both sides of the old border, was rapidly and quite dramatically liberalized. Political parties were legalized, new laws allowing greater levels of free expression and free association were enacted, an interim parliament was established, and the first parliamentary elections were planned for 1992. New media outlets and civil society organizations quickly sprang up amid strong optimism that Yemen's unprecedented experiment with democracy would succeed.⁸ There seemed to be a genuine belief that democracy, however vaguely defined, was the best means of unifying the two Yemens and their elites into one coherent political system.

Despite maintaining some of the formal aspects of a democratic system, including a reasonable level of political pluralism, the regime remains authoritarian in practice. The system of decision-making is predominantly informal and exclusive of ordinary Yemenis, and its survival has been largely dependent on state-sponsored political patronage. As oil revenues diminished, the regime found it increasingly difficult to contain dissent, the accumulation of which was certainly a factor behind the traction that the mass protests gained in 2011, and again in 2014, prior to the Houthi rebels occupying Sanaa.

The Executive

At the time of this writing, much of Yemen's executive is in Saudi Arabia, having fled the country in March 2015. The following is, therefore, an overview of the system that operated before that time as the shape of any future system is purely speculative. The Yemeni executive is formally divided into three branches: the president, the council of ministers (including the prime minister), and the local authority. The president is directly elected by the people and appoints the prime minister and the other ministers. In reality, the president has cast a long shadow over all parts of government, and politics are highly personalized. Maintaining patronage is frequently more important than strict adherence to the law. In practice, there have been few limits to the power of Yemen's executive.

The regime, led by President Ali Abdallah Salih until 2012, presented itself as a guarantor of stability in a volatile environment, consciously highlighting the lack of realistic alternatives to its rule. It permitted some political expression and selectively delivered benefits to reinforce its power. While some were initially optimistic that the rules of the political game might change under the presidency of Abd Rabbuh Mansoor Hadi—who was elected to office in February 2012 in a single-candidate election—they were quickly disappointed as patronage appointments continued, albeit to somewhat different individuals. Having served as Salih's vice president since 1994, President Hadi was widely considered as entrenched in the previous order.

Legislative Branch

Yemen's 301-member House of Representatives is also in a period of intense uncertainty. It is popularly elected, though the elections that were initially scheduled for 2009 have been repeatedly postponed, raising questions about its future as a representative body. It has the power to draft legislation and question the cabinet, but historically, it rarely acted upon these rights. Rather, it primarily distributes benefits to politically relevant elites and on occasion has been a barometer of public opinion.

The 111-member Consultative Council is appointed by the president and serves primarily as a sounding board for the executive. Its recommendations are nonbinding, and its members do not exercise a veto; it is widely seen as a way of giving selected elites a tangible stake in the system.

Judiciary

The Yemeni court system consists of three tiers: the district-level Court of First Appeal, the governorate-level Court of Appeal, and the Supreme Court in Sanaa. The Supreme Judicial Council presides over them and specialized courts. In 2006, the judicial system was restructured, and President Salih was removed as head of the Supreme Judicial Council in favor of the chief justice of the Supreme Court. On paper, at least, the change brought Yemen's judiciary closer to the formal separation of powers outlined in the constitution.

Yemen's judiciary was considered "nominally independent" by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 2009. Public confidence in the state's court system is low; Yemenis still prefer to handle the vast majority of cases informally. This limits access to justice for vulnerable members of society, such as women and the poor.

Although it had previously been a "source" of legislation, shari'a became "the basis of all legislation" with a 1994 constitutional amendment. In practice, the amendment did little to change Yemen's legal system. The state still recognizes customary tribal law, *'urf*, with the proviso that it not undermine shari'a, but inconsistencies between *'urf* and shari'a remain. Yemeni law also draws on British common law and socialist legal traditions, but it remains inconsistently applied.

Military and Security

Prior to the rupture of the formal state apparatus in 2014, Yemen spent approximately 7 percent of its GDP on its military—one of the highest percentages in the world. Due to Yemen’s notoriously inaccurate statistics and its deliberate opacity on security matters, precise confirmation and analysis of this figure is difficult. The military is the most important state institution and, like all others, is controlled at least indirectly by the president—something that was on stark display as the protesters in 2011 challenged Salih and his family’s right to wield such power.

Throughout Salih’s presidency, most key military positions were held by members of President Salih’s family. His son Ahmed Ali Abdallah Salih controlled the Republican Guard, a force of some thirty thousand men. President Salih’s half-brothers, cousins, and nephews also held important posts, such as Central Security Commander Mohammed Abdallah Salih, Air Force Commander Mohammed Salih al-Ahmar, National Security Agency Deputy Commander ‘Ammar Mohammed Salih, Head of the First Armored Division Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar (who was the first major commander to publicly defect from the regime during the protests), and National Security Agency Commander Yahya Mohammed Abdallah Salih. The domestic intelligence apparatus, the Political Security Organization (PSO), also reported directly to President Salih.

Following Salih’s resignation, President Hadi began to try to remove some of these figures from their positions, though some did not go without a fight. In June 2014, forces loyal to Hadi attacked the headquarters of a television channel that was affiliated with Salih, resulting in open conflict in central Sanaa. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the Houthis captured the capital city of Sanaa in September 2014, and in May 2015, Salih publicly declared what had been well known since 2012: that he was in a military alliance with his former enemies, the Houthis, against President Hadi. That alliance, always shaky, ended with Salih’s death at the hands of

Houthi fighters in December 2017, days after Salih publicly severed his link with them. Salih's nephew Tariq now commands the remnants of the family's military network and, at the time of writing in 2018, are fighting the Houthis in the battle to capture the Red Sea port city of Hodeidah.

Yemeni government forces are scattered, with few personally loyal to President Hadi. They are supported by the GCC coalition (led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates), but it is the proxy forces that are directly funded and trained by the coalition (largely the UAE) that are most present on the ground and through which some of the tensions between the GCC coalition can be seen. These include both the Hadhrami and Shabwani Elite Forces, the Security Belt Forces (al-Hizaam al-Amni), and the Giants' Brigade (*al-'Amlaqah*). In addition to these forces there is a multitude of local militias and tribal groups engaged in more localized conflicts.

Tribes

For many Yemenis—particularly those who live outside of urban centers—the tribes are extremely important social, political, and economic institutions, though their influence has waned in recent decades. The tribal system still offers an important means of local dispute resolution, with many seeing the state judicial institutions as ineffective or corrupt.

Tribes remained far stronger in northern Yemen than they did in the southern area. The ruling party in the former PDRY saw tribes as an anachronism and attempted to dismantle them—at least rhetorically. Even so, they endured and, with the collapse of the PDRY, reemerged as a significant political and social force in parts of the South. The tribal system often serves as a buffer against substantial poverty in Yemen’s countryside, and communalism sometimes helps to mask the enormous gaps in the state’s capacity or willingness to deliver services to the people.⁹

Photo 25.1 Houthi rebels seized the towns of Houth and Khamri, the seat of the Hashid tribal chief, in February 2014.



REUTERS/Khaled Abdullah

The impact of Yemen’s tribal system on the country’s political development remains a passionately debated issue among politically engaged Yemenis. Some argue that tribalism poses a serious

obstacle to the establishment of formal state institutions, while others state that because of tribalism's egalitarian foundations, many of its norms constitute an indigenous form of democracy and is a means of holding authority accountable. Some tribes consider their territories states within the state, control the central government's entry, and desire at least a degree of autonomy from the central government. Their authority, including the use of physical force, has always posed obstacles to the state exercising full sovereignty throughout all Yemeni territory. Equally, however, the state under President Salih also imposed its own limitations for full territorial sovereignty by allowing—some argue benefiting from—some tribes to resist formal centralized authority.

The relationship between the state and the tribe is not always adversarial. The Yemeni regime has historically relied upon the tribes in a number of important ways to maintain its rule.¹⁰ The central government absorbed most politically significant tribal leaders, increasing their wealth and power and the state's access to tribal areas. As a result of the state's co-optation of tribal leaders, some are no longer seen as advancing their communities' interests, and tribal traditions, such as group solidarity and egalitarianism, are widely believed undermined.¹¹ Yemenis often complain that the tribal system is significantly weaker than it was a generation ago—something the current war has certainly exacerbated.

Actors, Opinion, and Participation

Civil Society

The Yemeni constitution specifies a relatively high level of participation for its citizens. When the country unified in 1990, all adults over the age of eighteen were given the right to vote; political parties were legalized; and a new press law promised free expression, independent media, and access to information. Almost overnight, there was an explosion in the number of publications. The political atmosphere shifted considerably after the civil war in 1994, and the public space became increasingly limited. Some of Yemen's laws also seem to contradict the spirit of the constitution, and their application has been arbitrary, leading sometimes to strict controls.

The idea that civil society is the most important factor in transition to democracy has been widely questioned in the Middle East in recent years, and this debate has been reinvigorated since the ousting of several leaders with, as yet, uncertainties over the level of systemic change that has occurred as a result. Rapid growth in the number of civil society organizations (CSOs) throughout the region did not signal systemic political change in Yemen. The fact that the protests of 2011 began outside the auspices of any of Yemen's organized political parties or CSOs further underlined their lack of deep social penetration. After the movement gained momentum, organized groups became more visible, which became a source of tension on the streets between those who felt that they "started" the movement and those parties—particularly Islah—who many believed were attempting to co-opt it.

Political Parties

Yemen has had many different formal political parties since unification, though most of them are said to exist only during election time. There are three main political parties: the ruling GPC (General People's Congress), Islah, and the YSP (Yemeni Socialist Party), though all are in a major state of flux at the time of writing and are not the most significant actors.

The GPC

Once the ruling party of North Yemen and then of the unified Republic, the GPC's positions in cabinet were reduced to 50 percent when it was forced to enter into a transitional coalition government with the JMP (Joint Meeting Parties), a coalition of opposition parties, when President Salih was removed from office in late 2011. Members of the GPC come from diverse backgrounds, and most have historically been attracted to it because it is the country's ruling party, not necessarily because of its ideology. The GPC is an umbrella for the politically ambitious and those who seek benefits or protection from membership in the president's party.

Islah

Acknowledging the caveats that opened this chapter, Islah was the largest and best-organized opposition party in Yemen, though it is now in violent conflict with its one-time (partial) allies against Salih loyalists, the Houthis, and a number of UAE sponsored militias. Islah has historically had considerable grassroots support and a strong record in charitable work, which helped the party penetrate society beyond the elite. An Islamist party, it had long offered the only ideological, if incoherent, alternative to the status quo. The party's membership also exhibits a number of different schools of thought, which have at times been a cause of tension within the party, although its leaders are careful to publicly deny such schisms. The

main schools of thought that exist within the party are those that are aligned with the Muslim Brotherhood and more conservative Salafis (that express various degrees of religious tolerance). The party has also served as a base for some tribal elites—particularly members of the influential al-Ahmar family and religious businessmen.

The YSP

Although it once ruled the former South and had a clearer ideology than the GPC, the YSP was a party in decline for the two decades that preceded the crisis. The party never recovered from its loss in the 1994 civil war and ongoing harassment from the GPC that followed the war. It won only 7 of 301 seats in the 2003 parliamentary elections. The unrest in the South, which erupted in 2007, exacerbated divisions within its leadership. While the party long claimed that it was playing a lead role within the “southern movement” (see The Southern Movement—Harak section), its leaders’ ability to gain genuine grassroots traction within the movement was limited.

Elections

Yemen's electoral cycles have changed since unification as a result of changes to the constitution and (extraconstitutional) decisions to postpone the elections in 1992 and 2009. There are 301 seats in the Yemeni parliament. The parliamentary term was initially four years but was extended to six years in 2001. The current parliament was elected in 2003 but due to a series of postponements continues to serve. Local councils also serve six years, and voters elect representatives to serve in 333 districts and twenty-one governorates. The presidential term was previously five years, but it was extended to seven years in 2000. When Abd Rabbuh Mansoor Hadi won the presidential election in 2012 (in which he was the only candidate) following Salih's resignation, he obtained the right to serve as a transitional president until full elections could be held in 2014. These elections were also postponed.

Domestic Conflicts

As a mood of popular protest gripped the region in the wake of the events in Tunisia and Egypt in early 2011, Yemenis took to the streets in increasing numbers. Like other leaders in the region, President Salih initially experimented with various mechanisms of control in an attempt to contain the unrest but quickly resorted to high levels of violence. On March 18, 2011, snipers killed more than fifty unarmed civilians on the streets of central Sanaa, which provided the stage for the defection of the second-most-powerful man in the Salih regime—General Ali Muhsin. Muhsin's defection was not simply a response to the murder of the protesters, as he claimed, but was built on long-standing tensions within the regime's inner circle over the distribution of resources and the inheritance of power. The protests continued throughout the year and eventually forced President Salih to accept an offer of immunity in exchange for his resignation. Salih was replaced by Vice President Abd Rabbu Mansoor Hadi as acting president in late 2011, after which he was confirmed as president in a single-candidate election in February 2012. Hadi's presidency was initially greeted with enthusiasm, but his inability to stem the deteriorating political, economic, and security situation strengthened the hand of his opponents (particularly those affiliated with former President Salih) and built the sense that dramatic action was necessary to alter Yemen's course. That dramatic action came, first, when the Houthi-Salih militias took Sanaa in September 2014 and then again when they expelled President Hadi from the country in March 2015 after failing to agree to power-sharing arrangements. Underlying the whole crisis, one issue has remained constant: At one level, all actors are involved in a struggle over what constitutes a legitimate successor to Salih's leadership and the political order that he presided over.

The National Dialogue Conference

The Conference ran from March 2013 to January 2014 and was established out of the GCC Initiative (2011) that formalized President Salih's resignation. It was, at least theoretically, an attempt to resolve the multifaceted conflicts that the 2011 uprisings brought to the surface. While initially cathartic, the process was undermined by a number of factors, particularly the determination of its external sponsors to preserve an ill-defined (and externally perceived) "stability" and ongoing dissatisfaction with the deal that granted Salih immunity from prosecution.

Prior to the youth-led uprising, there were two main social movements challenging the status quo, both of which gained ground dramatically after the seismic shifts of 2011: the al-Houthi movement, which fought a series of wars against the Salih regime in and around the northern governorate of Sa'dah between 2004 and 2010; and the southern secessionist movement. Both are now deeply implicated in the conflicts currently engulfing the country.

The Southern Movement—Harak

The "southern movement" emerged from a series of antigovernment protests that began in the South on the anniversary of unification (May 22) in 2007. Now known simply as *al-Harak* (the movement) within Yemen, the term refers to the many organizations and activists in the southern governorates resisting the control of the northern-based regime. While not all those affiliated with Harak have consistently called for the full independence of the South, they are now united in this goal, though they disagree about the best way to achieve it. The movement has historically been plagued by a lack of clear internal domestic leadership, and it remains reasonably decentralized, with some of its affiliated organizations and activists still working primarily to achieve quite local objectives, although each group claims to represent southerners more broadly. However, the movement has become more coherent and broad based as the threat from northern actors, particularly the Houthis and Salih loyalists, has increased. Harak developed an armed "Southern Resistance" element, that fought off the Houthi-Salih militias that

“invaded” the South in 2015 in a conflict that was both bloody and underreported in the international media.

Even though President Hadi is from Abyan in the South, Harak sees him as a part of the northern-based system from which they wish to secede. In April 2017, Hadi fired the Governor of Aden, Aidarus al-Zubaidi, for being loyal to al-Harak instead of the government. Shortly afterward, al-Zubaidi announced the establishment of the Southern Transitional Council, which in early 2018 seized control of the government’s Aden offices. At the time of writing, it competes with al-Harak for popular support and claims to control eight of the southern governorates.

The Houthis

The Sa’dah-based rebel group, Ansar Allah, is better known as the Houthis, named after the family that has led the movement since it began as “The Believing Youth” in the early 1990s. The group fought a series of civil wars against the central government (though, more specifically, against the First Armored Division, which was commanded by General Ali Muhsin) between 2004 and 2010 and surprised many with their resilience and ability to project influence beyond their traditional base. As a predominantly Zaydi Shi’a movement, it was long charged that the Houthis were fighting to further a sectarian ideology. In reality, the ideological dimension grew over time, gaining traction as Yemen’s war became more violent and internationalized.

The Houthis have ties to Iran, though the duration and strategic depth of their association is a matter of conjecture. Both Saudi Arabia and Iran have cause to overstate the level of coordination between Iran and the Houthis to their domestic audiences. Iran’s ability to drive events in Yemen through the Houthis was historically limited but increased considerably since Saudi Arabia and the UAE became active participants in Yemen’s war. The Houthis’ initial success in Yemen was, however, largely a product of local political factors (including factional rivalries within the Salih regime), military

capacity, and support. The Houthis steadily gained influence since the departure of President Salih by articulating the widespread anger over the failures of Hadi's government, such as when it cut fuel subsidies in August 2014. The following month, Houthi militias overran the capital city of Sanaa with the assistance of factions of the military loyal to Salih.

Once they controlled the capital, the Houthis demonstrated a poor capacity to govern. They are now deeply unpopular outside of their core support base as a result of their often-ruthless use of violence, mismanagement, and increasingly exclusive sectarian and ideological agenda, though this does not suggest that their opponents necessarily support the actions of the GCC coalition either. Enmity for one side in Yemen's war does not mechanically confer legitimacy upon the other—something that is usually missed in Western media commentary about the conflict, which tends to presume a zero-sum game.

Religion, Society, and Politics

The vast majority of Yemen's population is Muslim, with a majority of the population in Upper Yemen being Zaydi Shi'i Muslims (20 percent to 25 percent of the total population) and the vast majority of Lower Yemen and the former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) being Shafi'i Sunni Muslims. Zaydism is doctrinally closer to the Sunni sects than it is to other Shi'i sects, particularly the Ithna'asharis, and it is commonly referred to as the "fifth school" of Sunni Islam. There has not been significant religiously fueled animosity between the two communities historically, although some have noted a sometimes antagonistic "us-them" feeling between them based on cultural, social, and political grounds.¹²

Before aligning with the Houthis after losing the presidency, Ali Abdallah Salih had charged that the movement called for the reestablishment of the Zaydi imamate that governed northern Yemen for more than one thousand years (with minor interruptions) until 1962. As a family of Sayyids—that is, those who claim descent from the Prophet Muhammad through his daughter Fatima and her husband Ali—members of the al-Houthi family would theoretically be eligible to claim the title of imam for themselves. Revival of the imamate is rejected by Yemen's Sunni majority and also by many Zaydis as well, and although the Houthis deny it, the charge that is their aim has increased.

The current conflict between the Houthis and other factions (including the Southern Resistance, the Islah Party, al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula, and the Saudi-led coalition) is being increasingly framed in sectarian terms. However, its origins are predominantly political, and aspects of it are deeply rooted in the factional rivalries of the Salih regime. It is clear now that the more the conflict is framed in sectarian terms and the more that both sides use sectarian language in their recruitment strategies, the more identities are being hardened around instrumental narratives of primordial hostility. Al-

Qa'ida also seeks to exacerbate sectarianism for political gains, and the geopolitical tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran find reflection in Yemen's domestic politics as well.

Political Economy

Under President Salih, Yemen's political economy was largely based on the distribution of patronage at the elite level. In part because of the state's inability (some say unwillingness) to maintain a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence, the Salih regime complemented its coercive power with the ability to co-opt, divide, reward, and punish other elites through patronage and exclusion. President Hadi did not move substantively away from the logic employed by his predecessor when distributing resources and other benefits to his political allies, overlooking the corrupt practices of certain elites and offering major tax breaks for businessmen of political significance. In other words, systemic change within Yemen's political economy did not occur with the transition of power to President Hadi.

Other than through oil exports, Yemen has remained poorly integrated into the global economy and even these have been seriously disrupted by the large-scale violence. When Saudi Arabia and Kuwait expelled Yemeni workers in 1990, labor was Yemen's most significant export. The country never fully recovered from reabsorbing so many unemployed workers at one time.¹³ Prior to unification, the YAR and PDRY economies had relied on a combination of workers' remittances, coffee exports, the fishing industry, and foreign assistance. Shortly before unification, revenues from oil exports supplemented these sources in both states. During the oil booms of the 1970s and 1980s, the exodus of Yemeni workers to other parts of the Gulf had made it difficult for Yemen to develop its own agricultural and industrial bases. With unification, the Republic of Yemen agreed to assume the international obligations of the YAR and PDRY, saddling the unified nation with a combined official debt of approximately \$7 billion.

The civil war of 1994 had a disastrous effect on Yemen and prodded the government toward a course of economic restructuring.¹⁴ In April 1995, worsening economic conditions prompted the government to

adopt an aggressive economic recovery plan. The primary objectives were to secure control of the rapidly increasing budget deficit; reinforce the value of the riyal; initiate privatization of many state-run sectors; and encourage national, Arab, and foreign investment by providing better facilities for investors.

Under this plan, Yemen attracted hundreds of millions of dollars in foreign aid and investment from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, the European Union (EU), Japan, and the United States. It brought rampant inflation under control, decreasing it from more than 55 percent in 1995 to less than 6 percent in 1997, and stabilized its exchange rate. Despite this, Yemen experienced a sharp rise in its budget deficit, in part because of low oil prices and decreased demand in the late 1990s.

Agriculture occupies around one-third of the workforce, and in many remote areas, farming is the only viable livelihood. Yet agriculture accounts for only approximately 10 percent of the country's GDP. This means that Yemen is highly dependent on external sources for its food, which makes it highly sensitive to international price shocks—and exceptionally vulnerable to the air and naval blockade that Saudi Arabia has applied to its key ports of entry. A significant number of Yemen's remaining workers provide unskilled labor to the Arabian Peninsula's labor-poor, capital-rich countries. Their wages provide an unsteady but important source of funds to the country's economy.

Since unification, Yemen has relied on revenues from its oil sector for virtually all of its essential needs. Initial estimates of its total oil reserves were around four billion barrels, but this figure was drastically revised downward. Yemen's oil production peaked in 2003 at around 450,000 barrels a day and comprised about 75 percent of the government's revenue. It appears highly unlikely to reach this level again. Significantly higher oil prices between 2004 and 2008 had a positive impact on Yemen's revenues and budget deficit. By 2009, however, the country was only producing 280,000 barrels a day, which, combined with the dramatic drop in oil prices later that

year, again put serious strain on Yemen's budget.¹⁵ As the political crisis deepened in 2011, disruptions to production became both regular and severe, meaning that Yemen had to import (or receive donations of) oil from abroad. By early 2015, production was estimated to be only around 140,000 barrels a day, though again exports plummeted once the Saudi-led coalition began its bombing campaign and partial naval blockade led in March of that year. Yemen is now grappling with the fact there is no other source of income, other than foreign assistance, that looks capable of replacing oil in the short- or even medium-term future. Yemen has an estimated seventeen trillion cubic feet of natural gas reserves, but these reserves are not anticipated to cover the loss of oil income.

Western, particularly American, assistance to the Yemeni government increased in accordance with the level of activity by al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). The amount of development assistance that the Yemeni government received from the United States increased from \$4.6 million in 2006 (that is, before AQAP had clearly emerged as a threat) to approximately \$22 million by 2008. By the end of 2010 and after AQAP had attempted several high-profile operations abroad, the United States had agreed to provide the Yemeni government with approximately \$130 million per year in nonsecurity assistance. The US government suspended assistance as the regime's crackdown on protesters intensified in 2011. By 2012, however, the Obama administration announced that Yemen was to be allocated \$337 million in humanitarian, political, and security assistance for FY2012. Likewise, the World Bank suspended activity in Yemen in 2011 but recommenced its projects the following year.

Yemen has also historically relied on the largesse of its wealthy GCC neighbors, particularly Saudi Arabia, which has funneled huge amounts of money annually (usually estimated in the billions) to both the central government and to various political, social, tribal, and religious actors in an effort to both project political and ideological influence and to prevent Yemen's troubles from breaching its own borders.¹⁶ The GCC's war in Yemen has put all of these avenues of

income into question, and it is impossible to know how it will affect these streams of revenue in the future.

In addition to natural resources and access to external funding, the widespread social habit of chewing qat is central to Yemen's political economy, though it has been long bemoaned (particularly by foreigners) as an economic scourge. Many men and women of all social classes chew the mildly narcotic leaves of the qat shrub daily. After several hours of providing mild stimulation, the plant induces lethargy. The qat bush is easy to grow, tolerates frequent cropping, and provides instant returns in cash. According to the World Bank in 2001, qat production directly employed around 16 percent of Yemenis, though this is almost certainly an underestimation. As a result of demand, some fields that previously grew edible and exportable crops have been converted into qat fields, contributing to the transformation of Yemen into an import-dependent country. Qat is a water-intensive crop—a serious problem for Yemen, which is one of the most water-poor countries in the world. However, it was international donors, particularly the IMF and World Bank, that pushed the Yemeni government to move from the subsistence agriculture that had sustained its population for centuries to a model that prioritized farming more water-intensive crops (including oranges and grapes) for export in exchange for international loans. The watering practices required to sustain these crops in the arid highlands region had an extremely deleterious impact on the water basin, for which qat was never solely responsible.¹⁷

International Relations and Security

Whether regionally or internationally, Yemen's external relations have long been viewed predominantly through the lens of security concerns. For the West, the perceived threat is from the actions of terrorist groups. For regional actors, particularly Saudi Arabia, the concerns are broader and include mass migration and the political threat posed by Republicanism (and, presumably, representative government) on its border. The degree to which Iran's involvement in Yemen is driving Saudi concerns remains a matter of debate but is stated by Saudi Arabia as the main reason for its current military intervention in Yemen. Saudi Arabia also has a long history of political influence in Yemen, the maintenance of which is widely believed to constitute a further layer to its actions.

Having maintained a low-level presence in the country since the end of the war against the USSR in Afghanistan, violent extremist groups have gained strength in Yemen since 2006, when twenty-three al-Qa'ida figures escaped from a prison in Sanaa under suspicious circumstances. Although some of the escapees were recaptured or killed reasonably quickly, some resurfaced to launch attacks against government infrastructure, foreign embassies, and civilians. In January 2009, a new Yemeni-Saudi organization—al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)—was announced by two of the 2006 fugitives, Nasser al-Wahayshi and Qasim al-Raymi, along with two Saudi militants, Sa'eed al-Shihri and Mohammed al-'Awfi. The very public establishment of this group, its subsequent attempts to hit high-profile foreign targets (particularly American and Saudi Arabian), its claimed responsibility for the attacks on the Charlie Hebdo office in France, and its ongoing deadly attacks and ability to gain territory within Yemen contributed to the widespread view that it is the most active operational franchise of al-Qa'ida. A group calling itself "Islamic State in Yemen" also began to claim responsibility for suicide bombings in Yemeni mosques in March 2015, suggesting that its aim is to distinguish itself from AQAP by being more viciously

sectarian in its targeting practices than its competitor. AQAP has become reasonably operationally sophisticated and has pursued alliances with tribal groups for safe haven, gaining a degree of territorial control in some parts of the South, most recently in the port city of Mukalla. The Yemeni government's capacity to combat al-Qa'ida, already limited, was further weakened by a security vacuum in parts of the country where al-Qa'ida is active¹⁸ but also by ongoing accusations that factions of the regime (particularly former president Salih and the current vice president General Ali Muhsin) have, at times, actively facilitated members of AQAP.¹⁹

Other than the now-internationalized war that is pitting GCC actors and their supporters against Iran and its supporters, the other key issue in Yemen's contemporary international relations and security is the American drone campaign against AQAP targets. In August 2018, the Bureau of Investigative Journalism stated that there had been at least 324 drone strikes conducted in Yemen since 2002, killing between 1,004 and 1,162 people and injuring hundreds more. The number of US counterairstrikes roughly doubled between 2016 and US President Donald Trump's first year in office in 2017—an upward trend that looks likely to continue. The opacity of information highlighted by these figures aside, there are serious questions raised about the effectiveness of drones as a counterterrorism strategy when AQAP and its ideological competitors have gained so much ground since their use became so regular.²⁰

Outlook

With the violent conflicts between the Houthi militias, Salih loyalists, scattered government forces, Southern Resistance fighters, and others in parts of southern and Lower Yemen, the aerial bombing campaign and naval blockade led by Saudi Arabia, the presence of GCC coalition proxy forces and ground forces, various local militias, and the heightened activity of militant jihadis, Yemen is in an extremely dangerous period. People are suffering dreadfully with insecure access to basic humanitarian necessities like food, water, and medical supplies. Its problems are being exacerbated by external powers and interests vying for political, economic, or security gains. In the longer term, the best prospect for improvement may be in developing long-term sustainable industries that use Yemen's large labor sector, its unique historical, cultural, and agricultural assets, and that take advantage of its strategic geographic location. With the many problems outlined earlier and the unwillingness of most external actors to see Yemen as more than a security problem to be solved, it is unlikely that this will be realized in the near future.

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Notes

Chapter 1

1. See Nikki R. Keddie, "Is There a Middle East?," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 4, no. 3 (July 1973): 255–71.
2. See Molly Greene, "The Ottoman Experience," *Daedalus* 134, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 88–99.
3. See Heather J. Sharkey, *A History of Muslims, Christians, and Jews in the Middle East* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).
4. See Christine M. Philliou, *Biography of an Empire Governing Ottomans in an Age of Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).
5. Non-Muslims for a variety of reasons used the shari‘a or Islamic courts. See Najwa Al-Qattan, "Dhimmis in the Muslim Court: Legal Autonomy and Religious Discrimination," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31, no. 3 (1999): 429–44.
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Chapter 2

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Chapter 3

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40. In Egypt before 2011, the oath for members elected to the assembly, including the president, stated:

I swear by Almighty God to uphold the Republican system with loyalty to respect the Constitution and the Law, to look after the interests of the People in full, and to safeguard the independence and territorial integrity of the motherland.

In prerevolutionary Tunisia, according to Article 42, the president took an oath indicating the supremacy of law: I swear by God Almighty to safeguard the national independence and the integrity of the territory, to respect the Constitution and the law, and to watch meticulously over the interests of the Nation.

41. For instance, under Mubarak, Articles 109 to 114 in the Egyptian constitution gave both the president and deputies in the People's Assembly the right to propose laws. Unlike the king, the president also cannot pass a law by decree. Furthermore, although the president can veto a law passed in the People's Assembly, the legislature can override the veto with a two-thirds majority. Under Mubarak, Article 85 of the Egyptian constitution provided for impeachment of the president with the approval of a two-thirds

majority of assembly members. The Tunisian case was quite similar. For instance, Article 28 in the Tunisian constitution gives both the president and the legislature the right to initiate legislation, although priority was given to legislation initiated by the president.

42. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*; Geddes, *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003); Magaloni, "Credible Power-Sharing and the Longevity of Authoritarian Rule," *Comparative Political Studies* 41, nos. 4–5 (2008): 715–41; Brownlee, *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

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2008), 95–120; Gunes Murat Tezcur, “Intra-Elite Struggles in Iranian Elections,” in *Political Participation in the Middle East*, ed. Lust-Okar and Zerhouni, 51–74; Zerhouni, “The Moroccan Parliament,” in *Political Participation in the Middle East*, 217–39; Zerhouni, “Looking Forward,” in *Political Participation in the Middle East*, 259–66.

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60. For indices, see Daniel Kaufmann, Aart Kraay, and Massimo Mastruzzi, *The Worldwide Governance Indicators, 2012. Update: Aggregate Indicators of Governance 1996–2011* and World Justice Project, "Rule of Law Index, 2017–2018," <http://data.worldjusticeproject.org/#table> (accessed December 13, 2018).
61. World Population Review, "United Arab Emirates 2018," <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/united-arab-emirates-population/> (accessed December 13, 2018).
62. Tamir Moustafa, "Law versus the State: The Judicialization of Politics in Egypt," *Law and Social Inquiry* 28, no. 4 (Fall 2003): 883–930; Mona El-Ghobashy, "Constitutionalist Contention in Contemporary Egypt," *American Behavioral Scientist* 51, no. 11 (July 2008): 1592.
63. Moustafa, *The Struggle for Constitutional Power: Law, Politics, and Economic Development in Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
64. Lynch, *State Interests and Public Spheres: The International Politics of Jordan's Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).
65. For details, see Lust and Jakob Wichmann, "Three Myths about the Arab Uprisings," *Yale-Global*, July 24, 2012, <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/three-myths-about-arab-uprisings>.
66. For discussions of the role of the media in uprisings, see contributions in Khatib and Lust, eds., *Taking to the Streets*.

67. See classical modernization arguments (Seymour Martin Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy," *American Political Science Review* 53, no. 1 [March 1959]: 69–105) as well as more recent reformulations (Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub, and Limongi, *Democracy and Development*) and rebuttals (Boix and Stokes, "Endogenous Democratization," *World Politics* 55, no. 4 [2003]: 517–49).

68. Stephan Haggard and Robert Kaufman, *The Political Economy of Democratic Transitions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

69. Michael L. Ross, "Does Oil Hinder Democracy," *World Politics* 53, no. 3 (2001): 325–61; Rex Brynen, Pete W. Moore, Bassel F. Salloukh, and Marie-Joëlle Zahar eds., *Beyond the Arab Spring: Authoritarianism and Democratization in the Arab World* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2012), 194–98; Jill Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Kiren Chaudhry, *The Price of Wealth* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); Hazem Beblawi, and Luciani, *Nation, State and Integration in the Arab World*, vol. 2, *The Rentier State* (New York: Croom Helm, 1987); Dirk Vandewalle, *Libya since Independence: Oil and State-Building* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); Ross, "Does Oil Hinder Democracy?" *World Politics* 53, no. 3 (April 2001): 325–61.

70. Brownlee, Masoud, and Andrew Reynolds, "Why the Modest Harvest?" *Journal of Democracy* 24, no. 4 (October 2013): 29–44; Brownlee, Masoud, and Reynolds, *The Arab Spring: Pathways of Repression and Reform* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

71. Geddes, "The Effect of Regime Type on Authoritarian Breakdown: Empirical Test of a Game Theoretic Argument," paper presented at the American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, 1999. See also Geddes, Wright, and Frantz, *How Dictatorships Work: Power, Personalization and Collapse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

72. Brownlee, *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

73. Gandhi and Przeworski, "Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats," *Comparative Political Studies* 40, no. 11 (2007): 1279–1301; Gandhi, *Political Institutions under Dictatorship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Milan Svobik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

74. Levitsky and Way argue that the durability derives from the development of cohesive ruling parties, the destruction of independent power centers, partisan control over security, and powerful coercive apparatuses. It should be noted that most, but not all, of their revolutionary cases are one-party states. Iran, for example, is an exception. See Levitsky and Way, "The Durability of Revolutionary Regimes," *Journal of Democracy* 24, no. 3 (July 2013): 5–17.

75. For the most compelling argument that dynastic monarchies are durable, see Herb, *All in the Family* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999). Analysis by Lachapelle, Levitsky, and Way (2015) also find that monarchies are resilient. (See Lachapelle, Levitsky, and Way, "The Durability of Revolutionary Regimes since 1990," paper presented at the American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, San Francisco, CA, September 3–6, 2015.) Similar findings are reported in Geddes, Wright, and Frantz, "Autocratic Breakdown and Regime Transitions: A New Dataset," *Perspectives on Politics* 12, no. 2 (June 2014): 313–31.

76. Some scholars view the relationship between regime age and stability differently. For instance, in the classic work *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), Huntington argued that older, more institutionalized parties were more likely to promote regime stability. More recently, and focusing specifically on the age of leaders, Bueno de Mesquita, Smith, Siverson, and Morrow suggest that regimes become less likely to break down the longer rulers are in office since they have time to

obtain greater knowledge over preferences and retain only loyal followers (see *The Logic of Political Survival* [Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003]). While tenure in office may have this effect in the absence of significant threats to the regime, it may also create a narrow, ossified coalition unable to withstand significant pressures. This appears to have been the case for long-standing rulers of one-party regimes in the MENA.

77. Larbi Sadiki, "Like Father, Like Son: Dynastic Republicanism in the Middle East" (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2009), www.carnegieendowment.org/files/dynastic_republicanism.pdf.

78. For a more detailed discussion, see Lust, "Elections," in *The Arab Uprisings Explained*, ed. Marc Lynch (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

79. There is evidence that the resilience of monarchies holds up over time. See Victor Menaldo, "The Middle East and North Africa's Resilient Monarchs," *Journal of Politics* 74, no. 3 (July 2012): 702–22.

80. Herb, "Monarchies and the Arab Spring," paper presented at Arab Spring Exploratory Conference, Princeton University, May 5–6, 2012. See André Bank*, Thomas Richter, and Anna Sunik reminding us that not all monarchies have dynastic rule and point to the importance of dynastic rule in maintaining five of the eight monarchies (e.g., Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates; Bank*, Richter, and Sunik, "Durable yet Different: Monarchies in the Arab Spring," *Journal of Arabian Studies* 4, no. 2 [2014]: 163–79). Brownlee, Masoud, and Reynolds (2014) take a more expansive approach, seeing dynasticism not only in the oil monarchies but also in republics. They argue that the problem in Tunisia and Yemen was not too much dynasty, but too little dynastic success, and they point to Asad's Syria as an example where successful dynastic transfer of power strengthened the regime. For reasons presented previously, I take issue with this view. However,

the case of Syria does remind us that elites in the inner circle of both dynastic and minority-based regimes, as that which exists in Syria, may have strong incentives to remain loyal to the ruler.

81. Adria Lawrence, "Kings in a Democratic Age: Collective Protest and the Institutional Promise of Monarchy," paper presented at the Middle East Studies Association Annual Meeting, November 2014. Zoltan Barany, "After the Arab Spring: Revolt and Resilience in the Arab Kingdoms," *Parameters: The U.S. Army War College Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 89–101. For a full discussion, see Lynch ed., *The Arab Monarchy Debate* (Washington, DC: Project on Middle East Political Science, December 19, 2012).

82. Russell Lucas, "Monarchies and Protests in the Arab Uprisings: Path Dependencies or Political Opportunities?" *Journal of Arabian Studies* 4, no. 2 (2014): 195–213; Menaldo, "The Middle East and North Africa's Resilient Monarchs."

83. Sean Yom and Gregory Gause III, "Resilient Royals: How Arab Monarchies Hang On," *Journal of Democracy* 23, no. 4 (October 2012): 74–88.

84. Eva Bellin, "Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Lessons from the Arab Spring," *Comparative Politics* (January 2012): 127–149.

85. For detailed discussions of how such organizations contested authoritarian regimes in the lead-up to the 2011 uprisings, see Khatib and Lust eds., *Taking to the Streets: Activism and the Arab Uprisings* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014).

86. Madawi Al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State: Islamic Voices from a New Generation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

87. Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead, eds., *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Comparative Perspectives* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986);

Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

88. Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, eds., *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Jillian Schwedler, "Islamic Identity: Myth, Menace, or Mobilizer?" *SAIS Review* 21, no. 2 (2001): 1–17; Quintan Wiktorowicz, ed., *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); Schwedler, *Faith in Moderation: Islamist Parties in Jordan and Yemen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

89. Haggard and Kaufman, "The Political Economy of Democratic Transitions," *Comparative Politics* 29, no. 3 (April 1997): 263–83; Noura Hamladj, "Do Political Dynamics Travel? Political Liberalization in the Arab World" (working paper, European University Institute, 2002).

90. The extent to which these regimes are aptly described as "secularist" is debatable, and it became even more questionable as the regimes sought to counter Islamist opposition by establishing their own religious legitimacy. Thus, even avowedly secularist, socialist regimes such as those in Egypt and Syria increasingly have used religious rhetoric and promoted conservative Islamic leaders who seek social, although not political, change. For more detail on this argument, see Herb, "Islamist Movements and the Problem of Democracy in the Arab World" (paper presented at the American Political Science Association annual meeting, September 1–4, 2005); and Lust, "Missing the Third Wave: Islam, Institutions and Democracy in the Middle East," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 46, no. 2 (June 2011): 163–90.

91. Lust, "Why Now? Micro-Transitions and the Arab Uprisings," *Comparative Politics-Democratization Newsletter* (Fall 2011), www.ned.org/apsa-cd/APSA-CDOctober2011.pdf; Janine A. Clark, "The Conditions of Islamist Moderation: Unpacking Cross-Ideological Cooperation in Jordan," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 38 (2006): 539–60; and, more generally, Hendrik Kraetzschmar, "Mapping Opposition Cooperation in the Arab World: From Single-Issue Coalitions to Transnational Protest Networks," *British Journal of Middle East Studies* 38, no. 3 (2011): 287–302; Eva Wegner and Miguel Pellicar, "Left-Islamist Opposition Cooperation in Morocco," in *British Journal of Middle East Studies* 38, no. 3 (2011): 303–22.

92. Mahmoud Soueid and Shaykh Muhammad Hussayn Fadlallah, "Islamic Unity and Political Change: Interview with Shaykh Muhammad Hussayn Fadlallah," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 25, no. 1 (1995): 62.

93. Amaney Jamal, *Of Empires and Citizens: Pro-American Democracy or No Democracy at All?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

94. Sarah Sunn Bush, *The Taming of Democracy Assistance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

95. See David Patel and Valerie Bunce, "Turning Points and the Cross-National Diffusion of Popular Protest," in *Comparative Democratization Newsletter* (January 2012), www.ssrc.org/workspace/images/crm/new_publication_3/%7Ba116de05-8659-e111-b2a8-001cc477ec84%7D.pdf; and Mark Beissinger, "Structure and Example in Modular Political Phenomena: The Diffusion of the Bulldozer/Rose/Orange/Tulip Revolutions," *Perspectives on Politics* 5, no. 2 (June 2007): 259–76.

96. For more detailed overviews of this literature, see Eva Bellin, "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: A Comparative Perspective," *Comparative Politics* 36, no. 2 (January 2004): 139–157; David Brumberg and Diamond, "Introduction," in *Islam and Democracy in the Middle East*, ed. Diamond, M. Plattner,

and Brumberg (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), xiii; Marsha Pripstein Posusney, "The Middle East's Democracy Deficit in Comparative Perspective," in *Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Regimes and Resistance*, ed. Pripstein Posusney and Angrist (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2005). Not all literature focused on stability, however, or saw it as inevitable. For a discussion of this literature in hindsight, and whether it shapes our current studies, see the debate in *Perspectives on Politics*, including Marc Morje Howard and Meir R. Walters, "Explaining the Unexpected: Political Science and the Surprise of 1989 and 2011," *Perspectives on Politics* 12, no. 2 (2014): 394–408; Bellin, "Response to Howard and Walters," *Perspectives on Politics* 12, no. 3 (2014): 409–12; Ellen Lust, "Response to Howard and Walters," *Perspectives on Politics* 12, no. 3 (2014): 413–14; Marc Lynch, "Response to Howard and Walters," *Perspectives on Politics* 12, no. 3 (2014): 415–16; and Howard and Walters, "Response to Eva Bellin, Ellen Lust, and Marc Lynch" (with Meir R. Walters), in *Perspectives on Politics* 12, no. 2 (2014): 417–19.

97. See note 81.

98. See, for instance, Adam Przeworski, Michael Alvarez, José Cheibub, and Fernando Limongi, *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Material Well-Being in the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) and compare with Carles Boix and Susan Stokes, "Endogenous Democratization," *World Politics* 55, no. 4 (2003): 517–49.

99. See, for example, Michael Ross, "Does Oil Hinder Democracy?" *World Politics* 53, no. 3 (April 2001): 325–61.

100. Even Ross, in "Does Oil Hinder Democracy?" finds that when oil, Islam, and a dummy variable for the Middle East are included in the same analysis of democratization, the dummy variable for the Middle East remains highly significant. In contrast, using a more nuanced analysis of rents, Herb (in "No Representation without Taxation? Rents, Development and Democracy," *Comparative Politics* 37, no. 3 [2005]: 297–316) finds that oil rents do not "hinder

democracy.” The presence of oil does not fully explain the persistence of MENA authoritarianism. Furthermore, oil rents do not account for the persistence of authoritarianism in the oil-poor states in the MENA. Many of the nonrentier states are as wealthy as, or wealthier than, states in sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia that have seen much more significant liberalization. Finally, scholars increasingly argue that we need to examine oil factors such as the nature of sociopolitical relations and institutions, regional conflict and rents, and different types of rents to better understand authoritarian durability and rents. See Brynen, Moore, Salloukh, and Zahar eds., *Beyond the Arab Spring*, 198–208.

101. See <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/02/14/us-libya-security-idUSKBN0LI0KP20150214>.

102. Huntington, “Will More Countries Become Democratic?” *Political Science Quarterly* 99, no. 2 (Summer 1984): 208.

103. For a similar critique, see Robert W. Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 7–10.

104. In his inaugural address, Abu Bakr is reported to have said, “Now, it is beyond doubt that I have been elected your Amir, although I am not better than you. Help me, if I am in the right; set me right if I am in the wrong. Truth is a trust; falsehood is a treason. The weak among you will be strong with me till, God willing, his rights have been vindicated; and the strong among you shall be weak with me till, if the Lord wills, I have taken what is due from him. Obey me as long as I obey Allah and His Prophet; when I disobey Him and His Prophet, then obey me not. And now rise for prayers; may God have mercy on you.”

105. Mark Tessler concludes: “There is little evidence, at least at the individual level of analysis, to support the claims of those who assert that Islam and democracy are incompatible.” Tessler, “Do Islamic Orientations Influence Attitudes toward Democracy in the Arab World? Evidence from Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Algeria,”

International Journal of Comparative Sociology 43, no. 3 (2002): 229–49; see also Tessler, “Religion, Religiosity and the Place of Islam in Political Life: Insights from the Arab Barometer Surveys,” *Journal of Middle East Law and Governance* 2, no. 2 (August 2010): 1–32.

106. Alfred Stepan, “Tunisia’s Transition and the Twin Tolerations,” *Journal of Democracy* 23, no. 3 (April 2012): 89–103.

107. In Egypt after 2011, 44 percent preferred a civil democratic state, 46 percent preferred an Islamic democratic state, and 10 percent preferred a strong state, even if it was not democratic. Four surveys carried out by the Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies from December 17–27, October 10–26, September 11–21, and August 5–17, with representative samples each between six hundred and one thousand respondents of Egyptian nationality above eighteen years of age. See also Lust and David Waldner, “Parties, Polarization and Democratic Development in the Middle East.”

108. J. Doces and B. Nega, “Democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa: Is There a Neighborhood Effect?,” *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology* 12, no. 5–6 (2013): 639–60, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15691497-12341280>.

109. Lisa Blaydes and Eric Chaney. “The Feudal Revolution and Europe’s Rise: Political Divergence of the Christian West and the Muslim World before 1500 CE,” *American Political Science Review* 107, no. 1 (2013): 16–34.

110. Bo Rothstein and Rasmus Broms, “Governing Religion: The Long-Term Effects of Sacred Financing,” *Journal of Institutional Economics* 9, no. 4 (2013): 469–90.

111. Jacob Gerner Hariri, “A Contribution to the Understanding of Middle Eastern and Muslim exceptionalism,” *Journal of Politics* 77, no. 2 (2015): 477–90.

Chapter 4

1. Most scholars avoid using the word *fundamentalist* to describe those we are calling Islamists who wish to use Islam for social and political purposes. Islamists do not necessarily adhere to more literal interpretations of the Qur'an; nor do they have a monopoly on the "fundamentals" of the religion.

2. Pew Research Center, *The Future of the Global Muslim Population: Projections for 2010–2030*, January 27, 2011.

3. Pew Research Center, *Mapping the Global Muslim Population: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Muslim Population*, October 7, 2009, 8–11.

4. All data on religious minority population sizes are from US Department of State, *International Religious Freedom Report* (July/December 2010), http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2010_5/index.htm.

5. Paul A. Marshall, *Religious Freedom in the World* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).

6. Pew Research Center, *The Future of the Global Muslim Population* (2011).

7. See <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/05/19/middle-east-christian-population-in-flux-as-pope-francis-visits-holy-land/>.

8. The question and proposed responses seem confusing. To the question "How frequently do you perform the five prescribed prayers of Islam?" the proposed responses were "five times a day," "every day," or "one to two times a week," for example. One can imagine that some respondents thought that "every day" meant praying five times in a day. Those doing the survey probably hoped that such respondents would have replied "five times a day." An anonymous reviewer of this chapter points out that the question may not work

well among Shi'a, who are permitted to combine prayers under certain circumstances.

9. World Values Survey, Four-Wave Aggregate of the Data Studies, variables F066 and F190 (Iran, 2000; Iraq, 2004; Turkey, 2001; United States, 1982, 1990, 1999), online analysis.

10. Look at Iranian figures for frequency of Muslim prayers.

11. Pew Research Center, "Israel's Religiously Divided Society," March 2016.

12. See Charles S. Liebman and Elihu Katz, eds., *The Jewishness of Israelis: Responses to the Guttman Report* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997). See also Robert D. Lee, *Religion and Politics in the Middle East* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2009), chap. 4.

13. World Values Survey, collected data 1982–2002, online analysis.

14. "The World's Muslims: Religion, Politics, and Society," Pew Research Center, April 2013, 9, 12.

15. World Values Survey, collected data 2006–2008, online analysis.

16. World Values Survey, 1990–2004, online analysis. Percentage mentioning "people of another religion": Algeria, 32.1; Iran, 20.1; Iraq, 34.8; Jordan, 32.5; Morocco, 33.8; Saudi Arabia, 40.4; Turkey, 35.1.

17. Abu Dhabi Gallup Center, "Progress and Tradition in the Gulf Cooperation Council States," May 2011, 47.

18. Mark Tessler, *Islam and Politics in the Middle East: Explaining the Views of Ordinary Citizens* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 69–70.

19. Tessler, 111.

20. Jonathan Fox, *A World Survey of Religion and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 47.
21. See Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).
22. Mark Tessler, "Popular Views about Islam and Politics in the Arab World," *II Journal*, University of Michigan (Fall 2011), <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/i/ij/11645653.0001.101/--popular-views-about-islam-and-politics-in-the-arab-world?rgn=main;view=fulltext>. Survey data are based on interviews in eight Arab countries. See the Arab Barometer Project.
23. See Fariba Adelkhah and François Georgeon, eds., *Ramadan et politique* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2000).
24. John L. Esposito, *Political Islam* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1998), 138.
25. Janine A. Clark, *Islam, Charity, and Activism: Middle-Class Networks and Social Welfare in Egypt, Jordan, and Yemen* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 12.
26. Sara Roy, " Hamas and the Transformation(s) of Political Islam in Palestine," *Current History* (January 2003): 16.
27. Khaled Hroub, *Hamas: A Beginner's Guide* (New York: Pluto Press, 2010), 69.
28. Sara Roy, *Hamas and Civil Society in Gaza: Engaging the Islamist Social Sector* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).
29. Clark, *Islam, Charity, and Activism*.
30. See Pieterella Van Doorn-Harder, "Copts: Fully Egyptian, but for a Tattoo?" and Charles D. Smith, "The Egyptian Copts: Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Definition of Identity for a Religious Minority," in ed.

Maya Shatzmiller, *Nationalism and Minority Identities in Islamic Societies* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005).

31. "Islamist Social Services," *POMEPS Studies* 9 (2014).

32. Charles Kurtzman and Ijlal Naqvi, "Do Muslims Vote Islamic?" *The Journal of Democracy* (April 2010): 50.

33. Vickie Langhor, "Of Islamists and Ballot Boxes: Rethinking the Relationship between Islamists and Electoral Politics," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 33 (2001): 591.

34. Ellen Lust, "Missing the Third Wave: Islam, Institutions, and Democracy in the Middle East," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 46 (2011): 163–90.

35. For a review of the literature on Islamic moderation through participation, see Langhor, "Of Islamists and Ballot Boxes," and Jillian Schwedler, "Can Islamists Become Moderates? Rethinking the Inclusion-Moderation Hypothesis," *World Politics* 63, no. 2 (2011): 347–76.

36. Schwedler, "Democratization, Inclusion and the Moderation of Islamist Parties," *Development* 50, no. 1 (2007): 59.

37. Stacey Patrick Yadav, "Understanding What Islamists Want: Public Debate and Contestation in Lebanon and Yemen," *The Middle East Journal* 64, no. 2 (2010): 199–213.

38. Cary Rosefsky Wickham, "The Path to Moderation: Strategy and Learning in the Formation of Egypt's Wasat Party," *Comparative Politics* (2004): 205–28; and Clark, "The Conditions of Islamist Moderation: Unpacking Cross-Ideological Cooperation in Jordan," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 38, no. 4 (November 2006): 539–60.

39. Clark and Schwedler, "Who Opened the Window? Women's Activism in Islamist Parties," *Comparative Politics* (2003): 293–312;

Mona El-Ghobashy, "The Metamorphosis of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 37, no. 3 (2005): 373–95; Anthony Shadid, *Legacy of the Prophet: Despots, Democrats, and the New Politics of Islam* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

40. Berna Turam, *Between Islam and the State: The Politics of Engagement* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007); Jason Brownlee, "Unrequited Moderation: Credible Commitments and State Repression in Egypt," *Studies in Comparative International Development (SCID)* 45, no. 4 (2010): 468–89; Eva Wegner and Miquel Pellicer, "Islamist Moderation without Democratization: The Coming of Age of the Moroccan Party of Justice and Development?" *Democratization* 16, no. 1 (2009): 157–75.

41. Gunes Murat Tezcür, "The Moderation Theory Revisited," *Party Politics* 16, no. 1 (2010): 69–88.

42. Lust, "Missing the Third Wave."

43. Kurtzman and Naqvi, "Do Muslims Vote Islamic?" 51.

44. Kurtzman, "Votes Versus Rights: The Debate That's Shaping the Outcome of the Arab Spring," *Foreign Policy* (February 10, 2012).

45. Kurtzman.

46. Gilles Kepel, *The Prophet and Pharaoh: Muslim Extremism in Egypt* (London: Al Saqi Books, 1985); Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); Sivan Mishal and A. Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas: Vision, Violence, and Coexistence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

47. Tarek Masoud, *Counting Islam: Religion, Class, and Elections in Egypt* (Cambridge University Press, 2014).

48. Clark, *Islam, Charity, and Activism: Middle-Class Networks and Social Welfare in Egypt, Jordan, and Yemen* (Bloomington: Indiana

University Press, 2003).

49. Lust, "Missing the Third Wave," 163–90.

50. Mohammed M. Hafez and Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Violence as Contention in the Egyptian Islamic Movement," in ed. Wiktorowicz, *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003).

51. Hafez and Wiktorowicz, "Violence as Contention."

52. Omar Ashour, *The De-Radicalization of the Jihadists: Transforming Armed Islamist Movements* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

53. Hafez, "From Marginalization to Massacres: A Political Process Explanation of GIA Violence in Algeria," in ed. Wiktorowicz, *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 46.

54. Hafez, "From Marginalization to Massacres."

55. Ashour, *The De-Radicalization of the Jihadists*.

56. Full text available at www.pbs.org/newshour/terrorism/international/fatwa_1998.html.

57. Mohammed Ayoub, *The Many Faces of Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Muslim World* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 149.

58. "Al-Qaeda Disavows ISIS Militants in Syria," BBC (February 3, 2014), <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26016318>.

59. For recent literature on ISIS, see Michael Weiss and Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*, Simon & Schuster, 2015; Jessica Stern and John M. Berger, *ISIS: The State of Terror*, HarperCollins, 2015.

60. See www.oic-oci.org.

61. For example, see Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

Chapter 5

1. The author would like to thank Ellen Lust for her help in the researching and writing of this chapter. This chapter also draws from the previous edition, authored by Janine A. Clark and Lina Khatib.
2. Unless otherwise stated, all statistics are taken from the 2016–2017 *Arab Barometer* survey. See <http://www.arabbarometer.org/waves/arab-barometer-wave-iv/>.
3. Transparency International, *People and Corruption: Middle East and North Africa Survey 2016*, http://issuu.com/transparencyinternational/docs/2016_gcb_mena_en?e=2496456/35314511.
4. Afrobarometer, “A Second Spring for Democracy in Post-Mubarak Egypt? Findings from Afrobarometer,” *Dispatch* 133, February 28, 2017, <http://afrobarometer.org/publications/ad133-second-spring-democracy-post-mubarak-egypt>.
5. Holger Albrecht, “The Nature of Political Participation,” in eds. Ellen Lust-Okar and Saloua Zerhouni, *Political Participation in the Middle East* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner), 15–32.
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Chapter 6

1. The extent of “modernization” is captured in quantitative and qualitative information about socioeconomic/human development, political institutions, and cultural changes, including attitudes toward women and the family. The early version of the modernization thesis was simplistic and linear and suggested a form of Westernization. A more sophisticated version, found in World Values Survey scholarship, posits that economic prosperity is a catalyst for cultural development, leading to social values that favor liberalization and thus promotes effective democracy (see Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change, and Democracy: The Human Development Sequence* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005]), although the attitudes among the population are also found to be highly correlated with the philosophical, political, and religious ideas that have been dominating in the country (see <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp>). The modernization perspective has a superficial similarity with a certain Marxist notion of the base-superstructure correspondence but lacks the latter’s emphasis on class and conflict.

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21. Elizabeth Ferris and Kimberly Stoltz, "Minorities, Displacement, and Iraq's Future," Brookings Institution and University of Bern, Project on Internal Displacement (December 2008), www.brookings.edu/papers/2008/1223_minorities_ferris.aspx. See also United States Committee on International Religious Freedom, *Annual Report 2010*, www.uscirf.gov/images/annual%20report%202010.pdf.

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Migration Policy Institute, 2008),
<http://www.migrationpolicyinstitute.org/transatlantic>.

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<http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/syria-population/>.

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36. See World Bank, *World Development Indicators* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2000), 108, Table 2.18; UNDP, *Arab Human Development Report 2009* (New York: UNDP, 2009); UNDP, *Human Development Report 2016* (New York: UNDP, 2016), Table 1.

37. Moghadam, *Modernizing Women*, chap. 6.

38. Maia Sieverding, Caroline Krafft and Nasma Berri, “How Are Families Changing in Jordan? New Evidence on Marriage and Fertility Trends Among Jordanians and Syrian Refugees.” *ERF Policy Brief* no. 35 (May 2018): 2, 4.

39. Farzaneh Roudi, “Iran Is Reversing Its Population Policy,” Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center, *Viewpoints* 7 (August 2012); Scott Peterson, “In Turkey, Cruel Tradition Trumps ‘Picture Perfect’ Gender Laws,” *The Christian Science Monitor*,
<https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2018/0124/In-Turkey-cruel-tradition-trumps-picture-perfect-gender-laws>.

40. Although the elder population is still a fraction of the young population, it is expected to grow in line with lowered fertility rates. Care for the elderly is already a matter of social concern in Lebanon, although it remains largely the responsibility of women in the family. Seiko Sugita, Simel Esim, and Mansour Omeira, “Caring Is Work: Meeting Social Care Needs in Lebanon” (paper prepared for Mediterranean Research Meeting, Montecatini Terme, March 2009).

The authorities in Iran have also raised the spectre of a growing elderly population and thus have ended the earlier state-funded family planning programs.

41. Data from UNDP, *Arab Human Development Report 2009*, 36, 232, Table 4.

42. The question of political inclusion after the Arab Spring was the subject of a Carnegie Corporation-funded study, directed by Dr. Marwa Shalaby of Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy, 2016–2018, in which the present author was a research participant.

43. Philippe Fargues, lecture at Harvard University, November 9, 2015. (Notes by Moghadam.) See also <http://www.migrationpolicycentre.eu/>.

44. *The Economist*, citing UNHCR data, June 30, 2018, 41–42.

45. Valentine M. Moghadam, "Women's Economic Participation in the Middle East: What Difference Has the Neoliberal Policy Turn Made?" *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 1, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 110–46.

46. Ragui Assaad, Rana Hendy, Moundir Lassassi, and Shaimaa Yassin, "Explaining the MENA Paradox: Rising Educational Attainment, yet Stagnant Female Labor Force Participation," IZA DP no. 11385 (Berlin: Institute of Labor Economics, March 2018). See also Moghadam, "Where Are Iran's Working Women?" *Viewpoints: Special Issue on the Iranian Revolution at 30* (Middle East Institute, January 2009), www.mideasti.org/.

47. MENA consistently ranks lowest on indicators pertaining to women and work, including laws and policies. See, for example, the World Bank's report *Women, Business, and the Law 2018*, Fig. 1.5: <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/999211524236982958/WBL-Key-Findings-Web-FINAL-2.pdf>. Other sources on institutional barriers are the OECD's States, Institutions, Gender Index (SIGI) and the World Economic Forum's annual *Global Gender Gap Report*.

48. These are among the findings of the international research project, “Female Employment and Dynamics of Inequality in the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia—2016–2018,” housed at London University’s School of Oriental and African Studies. For data and reports on female employment in Egypt, Jordan, and Tunisia, see Economic Research Forum for the Arab Countries, Iran, and Turkey (ERF). See also Niels Spierings, Jeroen Smits, and Mieke Verlook, “Micro- and Macrolevel Determinants of Women’s Employment in Six Arab Countries,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 72, no. 5 (Oct. 2010): 1391–1407.

49. Moghadam, “Women’s Economic Participation in the Middle East.”

50. ESCWA, *Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the ESCWA Region, 1994*; Radwan A. Shaban, Ragui Assaad, and Sulayman S. al-Qudsi, “The Challenge of Unemployment in the Arab Region,” *International Labour Review* 134, no. 1 (1995): 65–81; International Labour Organization (ILO), *World Labour Report 1999* (Geneva: International Labour Organization, 1999).

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Chapter 7

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3. The chapter focuses largely on fifteen countries, including the Gulf states (i.e., Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen), the countries of the Levant (i.e., Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria), the main North African countries (i.e., Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia), Turkey, and Iran. Excluded are Israel, because its economic structure and unique history make its political economy more comparable to that of the OECD states, and the sub-Saharan Arab countries of Djibouti, Mauritania, and Sudan, which are sometimes included in the region because they are members of the Arab League. The chapter briefly addresses Palestine, which has exhibited a *de*-development trajectory (see Sara Roy, “De-Development Revisited: Palestinian Economy and Society Since Oslo,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 28, no. 3 [Spring 1999]: 64–82) due to protracted conflict and occupation by Israel and Iraq, which has undergone an extended period of upheaval since 1990 as a result of the first and second Gulf wars, civil conflict, and the US occupation.

4. In 2018, the World Bank defined *high income* as a GNI level of greater than \$12,055 per capita, *upper-middle income* as \$3,896–\$12,055 per capita, *lower-middle income* as \$1,996–\$3,895 per capita, and *low income* as \$995 per capita or less.

5. Yemen only recently attained lower-middle-income status. In 2006, Yemen's per capita GNI was \$770, placing it in the lower-income category of countries. In 2007, it rose to \$950, thanks to the relatively recent development of the oil industry.

6. The UAE recently shifted to "moderate" oil dependence, which largely reflects the growing importance of financial services and related sectors in the federation's economies. Furthermore, with fuel exports accounting for 65 percent of total merchandise exports, the UAE lies on the cusp of "high" oil dependence.

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8. As discussed, the tendency for oil-rich economies to neglect the development of domestic manufacturing is consistent with what economists call the "Dutch Disease," an economic phenomenon named after the negative economic repercussions of the discovery of oil in the Netherlands in the 1970s. The Dutch Disease holds that the exploitation of natural resources increases a country's income, leading to increased demand for domestic currency. Given a constant supply of the national currency, this increased demand causes the appreciation of the exchange rate, in turn leading to a decline in non-resource-tradable goods, such as manufactures, which become more expensive and, hence, less competitive on world markets.

9. More recently, the UNDP developed the Inequality-Adjusted Human Development Index (IHDI). This index measures the achievements of a country in health, education, and income while accounting for the distribution of income among citizens by discounting the value of each factor by its level of inequality. Due to extensive missing data for the MENA countries, we report the values for HDI in Table 7.2.

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57. Rivlin, 101–12.

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60. Youssef, “Development, Growth and Policy Reform in the Middle East and North Africa since 1950,” 91–92.

61. Jeffrey B. Nugent and M. Hasem Pesaran, eds., *Explaining Growth in the Middle East* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2007), 14–15; and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Arab Human Development Report 2002* (New York: UNDP, 2002).

62. See Cammett, Diwan, Richards, and Waterbury, 2015, Figure 7.1.

63. World Bank, *Shaping the Future: A Long-Term Perspective of People and Job Mobility for the Middle East and North Africa* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2009); World Bank, *Unlocking the Employment Potential in the Middle East and North Africa: Toward a New Social Contract*, 2004.

64. Asef Bayat, “Transforming the Arab World: The Arab Human Development Report and the Politics of Change,” *Development and Change* 36, no. 6 (2005): 1225–37.

65. Marcus Noland and Howard Pack, *Arab Economies in a Changing World* (Washington, DC: Peterson Institute, 2007), 11.

66. See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2003 [1958]). For a critique of Weber's arguments vis-à-vis Islam and capitalism, see Maxime Rodinson, *Islam and Capitalism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979); Bernard Lewis, *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982); and Noland and Pack, *Arab Economies in a Changing World*, 10, 143–44.
67. Timur Kuran, "Why the Middle East Is Economically Underdeveloped: Historical Mechanisms of Institutional Stagnation," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 18, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 71–90; Kuran, *The Long Divergence: How Islamic Law Held Back the Middle East* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).
68. Noland and Pack, *Arab Economies in a Changing World*, 143–44.
69. Frederic L. Pryor, "The Economic Impact of Islam on Developing Countries," *World Development* 35, no. 11 (2007): 1815–35.
70. Murat Çizakça, "Review of Timur Kuran, *The Long Divergence: How Islamic Institutions Held Back the Middle East*," in H-Net, June 2011, http://eh.net/book_reviews/long-divergence-how-islamic-law-held-back-middle-east; Jack Goldstone, "Review Essay: Is Islam Bad for Business?" *Perspectives on Politics* 10, no. 1 (March 2012): 97–102.
71. Giacomo Luciani, "Allocation v. Production States: An Analytical Framework," in *The Arab State*, ed. Giacomo Luciani (London: Routledge, 1990), 65–84.
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73. Benjamin Smith, *Hard Times in the Lands of Plenty: Oil Politics in Iran and Indonesia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007).

74. Peter Evans, *Embedded Autonomy: States and Industrial Transformation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).
75. Pauline Jones-Luong and Erika Weinthal, "Rethinking the Resource Curse: Ownership Structure, Institutional Capacity and Domestic Constraints," *Annual Review of Political Science* 9 (2006): 241–63.
76. Ross 2015, *op. cit.*, 215.
77. See Cammett et al., 2015, chap. 2.
78. Youssef, "Development, Growth and Policy Reform in the Middle East and North Africa since 1950," 92.
79. World Bank, *Unlocking the Employment Potential in the Middle East and North Africa: Toward a New Social Contract* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2004), 2.
80. This argument corresponds with the growing body of research linking corruption and underdevelopment, as discussed earlier.
81. World Bank, *Better Governance for Development in the Middle East and North Africa: Enhancing Inclusiveness and Accountability* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2003), xviii.
82. World Bank, Governance Matters Dataset.
83. UNDP, *Arab Human Development Report 2002*.
84. Henry and Springborg, *Globalization and the Politics of Development in the Middle East*.
85. Eva Bellin (2004), Cammett (2007), Heydemann, *Networks of Privilege in the Middle East*.
86. Bayat, "Transforming the Arab World."
87. Salem 2003, *op. cit.*

88. For reviews of this literature and applications to the Middle East, see Bellin (2004) and Ross (2012).

89. Frederic Deyo, ed., *The Political Economy of the New Asian Industrialism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987).

90. Heydemann, *Networks of Privilege in the Middle East*.

91. David Kang, "Bad Loans to Good Friends: Money Politics and the Developmental State in Korea," *International Organization* 56, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 177–207.

92. Peter Evans, *Embedded Autonomy*; Atul Kohli, *State-Directed Development: Political Power and Industrialization in the Global Periphery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Matthew Lange and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, eds., *States and Development: Historical Antecedents of Stagnation and Advance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

93. Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson, and James A. Robinson, "Reversal of Fortune: Geography and Institutions in the Making of the Modern World Income Distribution," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 117, no. 4 (2002): 1231–94; and James Mahoney, *Colonialism and Postcolonial Development: Spanish America in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Chapter 8

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2. F. Gregory Gause III, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Curtis Ryan, *Inter-Arab Alliances* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2008).
3. Fred Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations: Power, Politics and Ideology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Laurie Brand, *Jordan's Inter-Arab Alliances* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Lisa Anderson, "Peace and Democracy in the Middle East: The Constraints of Soft Budgets," *Journal of International Affairs* 49 (1995): 819–32.
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5. L. Carl Brown, *International Politics and the Middle East: Old Rules, Dangerous Game* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984).
6. Malcolm Kerr, *The Arab Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics*.
7. Ryan, *Inter-Arab Alliances*.
8. David A. Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).
9. Lake, *Hierarchy*.
10. Shibley Telhami, *Power and Leadership in International Bargaining: The Path to the Camp David Accords* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

11. Lake, *Hierarchy*; Peter J. Katzenstein, *A World of Regions: Asia and Europe in the American Imperium* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).
12. Ian Lustick, "The Absence of Middle Eastern Great Powers: Political 'Backwardness' in Comparative Perspective," *International Organization* 51 (1997): 653–83.
13. Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations*; Steven Heydemann, ed., *War, Institutions, and Social Change in the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
14. Lynch, "Globalization and Arab Security," in ed. Jonathan Kirshner, *Globalization and National Security* (New York: Routledge, 2007).
15. Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public*.
16. Walt, *The Origin of Alliances*.
17. Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics*.
18. Gause, "Balancing What? Threat Perception and Alliance Choice in the Gulf," *Security Studies* (2003/2004): 274.
19. Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics*.
20. Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public*.
21. Benjamin Miller, "Balance of Power or the State-to-Nation Balance: Explaining Middle East War Propensity," *Security Studies* 15, no. 4 (2006): 658–705.
22. Gause, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf*; Ryan, *Inter-Arab Alliances*.
23. Patrick Seale, *The Struggle for Syria* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986).

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27. Joost Hiltermann, *A Poisonous Affair: America, Iraq, and the Gassing of Halabja* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
28. Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public*.
29. Fouad Ajami, *The Arab Predicament* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
30. Anderson, "Peace and Democracy in the Middle East."
31. Lustick, "The Absence of Middle Eastern Great Powers."
32. Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006).
33. Nazih Ayubi, *Over-Stating the Arab State* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 1996).
34. Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, Alistair Smith, Randolph M. Siverson, and James M. Morrow, *The Logic of Political Survival* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004).

Chapter 9

1. See Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954–62* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987). See also *The Battle of Algiers*, directed by G. Pontecorvo.
2. Military security is an intelligence service under the minister of defense. It functions as a sort of political police, whose mission is not only the security of the state but also that of the regime. In the 1980s, it changed its name to Département de Renseignement et de Sécurité (DRS).
3. Certain groups already existed in secret, such as FFS (Front des Forces Socialistes), PAGS (Parti de l'Avant Garde Socialiste), and MDA (Mouvement pour la Démocratie en Algérie). Others grew, although with no popular foundation.
4. The FIS, Front Islamique du Salut (Islamic Salvation Front), was the most popular Islamist party in Algeria. See Lahouari Addi, "Islamicist Utopia and Democracy," in *The Annals of American Academy of Political and Social Science* (November 1992).
5. Kabylia is a mountainous area in eastern Algeria, which is inhabited by Berber speakers generally hostile to the government. It has been a stronghold of Algerian nationalism.
6. See Hugh Roberts, *The Battlefield: Algeria 1988–2002: Studies in Broken Polity* (London: Verso, 2003).
7. See Addi, "The Algerian Army and the State," in eds. Kees Koonings and Dirk Kruijt, *Political Armies: The Military and Nation Building in the Age of Democracy* (London: Zed Books, 2002).
8. In June 2018, the military intelligence arrested Kamel Chikhi, a wealthy person whose business deals with the import of meat from Latin America. He has strong ties with high-ranking officers and civil servants who helped him to build a colossal fortune. He could not be

protected by these people because he was involved in international drug traffic. Many of his protectors have also been arrested. See *El-Watan*, July 26, 2018 (La proximité douteuse de 2 généraux-majors avec Kamel Chikhi), and *Liberté*, August 5, 2018 (Liens supposés de Kamel Chikhi avec des fonctionnaires de l'Etat).

9. *El Watan Economie*, January 15, 2006.

10. See the Office National des Statistiques official website (www.ons.dz) for the comprehensive employment reports with demographic and regional breakdowns.

11. William C. Byrd, "Algérie: Contre-performances économiques et fragilité institutionnelle," *Confluence Méditerranée*, no. 45 (Spring 2003).

12. From 1992 to 2002, there were two hundred thousand deaths in a "dirty war" in which Islamist guerrillas and counter-guerrillas took the civilian population hostage. One of the stakes of this war was international public opinion, especially French, in order to discredit the adversary and gain support in the West. There were massacres of villagers, including women and children. In the absence of credible reporting, Amnesty International demanded an international commission of inquiry, which was never set up because of French support of the Algerian government. In 2000, the new president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, called for a stop to the violence and offered amnesty and money to those who left the ranks of the insurgents. Since then, violence has decreased, although some Islamists refused his offer.

13. See Lahouari Addi, "Algeria's Joyful Revolution," *The Nation*, March 28, 2019.

Chapter 10

1. The quotation comes to us from John Holland Rose's *Life of Napoleon*, but it is used to open the Earl of Cromer's 1908 *Modern Egypt*. According to Rose, Napoleon made the statement "emphatically" in his first interview with the governor of St. Helena. The diminutive French conqueror was referring to Egypt's agricultural abundance and its location at the crossroads of Europe, Africa, and Western Asia.

2. L. Carl Brown, *Diplomacy in the Middle East: The International Relations of Regional and Outside Powers* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004), 101.

3. Arnold J. Toynbee, "The Present Situation in Palestine," *International Affairs* 10, no. 1 (January 1931): 42.

4. Thomas L. Friedman, "The Land of Denial," *New York Times*, June 5, 2002; Egypt State Information Service, "Mubarak: Peace Is Made by Strong, Brave Leaders," May 11, 2009; Helene Cooper, "Obama to Speak from Egypt in Address to Muslim World," *New York Times*, May 8, 2009. One might reasonably ask, of course, why Obama would choose the heart of the Arab world for an address to the Muslim world, given that the former makes up only a small part of the latter.

5. We often read that Nasser ruled Egypt from 1952 to 1970, although this is technically incorrect. See, for example, Asad Abu Khalil, *The Battle for Saudi Arabia: Royalty, Fundamentalism, and Global Power* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2004), 32–33; Ninette S. Fahmy, *The Politics of Egypt: State-Society Relationship* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 33; and Milton Viorst, *In the Shadow of the Prophet: The Struggle for the Soul of Islam* (New York: Anchor Books, 1998), 42. Though the coup that brought down Egypt's monarchy did occur in 1952, Nasser emerged as the undisputed leader of the so-called Revolutionary Command Council only in 1954, after a power struggle with Egypt's first president, Muhammad

Naguib. Even then, his official title was “prime minister” until his appointment to the presidency in late 1955. The reason this matters is that extending Nasser’s rule all the way back to 1952 obscures the fact that there was great uncertainty and debate in those early years about what kind of government Egypt would have. Though Nasser eventually won, his victory was by no means assured.

6. The Arab League has twenty-two members: Algeria, Bahrain, the Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, the Palestinian Authority, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. Of the Arab League’s six secretaries general, only one was not Egyptian: From Egypt’s expulsion in 1979 until 1990, the Arab League was headed by a Tunisian politician named Chedli Klibi.

7. Data on book and film production comes from UNESCO’s Institute for Statistics, www.uis.unesco.org. The scholar Fouad Ajami (in “The Sorrows of Egypt,” *Foreign Affairs* [1995]) noted that Egypt “produces a mere 375 books a year” and invited us to “contrast this with Israel’s 4,000 titles.” But according to UNESCO, Egypt in 1995 actually produced 2,215 titles. Israel, in contrast, was reported to have produced 1,969 books (although that figure is from 1998, the only year for which the Israeli data were available). Of course, Israel’s much smaller population (five million to Egypt’s eighty million) means that the Jewish state has a much higher ratio of books produced per person than does Egypt. On the question of the Egyptian dialect as the *lingua franca* of the Arab world, see Hussein Amin, *New Patterns in Global Television: Peripheral Vision* (London: Oxford University Press, 1999), 102.

8. David Patel, Valerie Bunce, and Sharon Wolchik, “Fizzles and Fireworks: A Comparative Perspective on the Diffusion of Popular Protests in the Middle East and North Africa,” in ed. Marc Lynch, *The Arab Uprisings in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

9. Robert Baer, *The Devil We Know: Dealing with the New Iranian Superpower* (New York: Random House, 2008), 151.

10. The precise number of dead in that incident is a matter of dispute. Human Rights Watch claims more than one thousand deaths (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/08/12/egypt-raba-killings-likely-crimes-against-humanity>). But Egyptian government sources claim a smaller number of casualties—see, for example, <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/08/16/health-ministry-raises-death-toll-of-wednesdays-clashes-to-638/>.

11. The architecture and many of the details of this section are drawn from two magisterial sources: Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot, *A Short History of Modern Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); and P. J. Vatikiotis, *The Modern History of Egypt* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1969). It also draws, with permission, on material from the chapter on Egypt from the eleventh edition of this volume.

12. The historian Roger Owen has memorably referred to the “somewhat artificial appearance” of many Middle Eastern states, with their “dead-straight boundaries that were so obviously the work of a British or French colonial official using a ruler.” See Roger Owen, *State Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

13. J. Patrick Bannerman, *Islam in Perspective: A Guide to Islamic Society, Politics and Law* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 129.

14. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narmer_Palette.

15. The Arabic name for Egypt, *misr*, appears seven times in the Qur’an: Chapter 10, Verse 87; Chapter 12, Verses 21, 43, 74, 94, and 99; and Chapter 43, Verse 51.

16. Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot, *A Short History of Modern Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 1.

17. Andrew McGregor, *A Military History of Modern Egypt: From the Ottoman Conquest to the Ramadan War* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2006), 10. It's possible to take this too far. The fact is that Egypt always had a knack for, in the words of one nineteenth-century writer, "conquering its conquerors" (Charles Dudley Warner, "Editor's Drawer," *Harper's Magazine* 82, no. 492 [May 1891]: 971–72). The descendants of Muhammad (Mehmet) Ali, for example, were largely Egyptianized by the time of their expulsion in 1952.

18. The erasure of the pre-Islamic histories of the "converted peoples" is explored, if in somewhat polemical fashion, in V. S. Naipaul, *Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey* (New York: Knopf, 1981) and *Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions among the Converted Peoples* (New York: Random House, 1998).

19. Dates for the Fatimid, Ayubid, and Mameluke dynasties are from Heinz Halm, *The Fatimids and Their Traditions of Learning* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1997). A highly readable account of the rivalry of Saladin and Richard is James Reston Jr., *Warriors of God: Richard the Lionheart and Saladin in the Third Crusade* (New York: Doubleday, 2001).

20. See, for example, Arthur Goldschmidt Jr., *Modern Egypt: The Formation of a Nation-State*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2004), 15.

21. For Napoleon's sojourn in Egypt, see Alan Schom, *Napoleon Bonaparte: A Life* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), 107–87.

22. In addition to cataloging these impacts of the French expedition, Max Rodenbeck, in *Cairo: The City Victorious* (London: Vintage, 2000), 121, reports another contribution made by the French to Egyptian society: "To this day," he writes, "peasant women of the Nile Delta wear dresses cut in the fashion of late eighteenth century France."

23. Marsot, *A Short History of Modern Egypt*, 51.

24. Ibid., 52.

25. For an account of Ali's attempts to make Egypt an economic and political power and a controversial explanation for why they ultimately failed, see David Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some Are So Rich and Some So Poor* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 392–421.

26. Ibid.

27. Ian S. Lustick, "The Absence of Middle Eastern Great Powers: 'Political Backwardness' in Historical Perspective," *International Organization* 51, no. 4 (2003): 653–58.

28. Marsot, *A Short History of Modern Egypt*, 66.

29. According to Marsot, Said and de Lesseps were old friends from de Lesseps's day as French consul. Said, she tells us, was always obese, and he chafed under his father's increasingly draconian weight-loss regimens. De Lesseps, she says, helped the young Said circumvent these restrictions by sneaking him plates of pasta—a favor Said would return years later by granting de Lesseps the Suez Canal concession on exceedingly favorable terms (Marsot, *A Short History of Modern Egypt*, 66).

30. In recognition of Egypt's special status, Ismail Pasha had secured from the Ottoman sultan the right to label himself a *khedive* (Persian for prince, ruler, or sovereign) instead of the traditional term, *vali*, which was used for Ottoman governors. In 1914, the title bestowed on Egypt's rulers changed when the country was declared a sultanate, and it changed yet again in 1922 when formal Egyptian independence from the British Empire rendered Egypt a kingdom. See Majid Khadduri, "The Anglo Egyptian Controversy," *Proceedings of the American Academy of Political Science* 24, no. 4 (January 1952): 82–100.

31. Max Rodenbeck, *Cairo: The City Victorious*, 131.

32. Ibid., 131.

33. This statement is quoted in a variety of places. The earliest mention I could find of it is in Appleton's *Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events of the Year 1878: Embracing Political Civil, Military, and Social Affairs: Public Document; Biography, Statistics, Commerce, Finance, Literature, Science, Agriculture, and Mechanical Industry* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1890), 266. According to this source, Ismail made the statement to the British representative of his creditors. Though it is often hinted that Ismail's statement was an idle boast, it appears from the context of the remark that Ismail was speaking less about the grandeur of his architectural achievements than of the need to reform his country.

34. Donald M. Reid, "Egyptian History Through Stamps," *The Muslim World*, 62 no. 3 (July 1972): 213.

35. Mohammed Naguib, *Egypt's Destiny* (London: Gollancz, 1955), 80.

36. Marsot, *A Short History of Modern Egypt*, 102. According to a biography of Nasser penned by his daughter, his rank at this time was that of major. See http://nasser.bibalex.org/Common/pictures01-%20sira_en.htm#3

37. Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 71.

38. Donald M. Reid, "Political Assassination in Egypt, 1910–1954," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 15, no. 4 (1982): 625–51.

39. Robert Bianchi, "The Corporatization of the Egyptian Labor Movement," *The Middle East Journal* 40, no. 3 (Summer 1986): 429–44.

40. Jacob M. Landau, *Parliaments and Parties in Egypt* (New York: Hyperion Press, 1979), 7.

41. Ibid. According to Landau, Muhammad Ali's legislative council included "33 high-ranking officials, 24 district officials and 99 of the notables of Egypt."

42. Fahmy, *The Politics of Egypt*, 44.

43. Don Peretz, "Democracy and Revolution in Egypt," *The Middle East Journal* 13, no. 1 (1959): 27. The revolution's six principles included ending feudalism, the British occupation, and the domination of capital; and establishing democracy, a strong national army, and social justice.

44. Robert Springborg, "Patrimonialism and Policy Making in Egypt," *Middle Eastern Studies* 15, no. 1 (January 1979): 49–69.

45. See Jason Brownlee, *Democracy Prevention: The Politics of the US-Egyptian Alliance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

46. Tamir Moustafa, *The Struggle for Constitutional Power: Law, Politics, and Economic Development in Egypt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

47. Mona Makram-Ebeid, "Political Opposition in Egypt: Democratic Myth or Reality?" *Middle East Journal* 40 (1989): 423–36.

48. See Samer Shehata and Joshua Stacher, "The Brotherhood Goes to Parliament," *Middle East Report* 240 (2006); and Brownlee, "The Decline of Pluralism in Mubarak's Egypt," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 4 (2002): 9.

49. For an in-depth exploration of the dynamics of parliamentary elections under Mubarak, see Lisa Blaydes, *Elections and Distributive Politics in Mubarak's Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

50. Springborg, *Mubarak's Egypt: Fragmentation of the Political Order* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989), 192.

51. Morsi attempted to reverse the court's dissolution of the Islamist-majority parliament but was blocked by the military. One wonders how Egyptian politics might have turned out had the legislature remained in place. Though the Muslim Brotherhood constituted a plurality of the parliament, it did not possess a majority, and its Salafist allies could not have been counted on to serve as a mere rubber stamp for Morsi's policies. There are thus reasons to believe that the dissolution of parliament was a grave setback for Egyptian pluralism, even as the court that undertook it likely believed it was doing the opposite.

52. Robert Springborg, *Egypt*, John Wiley & Sons, 2017.

53. Springborg, 2017.

54. Steven A. Cook, *Ruling but Not Governing: The Military and Political Development in Egypt, Algeria, and Turkey* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).

55. Alex Blumberg, "Why Egypt's Military Cares about Home Appliances," NPR News, February 4, 2011, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/money/2011/02/10/133501837/why-egypts-military-cares-about-home-appliances>.

56. See Springborg, "Egypt's Future: Yet Another Turkish Model?" *The International Spectator* 49, no. 1 (2014). See also Zeinab Abul-Magd, "The Egyptian Republic of Retired Generals," *Foreign Policy Middle East Channel* (May 28, 2012), <http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/05/08/the-egyptian-republic-of-retired-generals/>.

57. Peter Harling and Yasser El Shimy, "Egypt's Quest for Itself," *Orient XXI* (January 13, 2014), <http://orientxxi.info/magazine/egypt-s-quest-for-itself,0474>.

58. See Sharan Grewal, "Soldiers of Democracy: Military Legacies and Democratic Transitions in Egypt and Tunisia" (doctoral dissertation, Department of Politics, Princeton University, 2018).

59. See El-Shimy, “Fumbled Democracy: Why Egypt’s Transition Floundered,” paper presented at the Midwest Political Science Association Annual Meeting, Chicago, April 2015.
60. Mona El-Ghobashy, “Unsettling the Authorities: Constitutional Reform in Egypt,” *Middle East Report* 226 (Spring 2003): 28–34.
61. See, for example, Patrick Kingsley, “Egyptian Police Go on Strike,” *The Guardian* (March 10, 2013), <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/mar/10/egypt-police-strike>.
62. See Max Siegelbaum, “In Egypt, Police Are the Real Hooligans,” *Foreign Policy* (February 10, 2015), <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/02/10/in-egypt-police-are-the-real-hooligans-deaths-cairo-soccer-stadium/>.
63. “Egypt’s al-Sisi Apologises for Police Brutality,” *al-Jazeera* (June 8, 2015), <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/06/egypt-sisi-apologises-police-brutality-150607172031792.html>.
64. Kristen McTighe, “Proposed Terror Law Provokes Outcry in Egypt,” *Financial Times* (July 8, 2015), <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/e6abb6f8-256b-11e5-9c4e-a775d2b173ca.html#axzz3fWUzQ3QM>.
65. Yezid Sayegh, “Missed Opportunity: The Politics of Police Reform in Egypt and Tunisia,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (March 17, 2015), <http://carnegie-mec.org/2015/03/17/missed-opportunity-politics-of-police-reform-in-egypt-and-tunisia>.
66. Moustafa, “Law versus the State: The Judicialization of Politics in Egypt,” *Law and Social Inquiry* 28 (2003): 889.
67. Moustafa, “Law versus the State.”
68. Moustafa, “Law versus the State,” and Moustafa, *The Struggle for Constitutional Power*.

69. Nathan J. Brown and Michele Dunne, "Egypt's Controversial Constitutional Amendments: A Textual Analysis" (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2007).

70. See, for example, Brownlee, "Morsi Was No Role Model for Islamic Democrats," *Middle East Institute* (July 17, 2013), <http://www.mei.edu/content/morsi-was-no-role-model-islamic-democrats>.

71. Karl Vick, "Egypt's Courts Mock Justice with More Death Sentences," *Time* (April 28, 2014; appended, May 1, 2014).

72. On the weakness of opposition parties in Egypt and the Arab world more broadly, see Ellen Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World: Incumbents, Opponents, and Institutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

73. See Dina Bishara, *Contesting Authoritarianism: Labor Challenges to the State in Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

74. Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public: Iraq, Al-Jazeera, and Middle East Politics Today* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

75. See Carrie Rosefsky-Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam: Religion, Activism, and Political Change in Egypt* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

76. Readers interested in learning more about the menagerie of Egyptian political parties in the immediate aftermath of the January 25, 2011, revolution are advised to consult the Egyptian Parties and Movements website composed by the online magazine *Jadaliyya* and the Egyptian newspaper *al-Ahram*, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/contributors/43055>.

77. The Brotherhood's FJP actually ran in coalition with several smaller parties as part of a grandly named "Democratic Alliance." In

addition to the Brotherhood's 217 seats, other alliance members won 11 seats.

78. The Party of Light ran in coalition with other Islamist parties, which together captured around 16 additional seats on top of the 107 captured by al-Nūr.

79. Allocation of seats by party in the new legislature is available at the website of the Egyptian Higher Elections Committee (<http://parliament2011.elections.eg/>) and can be viewed in English here:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egyptian_parliamentary_election,_2011.

80. "Ahdath damiyya fi hizb al wafd [Bloody Events in the Wafd Party]," *Al-Ahram* (April 2, 2006).

81. See Masoud, *Counting Islam: Religion, Class, and Elections in Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2014).

82. Details of the system, on which this account draws, are found in Mohamed Menshawy, "Egypt's New Parliamentary Election Law: Back to the Future," *Middle East Institute* (July 17, 2014), <http://www.mei.edu/content/at/egypts-new-parliamentary-election-law-back-future>.

83. According to the website of the Egyptian chamber of deputies, the current parliament is comprised of 348 independents and 244 party members. See <http://www.parliament.gov.eg/HOME/AdmissionMain.aspx>.

84. See poll results at http://www.baseera.com.eg/pdf_poll_file_en/participation%20in%20parliamentary%20elections-%20En.pdf.

85. "Egypt Court Bans Muslim Brotherhood's Political Wing," <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28722935>.

86. Ashraf al-Sherif, "Egypt's Salafists at a Crossroads," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (April 29, 2015), <http://carnegieendowment.org/2015/04/29/egypt-s-salafists-at-crossroads/i7y8>.

87. Nancy Messieh and Ali Mohamed, "Who Is Participating in Egypt's Parliamentary Elections?" *Atlantic Council* (February 20, 2015), <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/egyptsource/who-is-participating-in-egypt-s-parliamentary-elections>.

88. Amr Mohamed Kandil, "51 'Free Egyptians' Party Members Become Members of 'Nation's Future,'" *Egypt Today*, May 22, 2018.

89. An important, if tendentious, account of the violence that has wracked Egypt since 2013 is provided by Human Rights Watch at <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/egypt>.

90. See <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/06/world/middleeast/egypts-interior-minister-survives-attack.html>. For ABM's claim of responsibility for the attack, see http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/10/ansar_jerusalem_release.php.

91. See <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/three-egyptian-judges-shot-dead-in-sinai-hours-after-mohamed-morsi-sentenced-to-death-10255067.html>.

92. See http://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2015/06/29/Egyptian-prosecutor-Barakat-killed-in-car-bomb-assassination/2051435584537/.

93. Tamara Qiblawi and Bryony Jones, "Grief and Desperation in Egypt's Coptic Community after Palm Sunday Attacks," CNN, April 10, 2017, <https://www.cnn.com/2017/04/10/middleeast/egypt-coptic-community-grief-anger/index.html>.

94. Ian Lee, Laura Smith-Spark, and Hamdi Alkhshali, “Egypt Hunts for Killers after Mosque Attack Leaves at Least 235 Dead,” CNN, November 24, 2017, <https://www.cnn.com/2017/11/24/africa/egypt-sinai-mosque-attack/index.html>.

95. This section draws, with permission, on material from the eleventh edition of this volume.

96. Edward P. Djerejian, “The U.S. and the Middle East in a Changing World,” Address at Meridian House International, Washington, DC, June 2, 1992.

97. This argument has been made most effectively by several scholars, including Quintan Wiktorowicz, Diane Singerman, and Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, among others. Masoud (2014) examines empirical evidence for this proposition.

98. Lust, Gamal Soltan, and Jakob Wichmann, “Egypt’s Swinging Centre,” Al-Jazeera (July 26, 2013), <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/07/201372612477541330.html>. See also Masoud, *Counting Islam: Religion, Class, and Elections in Egypt*, especially Chapter 5.

99. Testimonials to the “local embeddedness” of Islamists—which I take to mean the organic, daily participation of Islamist activists in the social lives of their communities—can be found in Wickham (2002) and Janine Astrid Clark, *Islam, Charity and Activism: Middle Class Networks and Social Welfare in Egypt, Jordan and Yemen* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004). Melani Cammett and Pauline Jones-Luong, “Is There an Islamist Political Advantage?” *Annual Review of Political Science* 17 (2014), among others. For an interesting comparison with Hindu fundamentalists in India, who appear to share some of these organizational and behavioral characteristics, see Tariq Thachil, *Elite Parties, Poor Voters: How Social Services Win Votes in India* (Cambridge University Press, 2014).

100. Ed Payne and Saad Abedine, "Egypt Charges Coptic Christians Linked to Infamous Video," CNN (September 18, 2012), <http://www.cnn.com/2012/09/18/world/film-protests/>.

101. This paragraph draws on material previously published in Masoud, "Losing Egypt," in ed. Nicholas Burns, *The Arab Revolutions and American Policy* (Aspen Institute Press, 2013), 96.

102. See video at <http://new.elfagr.org/Detail.aspx?nwsId=242959&secid=1&vid=2#.UNOF5o5Avd4>.

103. Essam el-Ibaidi, "Christians Angry after Biltagi and Higazi Declare That Copts Are Fighting the Islamic Project," al-Wafd (December 14, 2012).

104. Hussam Abd al-Raziq, "Christians Send SMS Messages to Voters in Suhag Instructing Them to Vote against the Constitution," Ikhwanonline (December 15, 2012), <http://www.ikhwanonline.com/new/Article.aspx?ArtID=131916&SecID=230>.

105. "Al-Bābā Tawāḍrūs muhājimān al-rabī' al-'arabī wa ḥukm Mursī: tarshīḥ al-Sīsī wājib waṭanī [Pope Tawadros Attacks the Arab Spring and Morsi's Rule: al-Sisi's Nomination Is a National Duty]," CNN Arabic (March 23, 2014), <http://arabic.cnn.com/middleeast/2014/03/23/tawadrous-egypt-mursi-sisi>.

106. Ibid.

107. This section is based on material from the eleventh edition of this volume, with permission.

108. The author thanks Diana Greenwald of the University of Michigan for pointing him to the source of this data.

109. Egypt's Ministry of Investment, which is responsible for overseeing Egypt's privatization program, reports that its portfolio of

companies up for privatization includes 153 public sector companies as well as shares in 669 public-private joint ventures. See “Egypt Investment Observer, Third Quarter, January–March, Fiscal Year 2008–2009” (Cairo: Ministry of Investment, Arab Republic of Egypt, 2009).

110. See <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/articles/africa/12880-al-sisi-raises-prices-for-the-poor-to-subsidise-the-wealthy>.

111. See <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/01/12/us-egypt-bread-idUSKBN0KL14520150112>.

112. See <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/egyptsource/one-year-on-the-economy-under-sisi>.

113. See <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/egypt/11014605/Egypt-s-president-announces-plans-for-new-Suez-Canal.html>.

114. Readers may explore Suez Canal monthly revenues at <https://www.ceicdata.com/en/egypt/maritime-transport-revenues/maritime-transport-suez-canal-revenues>.

115. See <http://www.egypttoday.com/Article/3/41562/Zohr-gas-field-in-numbers>.

116. See <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/3/162/125127/Business/EE-DC-/Live-updates-Gulf-leaders-pledge--bn-in-aid,-inves.aspx>.

117. See <http://www.thecairopost.com/news/157108/business/contract-negotiations-on-egypt-s-new-capital-city-in-progress-minister>.

118. This section (sans updates added by the author) first appeared in the eleventh edition of this volume. The material is reused here with permission.

119. See

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/02/05/israels-growing-ties-with-former-arab-foes/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.d4ed7596d606.

120. Ashok Swain, "Ethiopia, the Sudan, and Egypt: The Nile River Dispute," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 35 (1997): 675–94.

121. Arthur Okoth-Owiro, "State Succession and International Treaty Commitments: A Case Study of the Nile Water Treaties," Konrad Adenauer Stiftung Occasional Papers (2004), 28.

122. The details in this paragraph draw from "Nile River Dispute," Inventory of Conflict and Environment Case Study, American University, <http://www1.american.edu/iced/ice/bluenile.htm>.

123. Mohamed Hafez, "Testing the Waters," *Ahram Weekly* (May 6–12, 2010), <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2010/997/eg15.htm>.

124. Mike Thomson, "Nile Restrictions Anger Ethiopia," BBC News (February 3, 2005), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4232107.stm>.

125. See <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/06/04/morsi-forms-committee-on-dam-meeting-mistakenly-televised/>.

126. See <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/03/egypt-ethiopia-sudan-sign-accord-nile-dam-150323193458534.html>.

127. John Waterbury, "Is the Status Quo in the Nile Basin Viable?" *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 4, no. 1 (1997): 287–99.

128. See, for example, Masoud, "Provocateur-in-Chief," *Slate* (July 2, 2012), http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/foreigners/2012/07/mohammed_morsi_may_be_unpredictable_new_factor_in_egypt_s_relations_with_the_united_states_and_israel.html.

129. See

http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/22/world/middleeast/egypt-leader-and-obama-forge-link-in-gaza-deal.html?_r=0.

130. Front page, *al-Ahram* (July 22, 2015).

131. See

<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/11/world/middleeast/egypt-gives-saudi-arabia-2-islands-in-a-show-of-gratitude.html?module=inline>.

132. See <http://news.yahoo.com/saudi-arabia-egypt-show-discord-over-syria-193501210.html>.

133. Mona El-Ghobashy, "The Praxis of the Egyptian Revolution," *MER* 258 41 (Spring 2011), http://www.merip.org/mer/mer258/praxis-egyptian-revolution#_6.

Chapter 11

1. See James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989).
2. We should bear in mind that there are some important conceptual differences between a theocracy and a liberal democracy. Theocracy assumes that an objectively true belief system must be promoted in public life. Liberalism has a thinner view of public life as a space for individuals to coexist despite their diverse private beliefs. Liberal democracy presupposes that all citizens are eligible to hold all leadership positions, but a theocratic system holds that top officials must be drawn from a minority of people specially trained in religious doctrine.
3. See the full text of the constitution at <https://bit.ly/2Ojtqr5>.
4. See Mark Gasiorowski and Malcolm Byrne, eds. *Mohammad Mosaddeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2004).
5. Oil was first discovered in Iran in 1908, and its extraction began in 1911.
6. See Mehrzad Boroujerdi and Kourosch Rahimkhani, "The Office of the Supreme Leader: Epicenter of a Theocracy," in Daniel Brumberg and Farideh Farhi, eds., *Power and Change in Iran: Politics of Contention and Conciliation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 135–65.
7. Because the supreme leader appoints the head of the judiciary and has a say in the allocation of many posts held by high-level judicial officials, the principle of separation of powers and the independence of the judiciary are severely undermined.

8. According to the World Bank, 53 percent of the Iranian public was using the Internet by 2016. See <https://bit.ly/2LLcEmE>. Furthermore, some seventy-one million Iranians use mobile phones. Available at <https://bit.ly/2v905XI>.

9. See Kevan Harris, *A Social Revolution: Politics and the Welfare State in Iran* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017).

10. UN Development Programme, "Human Development Report 2014 Sustaining Human Progress, Iran (Islamic Republic of)," <https://bit.ly/2Lq3UD0>.

11. See <https://bbc.in/2mJAWPx>.

Chapter 12

1. For a summary of how the delineation of borders unfolded over time, see Sara Pursley, “‘Lines Drawn on an Empty Map’: Iraq’s Borders and the Legend of the Artificial State,” parts 1 and 2, *Jadaliyya*, June 2, 2015, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/32153/%60Lines-Drawn-on-an-Empty-Map%60-Iraq%E2%80%99s-Borders-and-the-Legend-of-the-Artificial-State-Part-2>.
2. James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 2.
3. Iraqi nationalists at the 1920 Damascus meeting called for territory from the Persian Gulf to the bank of the Euphrates north of Dayr al-Zur in present-day Syria and to the Tigris near Diyarbakir in present-day Turkey. The Ottoman division of the territory into three provinces was relatively recent—about thirty years old—and had been preceded by multiple alternative subdivisions. For a summary of these changes, see Reidar Visser, “Proto-Political Conceptions of ‘Iraq’ in Late Ottoman Times,” *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies* 3, no. 2 (2009).
4. Britain sought to guarantee a strategic location on the route to the crown jewel of their empire, India, control Iraq’s agricultural trade, and launch petroleum exploration by the Turkish Petroleum Company (after 1929, the Iraq Petroleum Company). Under the terms of the mandate, King Faisal, like his counterparts in Egypt and Transjordan, would heed Britain’s advice in financial, international, security, and (some) judicial affairs, and British officials would serve as advisers and inspectors throughout the government.
5. For the argument that the perception of endemic and unmanageable threat leads to elite collective action, see Dan Slater, *Ordering Power: Contentious Politics and Authoritarian Leviathans in Southeast Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

6. The most notable was the 1920 revolt, in which Shi'i clerics, urban intellectuals, and tribal leaders across northwestern, central, and southern Iraq articulated nearly identical demands: a "completely independent" Iraqi state stretching from the Persian Gulf to somewhere north of Mosul, distinct from Syria, and with its capital in Baghdad. Britain suppressed the revolt through extensive aerial bombardment and arrested and exiled many of its leaders. An estimated six thousand Iraqis and five hundred British and Indian soldiers died in the revolt, which became part of the founding myth of Iraqi nationalism. [See Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 44]. The British Royal Air Force put down disturbances an additional 130 times before independence in 1932, but these did not feature similar levels of elite coordination [Mohammad A. Tarbush, *The Role of the Military in Politics: A Case Study of Iraq to 1941* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1982), 17].

7. Charles Tilly, "Reflections on the History of European State-Making," in Tilly, ed., *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 42.

8. The present-day border with Saudi Arabia was settled by officials negotiating a line connecting wells in the desert in December 1922 after a British air offensive halted the northward military expansion of Abdulaziz ibn Saud of Najd. The Syrian border remained mobile until independence, when it was finalized by a historically contingent decision (Eliezer Tauber, "The Struggle for Dayr Al-Zur: The Determination of Borders between Syria and Iraq," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 23, no. 3 [1991]: 361–85.) The Turkish border was the most contentious of this period, yet even there, Arab, Kurdish, and Turkish nationalist claims were settled in 1926 by British air power and oil interests (Britain awarded the Mosul province to Iraq—despite vehement Turkish and Kurdish separatist opposition—because it had secured oil concession from King Faisal in 1925. Turkey agreed to sign a border agreement in 1926. Oil was discovered in Kirkuk in 1927). The Kuwait and Iran borders remained

undefined in this period—a legacy that would later precipitate two major interstate wars.

9. Nelida Fuccaro, “Ethnicity, State Formation, and Conscription in Postcolonial Iraq: The Case of the Yazidi Kurds of Jabal Sinjar,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29, no. 4 (November 1997): 559–80.

10. Ibrahim Al-Marashi and Sammy Salama, *Iraq’s Armed Forces: An Analytical History* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 24–26.

11. Tripp, 47.

12. Religious Statistics for Iraq, 1 August 1932, FO 406/70.

13. Pursley.

14. English translation of Iraq’s 1925 constitution is available at <http://www.constitution.org/cons/iraq/iraqiconst19250321.html>.

15. For an English translation of the full text, see https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Iraq_2005.pdf.

16. M. S. Hasan, “Growth and Structure of Iraq’s Population, 1867–1947,” *Bulletin of the Oxford University Institute of Economics and Statistics* 20, no. 4 (1958): 344.

17. Yitzhak Nakash, “The Conversion of Iraq’s Tribes to Shi’ism,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26, no. 3 (1994): 443–63.

18. Nathan J. Brown, “Debating Islam in Post-Baathist Iraq,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace March 2005, <http://carnegieendowment.org/files/PO13.Brown.FINAL2.pdf>.

19. Shi’i religious parties claimed it violates religious freedom by not allowing Shi’a to practice their own law. Ultimately the constitution does not overturn the law but adds ambiguous language regarding individuals’ freedom in matters of personal status according to their

“religions, sects, beliefs, or choices.” Nathan J. Brown, “The Final Draft of the Iraqi Constitution: Analysis and Commentary,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (2005), <http://carnegieendowment.org/files/FinalDraftSept16.pdf>.

20. International Organization for Migration, *Five Years of Post-Samarra Displacement* (February 2011), <http://iomiraq.net/reports/five-years-post-samarra-displacement>.

21. Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, “The Transformation of Land Tenure and Rural Social Structure in Central and Southern Iraq, 1870–1958,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 15, no. 4 (1983): 491–505.

22. Between 1947 and 1957, the population of Iraq’s three largest cities, Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul, increased by 54, 62, and 33 percent, respectively. Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq’s Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, Ba’thists and Free Officers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 35.

23. The government was unable to replace landlords’ functions, farmers were unenthusiastic about cooperatives, and smaller farms impeded extensive mechanization and economies of scale. Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, *Iraq since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1987).

24. For a discussion of the privatization of the agricultural sector, see Robert Springborg, “Infitah, Agrarian Transformation, and Elite Consolidation in Contemporary Iraq,” *Middle East Journal* 40, no. 1 (1986): 33–52.

25. See Chapter 6, “Social Change in the Middle East.”

26. Omar Dewachi, *Ungovernable Life: Mandatory Medicine and Statecraft in Iraq* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2017), 14.

27. World Health Organization, “Density of physicians: Latest available year,”
http://www.who.int/gho/health_workforce/physicians_density/en/.

28. World Bank, “Iraq Systematic Country Diagnostic,” February 3, 2017,
<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/542811487277729890/Iraq-Systematic-Country-Diagnostic>.

29. As Barrington Moore famously put it, “no bourgeoisie, no democracy.” He also argued that the destruction of the peasantry was critical to the formation of liberal democracies (*Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* [Boston: Beacon Press, 1966]). David Waldner argues that democracy requires the autonomy of the state from the agrarian property system (“Democracy and Dictatorship in the Post-Colonial World,” unpublished manuscript).

30. Evidence for the relationship between economic indicators and democracy is mixed. For the argument that economic development increases the likelihood of democratization, see Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes, “Endogenous Democratization,” *World Politics* 55, no. 4 (2003): 517–49. For the argument that it does not, see Adam Przeworski, Michael Alvarez, Jose Antonio Cheibub, and Fernando Limongi, *Democracy and Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000). For the link between inequality and democratization, see Carles Boix, *Democracy and Redistribution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003) and Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Boix also discusses capital mobility. See the Political Economy section for the literature on oil reliance.

31. Between 1920 and 1936, urban elites comprised 70 percent of the government (14 percent of which was military), while landowners and tribal leaders comprised 21 percent and 9 percent, respectively. In terms of religious breakdown, 71 percent of total posts were held by Sunni Arabs who made up only 36 percent of the population. Shi'i

ministers had 24 percent of posts (compared to 56 percent of the population). Apart from Sunni and Shi'i ministers, two cabinet members were Christian and one was Jewish. Between 1920 and 1936, cabinets had an average lifespan of eight months (Tarbush, 46–50).

32. General Bakr Sidqi, who led the 1936 coup, was assassinated less than a year later. Between 1937 and 1941, four colonels known collectively as the “Golden Square” held de facto power, with the king as figurehead until his suspicious death in a car accident in 1939 (which many Iraqis blame on Britain).

33. The leader of the coup, Brigadier ‘Abd al-Karim Qasim, became prime minister, minister of defense, and supreme commander of the armed forces. His deputy, Colonel ‘Abd al-Salam ‘Aref, became deputy prime minister and minister of interior. In 1964, newly nationalized public sectors were also placed under the direction of military officers.

34. The party was founded in Syria by Michel ‘Aflaq, an Orthodox Christian, and Salah al-Din al-Bitar, a Sunni Muslim. When it was established in Iraq in 1952, its first leadership was Shi'i Muslim, until it was deposed in 1961. The second leadership cadre that took control of the party was headed by a Faili Shi'i Kurd, Ali Salih al-Sadi, who led the first successful Ba‘thist coup d'état in February 1963. See Chapter 22 on Syria for a discussion of the origins of the Ba‘th.

35. The number of bureaucrats more than doubled between 1968 and 1978, to about 20 percent of the total labor force. Armed forces personnel increased from 100,000 in 1970 to 250,000 in 1980. A civilian militia, the Popular Army, created to serve as a counterweight to the regular armed forces, grew to 175,000 members. A further 260,000 Iraqis worked for the police by the end of decade.

36. Achim Rohde, *State Society Relations in Ba‘thist Iraq: Facing Dictatorship* (London: Routledge, 2010), 119.

37. Aaron M. Faust, *The Ba'athification of Iraq: Saddam Hussein's Totalitarianism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015).

38. Lisa Blaydes, *State of Repression: Iraq under Saddam Hussein* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).

39. The process began with the creation of a twenty-five-member Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) by the United States in consultation with its Iraqi allies. In June 2004, the IGC approved a provisional constitution (the Transitional Administrative Law, TAL), the Iraqi Interim Government was appointed, and the UN Security Council recognized Iraq's sovereignty. The process continued through the election of a provisional parliament (January 2005), the formation of an interim government, and the appointment of a constitution-drafting committee. A permanent constitution was finalized in August of that year and approved by popular referendum in October. The process ended with elections for a full-term parliament in December 2005.

40. There is still no consensus over when and by whom a decision was taken to mount such an extended occupation, although evidence points to Vice President Cheney's office (James P. Pfiffner, "US Blunders in Iraq: De-Baathification and Disbanding the Army," *Intelligence and National Security* 25, no. 1 [2010]: 76–85).

41. James Dobbins, Seth G. Jones, Benjamin Runkle, and Siddharth Mohand, *Occupying Iraq: A History of the Coalition Provisional Authority* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2009), xiv.

42. Human Rights Watch, "The Road to Abu Ghraib" (June 2004), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2004/06/08/road-abu-ghraib>.

43. This was determined early on by the United States and its Iraqi allies. The composition of Iraq's first post-Ba'ath governing institution, the twenty-five-member Iraqi Governing Council (IGC), included thirteen Shi'i Arabs, five Sunni Arabs, five Kurds, a Turkoman, and a Christian. Iraq's interim government also emphasized ethnic and sectarian balance; the president was an Arab Sunni and had two

vice presidents, a Shi'i and Kurd. The prime minister, a Shi'i, had a Kurdish deputy. There has been no post-2003 census reflecting Iraq's sectarian and ethnic composition; the United States based its policies on rough percentages, according to which Arab Shi'a were around 60 percent, Sunni Kurds around 17 percent, and Sunni Arabs around 20 percent. The exact source of such percentages is unclear (International Crisis Group, "Make or Break: Iraq's Sunnis and the State," *Middle East Report* 144, August 2013, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iraq%20Syria%20Lebanon/Iraq/144-make-or-break-iraq-s-sunnis-and-the-state.pdf>).

44. David Waldner, "The Limits of Institutional Engineering: Lessons from Iraq," *United States Institute for Peace Special Report* 222 (May 2009); Nathan Brown, "Is Political Consensus Possible in Iraq?" *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, Policy Outlook (November 2005), <http://carnegieendowment.org/files/PO23.Brown.FINAL.pdf>.

45. On September 25, 2017, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) of Iraq staged a referendum in areas under its security forces' control (both inside and outside the region's boundaries) that asked voters to tick "yes" or "no" to a single question: "Do you want the Kurdistan region and the Kurdistan areas outside the [Kurdistan] region to be an independent country?" Preliminary results suggest that some 93 percent of voters affirmatively answered that question, with a participation rate among registered voters of 72 percent. For details, see International Crisis Group, "Oil and Borders: How to Fix Iraq's Kurdish Crisis," *Briefing* 55, October 2017.

46. International Crisis Group, "Iraq's Paramilitary Groups: The Challenge of Rebuilding a Functioning State," *Middle East Report* 188, July 2018.

47. See <http://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/report-judicial-response-allegations-torture-iraq>; <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/02/06/iraq-security-forces-abusing-women-detention>.

48. A phenomenon Iraqis called *tarhib wa targhib* (literally, “terror and enticement,” but its English equivalent is “sticks and carrots”).

49. To rise through the ranks, a person had to spend a specific amount of time and demonstrate a particular skill set before he could be promoted; the party’s upper echelon was drawn from individuals with long party histories. Tracking exact membership numbers over time is difficult, but by September 2002, a few months before the Anglo-American occupation, party records listed almost four million affiliates (compared to a little over 1.5 million in 1986), of which 276,000 were involved in active party work. The Ba’th Party had ten membership levels, and the first four levels did not denote active party work: supporter, partisan, advanced partisan, nominee, member in training, active member, divisional member, section member, branch member, and secretary general. Almost all members of the party leadership in a particular area were local to that area, except in insurgent Kurdish zones in the north (these were considered hardship destinations). These party figures are from party records, cited in Joseph Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Ba’th Party: Inside an Authoritarian Regime* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 52, 286.

50. An estimated 38 percent of Iraq’s leaders from 2003 to 2006 were exiles, 19 percent were inhabitants of Iraqi Kurdistan, and only 26.8 percent still lived under Ba’thist rule in 2003 (Phebe Marr, “Who Are Iraq’s New Leaders? What Do They Want?” USIP Special Report [Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2006]).

51. A complete text of all CPA orders can be accessed at <http://www.iraqcoalition.org/regulations/#Orders>. These decisions were discussed in the US Department of Defense and approved by the White House but had not been adequately considered by the rest of the national security establishment. CIA Director George Tenet said, “In fact, we knew nothing about it until de-Baathification was a fait accompli . . . Clearly, this was a critical policy decision, yet there was no NSC Principals meeting to debate the move” (George Tenet, *At the Center of the Storm* [Harper Perennial, 2008], 426).

52. Beth K. Dougherty, “De-Ba‘thification in Iraq: How Not to Pursue Transitional Justice,” *Middle East Institute* (January 30, 2014), <http://www.mei.edu/content/de-bathification-iraq-how-not-pursue-transitional-justice>.

53. Relatively open elections for parliament were held only once (June 1954), and when reformist candidates were elected, the prime minister annulled the elections, changed the electoral laws, and guaranteed a more quiescent parliament.

54. In contrast, turnout was over 70 percent in Shi‘i majority provinces and 80 percent in Kurdish areas. The election produced a landslide victory for a coalition of Shi‘i Islamists (51 percent of the seats) and Kurdish nationalist parties (27 percent), and voting patterns closely correlated with ethnosectarian demographic distributions. Only 17 of the 275 members of parliament were Sunni, running on nationalist and secularist lists. The boycott was particularly consequential because Parliament would be drafting Iraq’s new constitution. Although the constitution was ultimately approved by referendum in October 2005 with 63 percent voter turnout, more than two-thirds of voters in two largely Sunni Arab provinces and over half in a third province rejected it. In fact, they almost succeeded in defeating it altogether since the TAL stipulated that a two-thirds majority against the document in any three of the eighteen provinces would result in its rejection.

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67. Tripp, 230.

68. Khoury, 46.

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79. The US military dropped more than ninety tons of bombs on Iraqi cities and experimented with depleted uranium warheads to maximize the destruction of vital infrastructure targets.

80. T. C. Jones.

81. David A. Lake, "Two Cheers for Bargaining Theory: Assessing Rationalist Explanations of the Iraq War," *International Security* 35, no. 3 (Winter 2010/2011): 7–52.

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600 Czech, Polish, and Slovak forces. In addition, these countries contributed approximately 67,400 sea and air forces.

83. For a discussion of the US's controversial interpretation of international law as a basis for the occupation, see Sean D. Murphy, "Assessing the Legality of Invading Iraq," *Georgetown Law Journal* 92, no. 4 (2004).

84. Alexandre Debs and Nuno P. Monteiro, "Known Unknowns: Power Shifts, Uncertainty, and War," *International Organization* 68, no. 1 (2014): 1–31.

85. Mearsheimer and Walt.

86. Lake.

87. Elizabeth N. Saunders, *Leaders at War: How Presidents Shape Military Interventions* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).

88. T. C. Jones.

89. This is the thesis in F. Gregory Gause, III, *Beyond Sectarianism: The New Middle East Cold War* (The Brookings Institution, 2014).

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94. For a summary of Ba'athist policies in the north, see Joost R. Hiltermann, "The 1988 Anfal Campaign in Iraqi Kurdistan," *Online Encyclopedia of Mass Violence* (February 2008), <http://www.massviolence.org/The-1988-Anfal-Campaign-in-Iraqi-Kurdistan>.
95. Khoury, 120–21.
96. Khoury, 110.
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101. Human Rights Watch, *The Iraqi Government's Assault on the Marsh Arabs*, Briefing paper (January 2003), <http://www.hrw.org/legacy/background/mena/marsharabs1.htm>.
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105. Pete Moore and Christopher Parker, “The War Economy of Iraq,” *Middle East Research and Information Project* 243 (Summer 2007).

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107. UNHCR, *2018 Country Operations Profile-Iraq*, <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/iraq-emergency.html>.

108. UNHCR, *Global Focus: Iraq*, 2018, http://reporting.unhcr.org/node/2547#_ga=2.90594458.1658732588.1537158983-2007899162.1537158983.

109. In 1990, President Saddam Hussein wrote “God is great” on the Iraqi flag and called for jihad against the Western-led coalition in the

First Gulf War. By the mid-1990s, the regime had declared a national “faith campaign,” built more mosques, and increased religious education. Scholars disagree on whether this shift reflected a genuine change in Ba‘thists’ religiosity or whether it was a more cynical strategy. For the argument that Saddam Hussein himself had become more religious and that this had radical implications for the state’s approach to Islamism, see Amatzia Baram, *Saddam Husayn and Islam, 1968–2003* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014). For the counterargument, see Joseph Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Ba‘th Party: Inside an Authoritarian Regime* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012) and Samuel Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein, Islam, and the Roots of Insurgencies in Iraq* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

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111. For a broader articulation of this alternative, see Brown, “Rethinking Religion and Politics,” *Islam and International Order* (POMEPS Studies 15, 2015).

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113. Holy sites include the tombs of Shi‘ism’s founder, ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib, the first Shi‘i imam, and his son, Hussein, the third imam, who is buried in Karbala. Today, millions of pilgrims converge annually in the month of Muharram to commemorate the death of Prophet Muhammad’s grandson Hussein in 680 CE at the hand of Yazid I, the second Umayyad Caliph. Historically, Iraq’s centrality to Shi‘ism has created a strong rivalry with neighboring Iran, especially the city of Qum, which has sought to rival Najaf as the main theological center of Shi‘ism.

114. The marriage law passed during the Tanzimat reforms (1839–1876) as the Ottomans became concerned with concepts of citizenship. The conflation between “Shi’i” and “Persian,” however, was confusing for many. In trying to implement the law, officials were unsure whether it applied to Sunni and non-Muslim Iranians and to non-Muslim Ottomans, and contradictory opinions were given by legal advisors (Karen M. Kern, *Imperial Citizen: Marriage and Citizenship in the Ottoman Frontier Provinces of Iraq* [Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2011]).

115. In 1980, Saddam Hussein ordered the execution of Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, along with his sister, Bint al-Huda, a theologian in her own right. In 1999, Hussein ordered the assassination of their brother Sadiq al-Sadr and two of his sons.

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117. Harling, 74.

118. US Energy Information Administration, *International Energy Statistics*, 2015, <http://www.eia.gov/cfapps/ipdbproject/IEDIndex3.cfm?tid=5&pid=57&aid=6>.

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private industry and investing in infrastructure, primarily irrigation and flood control works to regulate the rivers.

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Chapter 13

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http://elyon1.court.gov.il/heb/veadot/or/inside_index.htm; official summary [in English] at Adalah, the Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, <http://www.adalah.org/features/commission/orreport-en.pdf>.
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[http://www.mossawacenter.org/files/files/File/Reports/2006/Future%20Vision%20\(English\).pdf](http://www.mossawacenter.org/files/files/File/Reports/2006/Future%20Vision%20(English).pdf).
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<http://www.gov.il/FirstGov/TopNavEng/EngSubjects/EngSElections/EngSEElectoral/EngSEEElectoral/>.

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<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.KLT.DINV.WD.GD.ZS>.

9. See <https://ustr.gov/trade-agreements/free-trade-agreements/israel-fta>.

10. The Labor Party left the governing coalition in January 2011.

11. From the Center parties, Kulanu (10 seats) entered the governing coalition, but Yesh Atid (11 seats) stayed out.

12. From the Right of the Likud, Jewish Home (8 seats) entered the governing coalition, but Yisrael Beitenu (6 seats) stayed out.

13. See <http://www.oecd.org/economy/israel-economic-forecast-summary.htm> and <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG>.

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Chapter 14

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Chapter 15

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Chapter 16

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23. UNHCR, Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2015–2016.
24. UNHCR.
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26. UNICEF Country Statistics, 2016.
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30. Lebanon Country Profile, World Bank, International Labour Organization, 2017.

Chapter 17

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3. See Hanspeter Mattes, “Formal and Informal Authority in Libya since 1969,” in Vandewalle, ed., *Libya since 1969: Qadhafi’s Revolution Revisited* (New York: Palgrave, 2011).
4. See Ali Abdullatif Ahmida, *The Making of Modern Libya: State Formation, Colonization, and Resistance*, 2nd ed. (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008), chap. 2.
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7. Ragaei El Mallakh, “The Economics of Rapid Growth,” *Middle East Journal* 23, no. 3 (1969): 308–309, 312, 316.
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12. See UN Development Program (UNDP), *Human Development Report 2010* (New York: United Nations, 2010).

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14. Anderson, *The State and Social Transformation*, 253–254. See also Jamil M. Abun-Nasr, *A History of the Maghrib in the Islamic Period* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 405.

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16. Ahmida, *The Making of Modern Libya*, 93–95.

17. Alison Pargeter, "Prodigal or Pariah? Foreign Policy in Libya," in Vandewalle, ed., *Libya since 1969*, 83.

18. Pargeter, "Prodigal or Pariah?," 90.

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20. Ahmida, *The Making of Modern Libya*, 118.

21. See Geoff L. Simons, *Libya and the West: From Independence to Lockerbie* (Oxford: Centre for Libyan Studies, 2003), chap. 7–8.

Chapter 18

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4. Michael Herb, *All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution, and Democracy in the Middle Eastern Monarchies* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999).
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8. Justin Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain and the Arab Gulf: Rethinking the Rentier State* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 96.

9. Matthew S. Hopper, "Globalization and the Economics of African Slavery in Arabia in the Age of Empire," *Journal of African Development* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 155–84.
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26. Many of the dates were shipped to the United States, where they were a holiday tradition. See Hopper, "Globalization and the Economics of African Slavery," 164.

27. James Worrall, "Oman: The 'Forgotten' Corner of the Arab Spring," *Middle East Policy* 19, no. 3 (2012): 98–115.

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31. Mehran Kamrava, *Qatar: Small State, Big Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 119, 135–136.

32. Fuad I. Khuri, *Tribe and State in Bahrain: The Transformation of Social and Political Authority in an Arab State* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 47–53.
33. Katja Niethammer, “Voices in Parliament, Debates in Majalis, and Banners on Streets: Avenues of Political Participation in Bahrain,” EUI Working Papers (Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute, 2006).
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35. Gengler, *Group Conflict*, 57.
36. International Crisis Group, “Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (VIII): Bahrain’s Rocky Road to Reform,” *Middle East/North Africa Report*, July 28, 2011.
37. “World Report 2018: Events of 2017,” Human Rights Watch, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/bahrain>.

Chapter 19

1. In 1998, Hassan II succeeded in convincing Abderrahman Youssoufi, leader of the largest opposition party, the USFP, to head a so-called government of *alternance*. The government was mainly drawn from opposition parties that had largely been excluded from power in the past.

2. See Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968).

3. Bettina Dennerlein, "Legitimate Bounds and Bound Legitimacy: The Act of Allegiance to the Ruler (Bai'a) in 19th Century Morocco," *Die Welt des Islams* 41, no. 3 (November 2001): 287–310.

4. See Abdellah Hammoudi, *Master and Disciple: The Cultural Foundations of Moroccan Authoritarianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), and Rahma Bourquia and Susan Gilson Miller, eds., *In the Shadow of the Sultan—Culture, Power, and Politics in Morocco* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

5. Elaine Combs-Schilling, "Etching Patriarchal Rule: Ritual Dye, Erotic Potency, and the Moroccan Monarchy," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1, no. 4 (April 1991): 658–81.

6. The notion of *makhzen* has changed over time to refer to the state apparatus and to the education, health care, and economic services it provides. The people who work closely with the monarchy are also part of the *makhzen*, and the Moroccan people have generally held them in awe.

7. George Joffe, "Morocco: Monarchy, Legitimacy and Succession," *Third World Quarterly* 10, no. 1 (January 1988): 201–28.

8. See Henry Munson, *Religion and Power in Morocco* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993).

9. All constitutions were submitted for ratification by popular vote.

10. It was done mainly to allow him to exercise more power within the parliament and situate himself at the top of political institutions and the representatives of the nation.

11. Elite *immobilisme* refers to a kind of stasis and lack of initiative on the part of the Moroccan elite. See also Saloua Zerhouni, "Morocco: Reconciling Continuity and Change," in Volker Perthes, ed., *Arab Elite: Negotiating the Politics of Change* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2004).

12. Following the 1992 constitutional revision, Morocco proclaimed its adherence to the principles, laws, and obligations that were derived from the charters of international organizations and reaffirmed its attachment to human rights as they are universally recognized. In response to international criticism, King Hassan released political prisoners, created a Ministry of Human Rights (1993), and announced the destruction of the Tazmamart death camp (1994).

13. Youssoufi refused to enter into arrangements for a change of government and left the country after a massive use of money in the indirect elections of 1993. There is also the fact that the king wanted to keep possession of the four ministries called "ministries of sovereignty"—Interior, Justice, Islamic Affairs, and Foreign Affairs. For more details, see Mohammed Tozy, "Political Changes in the Maghreb," *CODESRIA Bulletin* 1 (2000): 47–54.

14. In liberal democracies, *alternance* means the emergence of opposition parties to power as a result of their success in free and transparent elections. For *alternance* in the Moroccan context, see Abdellah Boudahrain, *Le Nouveau Maroc Politique, Quel Avenir?* (Casablanca: Al Madariss, 1999), 61–73.

15. In his first speeches, the new king affirmed his attachment to the principles of constitutional monarchy and called for a new concept of authority based on accountability.

16. The family code provided women with more rights when it came to marriage, divorce, and child custody.

17. A few weeks after his ascension to power, King Mohammed VI ordered the Consultative Council for Human Rights (CCDH) to activate an independent indemnity commission (Commission d'Arbitrage) in order to compensate former victims of forcible disappearances and detention; see Susan Slyomovics, "A Truth Commission for Morocco," *Middle East Report*, no. 218 (Spring 2001).

18. King Mohammed VI created a number of committees in charge of important dossiers such as investment, tourism, education, and reform of the family code, although designated ministries were already in charge of those issues.

19. Roger Letourneau, "Social Change in the Muslim Cities of North Africa," *American Journal of Sociology* 60, no. 6 (May 1955): 529.

20. Mohamed Aneur, "Le Logement des pauvres à Fes," *Revue Tiers Monde* 29, no. 116 (1988): 1171–81.

21. See Will D. Swearingen, *Moroccan Mirages: Agrarian Dreams and Deceptions, 1912–1986* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 145.

22. Hassan Awad, "Morocco's Expanding Towns," *Geographical Journal* 130, no. 1 (March 1964): 49–64.

23. Laetitia Cairoli, "Garment Factory Workers in the City of Fez," *Middle East Journal* 53, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 28–43.

24. Susan Joeques, "Working for Lipstick? Male and Female Labour in the Clothing Industry in Morocco," in Haleh Afshar, ed., *Women*,

Work and Ideology in the Third World (London: Tavistock, 1985), 183–214.

25. Shana Cohen, “Alienation and Globalization in Morocco: Addressing the Social and Political Impact of Market Integration,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 1 (January 2003): 168–89.

26. Driss Maghraoui and Saloua Zerhouni, “Searching for Political Normalization: The Party of Justice and Development in Morocco,” in *Islamist Parties and Political Normalization in the Muslim World*, eds. Quinn Mecham and Julie Chernov Hwang (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 112–133.

27. See Amal Vinogradov and John Waterbury, “Situations of Contested Legitimacy in Morocco: An Alternative Framework,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 13, no. 1 (January 1971): 32–59.

28. Between 1965 and 1970, King Hassan declared a state of emergency during which he concentrated all powers in his hands.

29. To encourage MPs to make use of this prerogative, at least one day per month is reserved for the examination of proposed bills, including those put forward by the opposition (Article 82).

30. The constitution established a Superior Council of Security, which is in charge of coordinating the country’s internal and external security; it also aims to institutionalize norms of good governance in the security field (Article 54).

31. See Mohamed Madani, D. Maghraoui, and Zerhouni, “The 2011 Moroccan Constitution: A Critical Analysis,” IDEA, 2012, http://www.idea.int/publications/the_2011_moroccan_constitution/loader.cfm?csModule=security/getfile&pageid=56782.

32. According to different studies, the majority of Moroccans do not perceive parliament as an efficient institution. MPs are perceived as

-serving their own interests, and media coverage of parliamentary activities reinforces this image among the population.

33. Rémy Leveau, *Le fellah marocain défenseur du trône* (Paris: Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1985).

34. See Henry Clement, *The Mediterranean Debt Crescent: Money and Power in Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), 135–39.

35. André Bank, “Rents, Cooptation and Economized Discourse: Three Dimensions of Political Rule in Jordan, Morocco and Syria,” *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 14, nos. 1/2 (2004): 155–79.

36. See Michel Laurent and Guilain Denoeux, “Campagne d’Assainissement au Maroc: Immunisation Politique et Contamination de la Justice,” *Monde Arabe-Maghreb Machrek*, no. 154 (October/December 1996).

37. Shana Cohen, “Alienation and Globalization in Morocco: Addressing the Social and Political Impact of Market Integration,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 1 (January 2003): 168–89.

38. The marriage contract now required the consent and signature of the bride.

39. Some observers spoke about the “one million march,” but there is no exact figure on the number of participants in this march. Overall, the demonstration was considered a success.

40. For an analysis of these obstacles, see Katja Zvan Elliott, “Reforming the Moroccan Personal Status Code: A Revolution for Whom?” *Mediterranean Politics* 14, no. 2 (2009): 213–27.

41. When the Romans arrived in North Africa, they met tough resistance and named the inhabitants of the region Barbarians, hence the word *Berber*.

42. Among others, we can cite l'Association Marociane de la Recherche et d'Echanges Culturels and the Association Nouvelle pour la Culture et les Arts Populaires. These kinds of associations exist in both the countryside and the cities.

43. In an interview conducted by four Lebanese papers (*Al-hawadith*, *la Revue du Liban*, *Monday Morning*, and *Al-Bairak*) in March 2002, King Mohammed VI said, "Amazigh is the property of all Moroccans. It is a national wealth, a basic component of the national pluralistic identity."

44. President of the Bureau of la Confédération Tada des Associations Culturelles Amazighes du Maroc, July 2003.

45. See D. Maghraoui, "The Dynamics of Civil Society in Morocco."

46. A. Maghraoui, "Depoliticization in Morocco," 24–32.

47. It is safe to say that the social movements that are currently taking place in the MENA region have gone beyond the *khubziste* (bread seeker) demands and logics; see Larbi Sadiki, "Popular Uprisings and Arab Democratization," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 32, no. 1 (2000): 71–95.

48. See the official Arabic *communiqué* of the movement: *al-bayan arrasmi li harkat 20 fibrayar*.

49. For instance, art initiatives such as The Theater of the *Mahgour*; *falsafa fi zanka* (philosophy in the streets), *Ikraza fi zanka* (reading in the streets).

50. Hassan II was the only Arab leader to invite for a visit an Israeli head of government, Shimon Peres.

51. Miguel Hernando de Larramendi and Beatriz Tomé-Alonso, "The Return of Morocco to the African Union," Geographical Overview, The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and Other Actors, 2017.

52. According to Article 31, “The King accredits ambassadors to foreign countries and international organizations. Ambassadors or representatives of international organizations are accredited to Him. He signs and ratifies treaties. . . .” The same article stipulates that only treaties relating to the state finances require prior approval of the parliament. In addition, the king appoints the government, including the foreign minister. As commander in chief of the Royal Armed Forces, he is in direct control of national defense.

53. Abderrahim Maslouhi, “Politique Intérieure et Politique Extérieure au Maroc, Essai d’Identification de la Dynamique Interférentielle dans le Champ Politico-marocain” (unpublished dissertation, Université Mohammed V, Rabat, 1999).

54. For instance, the palace invited the political parties represented in parliament to formulate their views on the project of regionalization and autonomy of the southern provinces. The young sovereign also consulted new actors, notably members of the autonomous civil society, in matters related to foreign policy.

55. The minister is appointed by the king and must not have any political affiliation. This prerogative was maintained by the late king when the *alternance* government was established in 1998, despite protests by the opposition parties.

56. Former prime minister Abderrahmane Youssoufi was very active in international affairs and played an important part in promoting a more liberal image of Morocco. The prime minister for the 2002 government, Driss Jettou, was also strongly involved in the negotiations for an advanced status with the EU.

57. The new king reactivated the role of the Royal Advisory Council for Saharan Affairs and renewed its composition in 2006.

58. In a royal speech at the opening of the October 1982 session of the Chamber of Representatives, Hassan II encouraged the parliamentarians to develop a genuine parliamentary diplomacy.

59. During the sixth legislative period (1997–2002), a group of members of parliament representing different political sensibilities was set up to do lobbying work in the European Parliament. In the seventh legislative period, members of parliament repeatedly campaigned for the legitimacy of the Moroccan position. For instance, parliamentarians of the majority groups and the PJD organized a diplomatic tour through Africa and Latin America in 2005.

60. Moroccan parliamentarians are very active within European and Arab institutions such as the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly and the Arab Interparliamentary Union, working for the promotion of foreign investments in Morocco.

61. King Mohammed VI in a message to the participants of the conference organized at Rabat on the occasion of the National Day of Diplomacy, April 28, 2000.

62. One might cite the conference organized by the Association Ribat Al-Fath for Sustainable Development and the Konrad-Adenauer Foundation on Morocco's demand for an advanced status with the EU, held under the patronage of King Mohammed VI.

63. King Hassan II was the head of Bayt al Qods, and Mohammed VI succeeded his father to this position.

64. In 1963, Morocco initiated negotiations with the EEC, which resulted in a trade agreement in 1969. The cooperation was later extended in 1976 by a new agreement that included not only trade regulations but also financial aid for socioeconomic development in Morocco.

65. In the context of the MEDA I program, €630 million was invested in sectors supporting economic transition and enhancing socioeconomic balance.

66. In the context of the MEDA II program, €687 million was allocated to the following domains: development of the private

sector, adjustment of the financial sector, improvement of the public health and water sectors, development of trade relations, administrative reforms, and support for the northern provinces.

67. In 2004, the financial commitment reached 90 percent and actual disbursement reached 40 percent of the financial aid allocated to Morocco, which makes Morocco the foremost beneficiary of the MEDA program.

68. It is not an accident that in 1988, as crown prince, Mohammed VI did an internship of several months in the cabinet of Jacques Delors, president of the Commission of the European Communities; in 1993, he obtained his doctorate with a dissertation on “The EEC-Maghreb Cooperation.”

69. King Mohammed VI (speech at the dinner given in his honor by President Jacques Chirac, Paris, March 20, 2000).

70. King Mohammed VI (speech on the occasion of the sixth anniversary of his reign).

71. The European Neighbourhood Policy was approved by the European Council in June 2003.

Chapter 20

1. Jamil Hilal, "Reclaiming the Palestinian Narrative," Al-Shabaka Commentary, January 6, 2013, <http://al-shabaka.org/commentaries/reclaiming-the-palestinian-narrative/>; also see Beshara Doumani, "Palestine versus the Palestinians? The Iron Laws and Ironies of a People Denied," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 36, no. 4 (Summer 2007): 49–64.
2. For the sake of simplicity, in this chapter we are focusing on the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, and we use the Occupied Palestinian Territory (oPt), the Palestinian Authority (PA), and the State of Palestine as synonyms and interchangeably.
3. Statistics are acquired from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/_Rainbow/Documents/gover_e.htm and <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Downloads/book2345.pdf>; and Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics, http://www.cbs.gov.il/reader/newhodaot/hodaa_template.html?hodaa=201811104.
4. In addition to the argument that the 1993 Oslo Peace Accords can be traced to the aftermath of the 1973 October War, it is rooted in the 1978 Camp David framework for peace. See Osamah Khalil, "Oslo's Roots: Kissinger, the PLO, and the Peace Process," Al-Shabaka Policy Brief, September 3, 2013, <https://al-shabaka.org/briefs/oslo-roots-kissinger-plo-and-peace-process/>.
5. Ari Shavit, "The Big Freeze," Haaretz.com, August 10, 2004, <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/ShArt.jhtml?itemNo=485929>.
6. In May 2012, Defense Minister Ehud Barak declared that Israel should abandon negotiated peace with the Palestinians but engage in unilateral decisions concerning the fate of the oPt; it further illustrates that the Israeli government is not keen on having any negotiating process with the PLO. In 2015 and during his electoral

campaign, the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that there will never be an independent Palestinian state as long as he serves as prime minister of Israel. See http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/on-final-day-of-campaign-netanyahu-says-no-palestinian-state-if-he-wins/2015/03/16/4f4468e8-cbdc-11e4-8730-4f473416e759_story.html.

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