



The “Robustness of Authoritarianism” and the Prospects for Democratization



Authoritarianism in Perspective

- Authoritarianism is a form of social control characterized by strict obedience to the authority of a state or organization (oppressive measures, strongly hierarchical).
 - Why have authoritarian regimes in the Middle East endured while formerly authoritarian governments in other countries been swept up in the third wave of democratization?
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Factors Contributing to Durability of Authoritarianism

- Political Culture and Discourse
- Economic Explanations (region's access to rent)
- Patrimonial Character of State Institutions
- Persistent Support of International Patrons
- Coercive Apparatus Directly Linked to "Fiscal Health"
- Fragmented and Weak Civil Society
- Limited Degree of Popular Mobilization for Reform
- Geographic Remoteness from Epicenter of Democratization

“Authoritarianism lies in the strength of the state and its capacity to maintain a monopoly on the means of coercion...”

If the state’s coercive apparatus remains coherent and effective, it can face down popular disaffection, survive significant illegitimacy and even a pervasive sense of relative deprivation among its subjects”

~ Theda Skocpol

States and Social Revolutions, 1979



State Formation

- ❑ As a result of Western colonial rule, the birth of the new Arab states bore deformities ranging from artificial boundaries to internal weaknesses in their foundations.
- ❑ Erratic state building characterized by “distorted stratification” and “confused socio-economic policies” soon followed.
- ❑ In the 1950’s and 60’s, a wave of radical politics through populist coup d`etat took the region by storm (Syria, Egypt, Libya, Sudan etc.).
- ❑ In the 1970’s and 80’s, two social formations grew rapidly: a nouveau riche class and a lumpenproletariat (problems: “capital flight”; unemployment and deprivation).



State Formation

- ❑ Unresolved regional and internal conflict highlighted problems in society (Arab-Israeli, Iraq-Iran, Lebanese, Sudanese, Somali).
- ❑ Psycho-sociopolitical cleavages forced individuals and groups to retrench behind “primordial walls of solidarity.”
- ❑ Pan-Arabism emerged: national aspirations for Arab unity and the liberation of Palestine became banners of solidarity (“social contract” formed whereby citizens were to forgo liberal participatory politics).
- ❑ 1967 defeat at the hands of Israel and later the 1990-91 Gulf crisis led to the discrediting of the populist social contract and the erosion of legitimacy of most Arab regimes.



Regime Crises and Enduring Authoritarianism

- ❑ Authoritarian rulers in the Middle East have survived for decades while similar governments in other parts of the world have collapsed partly because of their capacity to repress their opponents through unrestrained violence.
- ❑ When challenged, these regimes have often responded to domestic opposition with brutal crackdowns.
- ❑ Former reactions to revolts in Syria, Iraq, Libya and Iran illustrate the extraordinary endurance of these authoritarian systems.



Syria: The *Hama* Revolt

- Hafez al-Asad ruled Syria through a system of repression, personal networks, a strong security apparatus, and a pervasive cult of personality.
- In 1982, he brutally suppressed the Muslim Brotherhood when they challenged his forces in the city of Hama.
- Heavy repression dealt a blow to the opposition and since then Syria has seen twenty more years of continued authoritarianism – including Bashar al-Asad's assumption of the presidency.



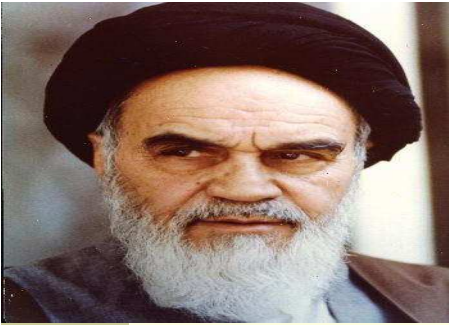
Iraq: The 1991 Uprising

- Like Assad, Saddam Hussein combined family-centered rule with institutions of repression to maintain minority (here Sunni) control over a population composed mainly of Shia and Kurds.
- Shortly after Iraq withdrew from Kuwait, Shia in the south rose up against Hussein and Kurds in the north joined them.
- The Republican Guard did not retreat or turn upon their leader, but instead repressed both movements and reestablished control over the country.



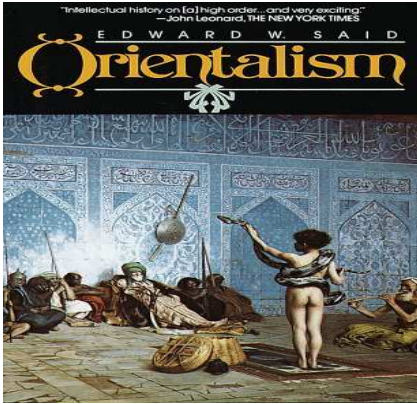
Libya: The Army Rebellion

- Muammar Qaddafi has ruled Libya since deposing its King in 1969 and constantly shifts networks in his regime so they are ill-prepared to address substantive policy (strives for “statelessness”).
- Libya’s oil wealth fuels patronage on a grand scale.
- In 1973, he announced his alternative to socialism and capitalism – the “The Third Universal Theory” which declares that “representation is deception” and the only true democracy in one in which people rule directly.
- He confronted and *defeated* both a weak Islamist movement and a formidable challenge from soldiers within his regime.
- Qaddafi has engaged in both ideological and military conflict with the United States – Lockerbie affair, oil import ban etc.



Revolution and Lessons from Iran

- The revolution of 1979 was based as much on the principles of freedom and republicanism as it was on Islamic politics and anti-imperialism
- Iran is a “hybrid regime” that combines democratic and authoritarian elements – an “illiberal democracy” or “inclusionary autocracy.”
- High levels of literacy, education, urbanization – an emerging civil society and widespread electoral participation, “reform movement.”
- Long-standing elite fragmentation and contestation exist in the regime – fundamental ideological divisions within the establishment (clergy rule privileged).
- Many theorists believe regime collapse may be imminent at first sign of internal dissent, conflict among clergy, or Western pressure.



Political Culture and “Orientalism”



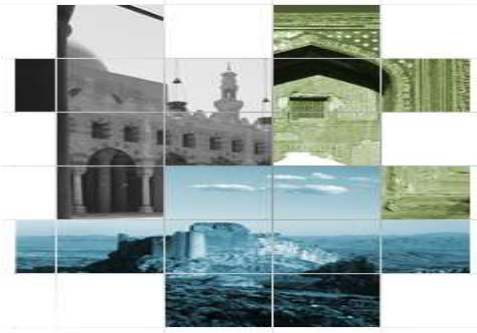
- In “Orientalism”, Edward Said argues that a long tradition of “false and romanticized images” of Asia and the Middle East in Western culture served as an implicit justification for Europe and America’s colonial and imperial ambitions.
- Said describes a “subtle and persistent Eurocentric prejudice against Arabo-Islamic peoples and their cultures.”
- The crux of the argument is that the history of European colonial rule and political domination over the East distorts the writings of even the most knowledgeable, well-meaning Western “Orientalists.”



A Framework for Analysis: “The Political Culture Approach to Democratization”



- Michael Hudson’s analysis of the crisis of authoritarianism and the potential prospects for liberalization set forth a new paradigm: the importance of political culture and the “Case for Bringing it Back In, Carefully.”
- Hudson argues that although the attack on “Orientalism” had its proper place, a side effect of that was the discrediting of political culture analysis.
- Developing more “sophisticated, less biased formulations” are essential in understanding the possibilities and limits of alternatives to authoritarianism.



Beyond the “Reductionist” and “Empirical” Approaches

- ❖ Michael Hudson’s recommendations for the proper evolution of political culture analysis:
 - Political culture is multi-layered
 - Delve into deep structures of enduring collective values
 - Avoid reductionist concepts and essentialist assumptions
 - Examine formal ideologies, then opinions, then attitudes
 - Look at subcultures, elite cultures, and mass cultures
 - Focus on group identities, principles of equity and justice
 - Seek methodologically multi-faceted sources



Islam and Authoritarianism

- ❑ Several prominent scholars attribute authoritarian politics to Islam and advocate the position that Islam is “ill-suited to democracy.”
- ❑ The explanation of why so many Muslim countries are not democratic has more to do with historical, political, cultural and economic factors than religious ones.
- ❑ Islamic scholars agree that the principle of *shura*, or consultative decision-making, is the source of democratic ethics in Islam. More reflection is needed to clarify the relationship of *shura* to democracy.
- ❑ Despite repression of human rights, two grassroots movements struggling to change the situation: Women are beginning to assert their rights / young people are agitating against government oppression.



“Reviving Middle Eastern Liberalism”

- Saad Eddin Ibrahim: scholar, human rights and pro-democracy activist - founder of the Ibn Khaldoun Center for Development Studies.
- Arrested and convicted in 2001 on false charges, sentenced to seven years, and acquitted by Egypt’s high court two years later.
- Has focused on the link between civil society and democratization and the theory that civic culture is “the optimum channel of popular participation in governance.”
- A staunch critic of “Arab exceptionalism” and the clash of civilizations thesis, he advocates a universalist conception of democracy and human rights.

“The complex nature of modern civil society reflects a double-edge character:

At once the political terrain on which the dominant class organizes its hegemony and the terrain on which opposition parties and movements organize, win allies and build their social power”

~ Antonio Gramsci



Democracy in Arab Intellectual Discourse



- The Arab renaissance (*nahda*) is grounded in the search for elements behind the progress of the West (“other”) and the retardation of the Arab world (“self”).
- The need for a new Arab project was propelled by a sense of crisis (*azma*) in the economic, political, and social realms.
- How does the West serve as a model? Did the colonies play the role of helper in Arab development? All Part of the dialectic.
- How is democracy identified? Is it a feature of all civilizations? Some intellectuals have argued that liberalism is just as important as the inherited elements of the past.
- Formulation of an “active population” rather than one that is a “receiver.”

Political Liberalization vs. Political Democratization

- Political Liberalization: The expansion of public space through the recognition and protection of civil and political liberties.
 - Political Democratization: The expansion of political participation that provides citizens with a degree of real and meaningful collective control over public policy.
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Towards Democratization?

- Since the Gulf War, political liberalization has unfolded in a number of countries.
- **Jordan** – reinstating of a multi-party system after a 35-year suspension. It remains to be seen whether more effective political groups emerge in parliamentary elections.
- **Lebanon** and **Kuwait** – two countries with longer parliamentary traditions; political instability a huge factor.
- **Morocco** – most recent success story; more than 11 political parties participated in parliamentary elections – SUPF and Istiqlal came in first and second.
- **Saudi Arabia** – criticism of royal family led to reforms (a constitution i.e. formalization of basic system of rule and a national consultative council were implemented).



Democratization and Global Diffusion

- Change is never automatic – a lag persists until the “old ways” are re-examined, questioned, and intellectuals come to terms with the new realities.
- The electronic media, the most potent agent of change today, is gaining hold and a diffusion of global values infuse the Middle Eastern “regional village” (Arabic version of You Tube – *Ikbis* – has already been launched).
- The more basic questions about the future of democracy have to be asked within the context of the political realities inside the Middle East.

