

INTRODUCTION

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This book addresses one of the major puzzles in comparative democratic studies today. Why is the Middle East the only region of the world to have been largely untouched by the third wave of global democratization? Since 1974, the absolute number of democracies in the world has nearly tripled, while the percentage of the world's states that are democratic has doubled. Democracy has expanded significantly in every other major region of the world. In Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the number of democracies has gone from none (before the downfall of communism) to 19, or 70 percent of the 27 states. In Latin America and the Caribbean, 30 of the 33 states are democracies. In 1974, less than two-fifths of those states were democracies; now nine-tenths are. In Asia (excluding the Pacific Island states), the number of democracies has increased from 5 in 1974 to 12 in 2002 (or about half of the 25 states). Even in Sub-Saharan Africa, which came late to the third wave, the number of democracies has increased from 3 to 19, about two-fifths of the 48 states.

Only in the Middle East and North Africa (what we will hereafter simply call the Middle East) has democracy failed to expand in the past three decades. In fact, in 1974, the whole region had but a trio of democracies—Israel, Turkey, and Lebanon. Today, only the first pair remains, and in Turkey, the persistence of democracy has been punctuated and constrained by repeated military interventions. Overall, the 19 states of the Middle East also have by far the lowest average levels of freedom. On the 7-point combined Freedom House scale of political rights and civil liberties, with 1 being most free and 7 the least free, the states of the Middle East have an average score today of 5.53. Not only is this the least free region of the world—by more than a full point on the Freedom House scale, as compared to the next most repressive region—but it is also the only region where the average level of freedom has *declined* since 1974 (see Table 1 on the following page). Moreover, if we examine only the 16 predominantly Arab states of the region (excluding Israel, Turkey, and Iran), the picture is even more uniformly

TABLE 1—DEMOCRACY AND FREEDOM BY REGION, 2002

REGION	NUMBER OF COUNTRIES	NUMBER OF DEMOCRACIES (% OF TOTAL)*	NUMBER (%) OF LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES FH SCORE < 2.5	AVERAGE FREEDOM SCORE FOR REGION	
				1974	2002
Western Europe & Anglophone states	28	28 (100%)	28 (100%)	1.58	1.04
Latin America & Caribbean	33	30 (91%)	17 (52%)	3.81	2.49
Eastern Europe & Former Soviet Union	27	19 (70%)	4 (15%)	6.50	3.39
Asia (E, SE, and S)	25	12 (48%)	4 (16%)	4.84	4.38
Pacific Island	12	11 (91%)	8 (67%)	2.75	2.00
Africa (Sub-Sahara)	48	19 (40%)	5 (10%)	5.51	4.33
Middle East–North Africa	19	2 (11%)	1 (5%)	5.15	5.53
Total	192	121 (63%)	73 (38%)	4.39	3.38
Arab Countries	16	0	0	5.59	5.81
Predominantly Muslim Countries	43	7**	0	5.29	5.33

Source: Adrian Karatnycky, “The 2002 Freedom House Survey: Liberty’s Advances in a Troubled World,” *Journal of Democracy* 14 (January 2003): 100–13.

* The current number of democracies as classified by Freedom House.

** Counted among this group are Bangladesh, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Indonesia, Turkey, and Albania.

authoritarian. Among the 16 Arab states, there are no democracies, and the average level of freedom in 2002 was 5.81, compared to an average of 3.16 for the other 176 states of the world. This gap (2.65 points on the 7-point scale) has doubled since 1972 (when it was 1.34). Table 2 on page xii presents the current Freedom House rankings for all 18 Muslim-majority Middle Eastern states.

Although it is frequently asserted that Islam is incompatible with democracy, the presence of large Muslim majorities in most Middle Eastern states is not, statistically, a persuasive explanation. There appear to be 43 countries in the world where the populace is predominantly Muslim.¹ Of these, 27 are outside the Arab world, and seven among them (or about a quarter) are democracies (see Table 1 above). While this proportion is the lowest of any region of the world, it is not trivial. Moreover, as Alfred Stepan has recently noted, when one examines the level of democracy in the non-Arab Muslim world in relation to level of economic development, one finds an unusual number of “great electoral overachievers,” that is, political systems that have at least a minimal electoral democracy, or what Stepan calls an “electorally competitive regime,” despite falling below the level of economic development that is usually thought necessary to sustain democracy. Further, Stepan shows, non-Arab Muslim countries have witnessed considerable electoral competition over the last three decades, while the Arab world—with

the sole exception of Lebanon for a few years before civil war broke out in the mid-1970s—has seen none.² As several of the essays in the concluding section of this book argue, there are strong substantive reasons as well to question the assumption that Islam as a religion presents a formidable obstacle to democracy.

So if Islam is not the problem, then what is? What can account for the dismal levels of democracy and freedom in the Middle East?

Who Fears Democracy, and Why?

Autocrats do not willingly commit political suicide. In the Middle East, particularly, autocracies have repeatedly outlived predictions of their demise. This is an imposing fact, and our contributors face it squarely. Rather than speculate about the absence of substantive democratization, they highlight the roots, the nature, and most of all the perdurability of autocracy in the Arab world and Iran. This is not to underestimate the struggles of the region's democrats, which also receive space in these pages. Nor does it support the too-pat idea that Islam is a stumbling block to democracy. As the essays on Turkey and Iran suggest, and as the concluding section reminds us, political leaders have shaped Islamic norms and symbols to advance both autocracy and democracy. Still, as Guillermo O'Donnell once wrote, reality *is* compelling. So far, the durability of autocrats is *the* story of the Middle East. We can only hope that one day a happier tale will be told.

Half of our story is about rulers whose grip on economic as well as political power gives them reason to fear democracy, since political reform could strip them of their booty. The other half tells of weak oppositions that are financially and institutionally dependent on the state and, worse yet, profoundly divided by religious and ideological cleavages. These fragmented oppositions can sometimes unite to assail this or that controversial policy, be it peace with Israel or privatization of state-run industries. But saying no is not the same as saying yes. In much of the Middle East both rulers and oppositions lack the means or incentive to negotiate a political accommodation or "pact" that would ease their exit from a deeply rooted legacy of autocratic rule.

This sad outcome is the work of political, socioeconomic, cultural, and ideological forces whose roots go back decades. Mohamed Talbi's opening essay discusses two of these factors: the creation of repressive security establishments, and the control that they and their allies exert over economic resources. The tenacity with which Arab security establishments hang on to power reflects the circumstances of their birth. As Talbi notes, many an Arab ruler has climbed to the top by shoving aside or even murdering his rivals or his predecessor. Having made so many enemies, a Qadhafi or an Assad can hardly envision a safe surrender of the throne to forces outside his control. Paradoxically, the

TABLE 2—MUSLIM-MAJORITY MIDDLE EAST STATES

COUNTRY	FH RANKING (PR, CL)	REGIME TYPE
Algeria	6, 5	Partial Autocracy
Bahrain	5, 5	Partial Autocracy
Egypt	6, 6	Partial Autocracy
Iran	6, 6	Partial Autocracy
Iraq	7, 7	Collapsed Full Autocracy
Jordan	6, 5	Partial Autocracy
Kuwait	4, 5	Partial Autocracy
Lebanon	6, 5	Partial Autocracy
Libya	7, 7	Full Autocracy
Morocco	5, 5	Partial Autocracy
Oman	6, 5	Partial Autocracy
Qatar	6, 6	Partial Autocracy
Saudi Arabia	7, 7	Full Autocracy
Syria	7, 7	Full Autocracy
Tunisia	6, 5	Full Autocracy
Turkey	4, 4	Illiberal Democracy
United Arab Emirates	6, 5	Partial Autocracy
Yemen	6, 5	Partial Autocracy

longer such rulers survive, the more ruthless and potent this circular reasoning looms. A vast security apparatus may silence opponents. But its “success” only raises the cost of relinquishing power. That is why figures such as the late Moroccan king and the late Syrian president (as well as the current Egyptian president) have made such efforts to pass their rule on to their respective sons. But one thing that Middle Eastern rulers will not do is expose their rule to the uncertainties of real democracy. In other regions

burdened by a lack of democracy—Latin America springs to mind—transitional “pacts” negotiated with the opposition have given autocrats such as Chile’s Augusto Pinochet a kind of “insurance policy” to help ease their exit from power. Nothing like this has ever happened in the Middle East. Instead, most rulers have devoted themselves to sustaining the original “ruling bargain” by which the state provides jobs, subsidies, and a modicum of social order in return for political quiescence.

State control over economic resources—particularly (though not exclusively) oil rents—has made this autocratic social pact possible. As William Quandt, Michael Herb, and Jean-François Seznec remind us, the oil rents that flow to state elites have fused political and economic power in ways that magnify the risks of reform. State control of the economy allows rulers to fund huge patronage systems that turn workers, professionals, intellectuals, and businesspeople into dependents. While in recent years some of these client groups have pushed for democracy, the porous boundaries between business and the state powerfully promote an unhealthy collusion between commerce and autocracy.

The hobbling of forces that might otherwise play a democratizing role also has a cultural dimension, which includes but goes far beyond the question of Islam. As the contributors to this volume show us, rulers and their opponents have invoked, shaped, reinterpreted, or distorted a myriad of religious, tribal, or ethnic symbols to defend or challenge

autocracy. While it may be going too far to claim, as Talbi does, that “Arab dictators have succeeded in hypnotizing their people,” even an upbeat analyst such as Laith Kubba acknowledges that dictators’ ability to provide jobs, welfare, and political stability has given them “broad appeal.” To further close off the path to change, rulers have deliberately “depoliticized” their societies, severing people from everyday politics and encouraging apathy. While Maghraoui traces the contours of this strategy in Morocco, depoliticization remains one of the most pernicious cultural and ideological legacies of autocracy throughout the Middle East. Culturally, its patrimonial nature encourages excessive deference to hierarchical authority while harnessing symbols and traditions rooted in rural Islamic structures. Ideologically, it pushes totalitarian ideologies with decidedly *Western* roots.

Rulers have paid a high price for “normalizing” these patrimonial visions of authority. The state’s dissemination of religiously inspired statist ideologies has crowded out secular, ethnic, or liberal Islamic alternatives, thus reinforcing the influence of illiberal Islamists. This is not merely because they have access to the mosque and other religious institutions. As Maghraoui notes, Islamists have made significant strides because they advance a moralistic and thus highly *apolitical* notion of authority that echoes the patrimonial ethos of the state itself. Islamist slogans such as “Islam is the solution” reproduce a legacy of depoliticization whose long-term costs are most visible in the absence of a vibrant political society throughout the Arab world.

Yet, the persistence of autocracy cannot be reduced to Islam or to its manipulation by rulers and opposition. Instead, the more fundamental *cultural* impediment to democracy lies in the failure of both Middle Eastern rulers and oppositions to forge a democratic solution to the question of national identity. As Brumberg observes, and as our case studies of Yemen, Kuwait, Morocco, and even Egypt suggest, autocracies have tolerated, sustained, and even abetted religious, tribal, ethnic, and ideological cleavages rather than resolve them democratically. This pattern is hardly unique to the Middle East. As students of “divided societies” have observed, in giving one or more ethno-religious groups the power to marginalize opposing groups (absent strong constitutional guarantees and a culture of constitutionalism), democratic elections generate risks for minority groups. These risks of democracy are especially great for minority groups that have long monopolized power by authoritarian means, and the more abusive their rule has been, the greater the risk they will suffer retribution under democracy. Nowhere has this fear been more palpable than in Syria and Iraq, where all the talk of “Arab nationalism” has barely disguised the brutal sway of an ethnic or religious minority. Over time, the very endurance of such minority-based regimes makes it more likely that even the slightest political opening will invite revenge from those who have been violently shut

out. This grim logic partly accounts for the ruthlessness of Saddam Hussein's regime and the rather hasty abortion of the *glasnost* presided over by Syria's Bashar Assad.

Liberalized Autocracy: Weakening or Growing Stronger?

While ethnoreligious divisions and their manipulation have hindered democratization, they have not excluded political reform. The leaders of Egypt, Morocco, Algeria, Jordan, and Yemen have all initiated political openings despite the persistence of profound disagreements between Islamists and secularists in the first three countries, between Bedouin tribes and Palestinians in Jordan, and between tribes representing North and South in Yemen. Indeed, the striking thing about the Middle East, and the Arab world in particular, is that despite the mix of socioeconomic, political, cultural, and ideological forces that have encouraged rulers to hold on to power, many have *promoted* a measure of political liberalization while maintaining the essential instruments of autocracy. Why is this so? What do such hybrid regimes mean for the region's future?

Many of our contributors implicitly or explicitly tackle these important questions by analyzing the roots, nature, and most of all the consequences of "liberalized autocracy" in the Arab world. In contrast to the "full autocracies" of Libya, Tunisia, Syria, and Saudi Arabia, which do not abide the slightest expression of dissent or pluralism, liberalized autocracies not only tolerate but *depend on* a limited, state-managed pluralism of ideas and organization as a strategy for legitimation and hence survival. Often adopted in response to economic crises (and in particular austerity programs mandated by the International Monetary Fund), limited liberalization and greater political participation are methods by which Arab rulers hope to offset the pain of economic reforms.

The trick, of course, is to ensure that such political openings never get out of hand. As our case studies show, Arab leaders look to liberalization as a way to divide the opposition even while letting it blow off steam. The proliferation of civil society groups, a somewhat open press, and access to the Internet and satellite television can create a feeling of virtual democracy without opening the doors to dramatic reforms. State-monitored political parties and even state-managed elections can also serve these purposes, so long as the key "ministries of sovereignty" remain under regime control. Liberalization without popular sovereignty or political accountability is thus the essence of liberalized autocracy—a form of hybrid regime that produces "elections without democracy."³

Is this good or bad? The answer depends at least in part on whether one sees liberalized autocracy as opening a possible path toward de-

mocracy—whatever the rulers intended—or as a self-contained system whose features hinder a transition from liberalization to democracy.

Our contributors are hardly of one mind on these crucial questions. Daniel Brumberg, for example, seems ambivalent about both the costs and benefits of liberalized autocracy. On the one hand, he argues that it can mitigate ethnoreligious and ideological conflict by providing secular, Islamist, and ethnic groups space in civil society, parliaments, and even cabinets. Such state-mandated power sharing can promote a greater measure of peaceful coexistence than might otherwise obtain in a truly competitive election, particularly one with a majoritarian, “winner-take-all” character. On the other hand, Brumberg argues that by design or default, liberalized autocracy eventually abets the influence of Islamists, thus setting the stage for a zero-sum regime-opposition conflict that raises the cost of further political reforms. For this reason he sees it as a “trap” that can ensnare regimes by encouraging even the most modern of new leaders, such as the kings of Jordan and Morocco, to skirt the challenges of substantive democratization.

William B. Quandt and Michael Herb each gives liberalized autocracy a mixed review as well. Quandt believes that Algeria’s 1997 political opening has helped Berbers, Islamists, and secularists to achieve an “uneasy peace.” Yet he also recognizes that state-controlled elections “have done little either to legitimize governance or to challenge the positions of those in power.” Similarly, while Herb affirms that Kuwait’s parliament has indeed given opposition forces real influence, he speaks volumes with his account of how easily royal factions played on Islamist-secularist splits to deflect opposition demands for an unprecedented vote of confidence. While “partial democratization,” notes Herb, has allowed Islamists to advance a “good deal of illiberal policy,” it has also institutionalized divisions that stymie them. Thus while affirming a “serious disconnect between democracy and liberalism in the Gulf,” Herb implies that this gap has been bridged by a hybrid system that ensures that “elections matter”—but not *too* much.

Little ambivalence is on display in Jillian Schwedler’s study of Yemen, Russell Lucas’s analysis of Jordan, Jason Brownlee’s account of Egypt, or Abdeslam Maghraoui’s essay on Morocco. The first three weave an unhappy tale that begins on a positive note with a political opening that gives Islamists, Arab nationalists, secular democrats, tribal formations, or ethnic groups space to speak out and occasionally cooperate. With their command of the mosques and occasional support from elements of the regime, Islamists invariably make greater electoral gains than secularists. Fearing that Islamists are getting too powerful, regimes respond by revising constitutions, rewriting electoral rules, tightening press and association laws, or even by postponing elections, as has been the case in Jordan. As for Morocco, while Maghraoui’s story ends just prior to the 2002 elections, the fact that the Islamist Justice and Devel-

opment Party came in third—an unprecedented victory for any Islamist party in Morocco—suggests that the ruling establishment may one day face similar pressures to back away from political reform.

This “deliberalization” process has been especially marked in states that are vulnerable to regional and global pressures for market reform, or with pro-Western foreign policies unacceptable to key portions of the population. The monarch in Jordan has been unlucky on both scores. As Lucas observes, political liberalization sparked opposition to structural adjustment while also giving voice “to opposition critics who could not reconcile themselves to peace with Israel.” In the wake of the U.S.-led war in Iraq,⁴ and absent dramatic progress toward a resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, this unfortunate convergence of domestic and regional politics could spur new bouts of deliberalization, even in such recently liberalized autocracies as Bahrain and Qatar. Still, both ruling and opposition elites are likely to see the advantages of reviving forms of political accommodation that provide for some state-managed participation and pluralism even while falling short of democracy.

Indeed, it is possible that one or two full autocracies may move toward liberalized autocracy. Jean-François Seznec’s analysis of Saudi Arabia, for example, suggests that despite the regime’s dependence on the clerical establishment and its conservative Wahhabi-Islamic ideology, the practice of negotiation and consultation among the 15,000 or so princes of the ruling House of Saud may set the stage for a modest loosening. Finally, as some contributors argue, if Western and especially U.S. support is crucial to some liberalized autocracies, there will likely be more outside pressure for economic and political liberalization. That said, given the weakness of parliaments, the fecklessness of opposition parties, the coopted and constrained character of civil society, the subordination of judges to the executive, the state’s domination of economic resources, and the challenge of illiberal Islamism, a transition from liberalized autocracy to competitive democracy still seems a long way off.

Iran

There are many possible kinds of transitions. To get a sense of the variety, consider Iran and Turkey—two large countries of almost 70 million people each on the edge of the Middle East. The former teeters between a return to full autocracy and a chaotic move into the “gray zone” of liberalized autocracy, while the latter appears to be exiting decades of constrained and partial democracy into a more freely competitive regime. Moreover, in both countries the struggle over Islam is playing a central role in redefining the political game. While the futures of Turkey and especially Iran remain uncertain, their stories illustrate

what happens when large numbers of people, some in the name of Islam, seize upon unexpected historical conjunctures to cast a ballot for democratizing change.

In Iran, as Shaul Bakhash points out, the would-be reformist President Mohammad Khatami was first elected almost by happenstance in May 1997, but then he and his reformist allies in the Majlis (parliament) won decidedly nonaccidental victories in the 2000 legislative and 2001 presidential voting. On both occasions, the wins were byproducts of at least two features of the Islamic Republic itself.

First, Khatami's victory stemmed partly from what Brumberg calls the multidimensional or "dissonant" nature of Iran's formal political system, with its strange mixture of democratic and clerical-authoritarian notions of rule. Factional tensions in the Majlis between the clericalist right and the Islamic-reformist left were serious, but the system endured because generally speaking the losers of any one fight could expect to survive politically. As Bakhash notes, with the emergence during the 1996 Majlis elections of the "Servants of Construction," a centrist group led by then-President Hashemi Rafsanjani, the "*potential* for meaningful politics" suddenly surfaced. For by backing Khatami, an important member of the clerical left, Rafsanjani opened the door to an alliance between this key wing of the ruling establishment and millions of young people in a youth-skewed population. Thus as Ladan and Roya Boroumand write in their otherwise gloomy analysis of the 2000 elections, if by the turn of the century the Iranian electorate had in fact become "an important player," this was the unintended consequence of a regime that had long ago "introduced a subversive element within a closed ideological system."

That the opposition turned this system against the clerical establishment also had something to do with the profound ideological and social changes that the Islamic Republic engendered. Some of these outcomes were hardly blessed by the clerics. By attempting to impose Islamic edicts on a new generation of young people, the clerics not only produced, in Ramin Jahanbegloo's words, a "younger generation (that) is today almost completely 'de-Islamicized,'" they also encouraged intellectuals (such as Abdul Karim Soroush) who had once championed the Islamic Revolution to rethink its very ideological foundations by holding, for instance, that Muslim piety will actually benefit from more distance between mosque and state. With its high levels of literate citizen engagement and its openly squabbling political factions, Iran presents a picture far different from that of the largely depoliticized Arab world. Keen to take on the system, young Iranians displayed a striking capacity for collective action during the 2000 elections, as Haleh Esfandiari's describes firsthand.

Three years later, much of this enthusiasm has waned under clerical-authoritarian assault. The contributions of Ladan and Roya Boroumand

and Mehrangiz Kar trace this distressing story of repression and persecution. All three remind us that the effort to silence reformists within and outside the Majlis was, and continues to be, sanctioned by the many articles in the Constitution that give ultimate power to the clerics and their Supreme Leader. Thus the very “dissonance” which at first promoted political reform has also served to contain it.

Where then is Iran going: back to full autocracy, haltingly toward liberalized autocracy, or to genuine democracy? Our contributors differ. The Boroumands see the Islamic Republic as a “unique” form of modern theocracy whose foundations rest on an ideological vision of the “people as the faithful.” Enshrined in the Constitution and enforced by the Supreme Leader, this theocratic notion of community can neither abide pluralistic democracy nor long tolerate state-managed political liberalization. Thus they conclude that political reform in the Islamic Republic is inherently unstable. It will either provoke a final bout of repression and thus a return to full autocracy, or it will unwittingly open the doors to the eventual victory of democracy—or as they put it, the principle of “the people as individuals.” Brumberg disagrees, arguing that Iran’s evolving political system is not unique, and that its multidimensional roots might eventually support a relatively stable, if messy, blend of autocracy and political liberalization. By contrast, Jahanbegloo and Kar believe, like the Boroumands, that the contradictions that animate the Islamic Republic will probably prove its undoing.

Turkey

While Iran may or may not be moving toward a form of liberalized autocracy, Turkey seems to be in the midst of going from a hybrid regime that blended elements of democracy, autocracy, and pluralism to one that is more liberal *and* democratic. This as-yet incomplete transformation was heralded by the resounding success of the Islamic-oriented Justice and Development Party (AKP) in the November 2002 elections. This landmark vote has prompted speculation not only about the capacity of Islamists to advance pluralistic democracy, but also about the relevance of the Turkish example for the Arab world.

Our two chapters on Turkey highlight the distinctive nature of the Turkish story. Among the historical events or trends that helped make the AKP’s win possible were these: the debate over membership in the European Union that heated up after Turkey was passed over in 1997; the 1999 earthquake, which as Soli Özel puts it, “shattered” the “reified idea of an omniscient, paternalistic *devlet baba* (daddy state)”; the economic crises of November 2000 and February 2002, which increased the EU pressure on Turkey to undertake deeper economic and political reform; and finally, the abysmal turnout in the 2002 elections, which let the AKP sweep the board. Combined with the 10 percent threshold, this

unprecedentedly low participation rate helped the AKP win nearly two-thirds of the seats with just over a third of the vote! Thus the November 2002 election was hardly a victory for political Islam. Exit polling suggests that every other AKP voter was casting a protest ballot against the traditional parties.

The deeper socioeconomic and political conditions that set the stage for the AKP's victory were also peculiar to Turkey. Among the most striking features of the Turkish case is the close and mostly *positive* connection between the perceived failures of a state-managed economic reform program and the rise of a new coalition of democratic forces outside the inherited party system. The corruption and inflation associated with economic reform alienated both the pro-globalization, export-oriented business community and the myriad of globalization skeptics represented by small businessmen, unskilled workers, and white-collar government employees. As our two essays clearly show, AKP's great feat was to craft a religious-cultural message that attracted support from both groups despite their divergent interests. This communitarian or "third way" message is not new; Islamists have long emphasized shared religious identity over class. What makes the AKP distinct is that while it is an avowedly *non-Islamist* party that favors the EU path, the AKP's popularity depends on a certain Islamist vision of politics. Is the AKP genuinely committed to liberal democracy? Our contributors offer a *qualified* yes. The AKP's support for democracy, they argue, is rooted in a long and often stormy process of political learning through which its leaders came to repudiate, in Özel's words, the "bolder—indeed at times bigoted—claims about the role of religion in politics" advanced by the AKP's Islamist predecessors.

Of course, one of the most critical factors that sets Turkey apart from the region is a state devoted to protecting secularism. While Turkey's rulers have not always consistently defended this ideal, the military's role means that the price of entry into (and survival in) the system for any party is repudiating the very idea of an Islamic state. No Arab state has an equivalent legal mechanism, nor does any have a political history that has produced such widespread and continued support for secularism as a principle of state. In addition, Turkey differs from all Arab countries in having an established tradition of truly competitive multiparty politics, which makes Islamists only one of several serious players.

Our contributors suggest that great uncertainties face the AKP. Some are economic: As Özel asks, how long can a party that represents "both many net winners and many net losers from Turkey's integration into the global economy" sustain this alliance? The other challenge is ideological. As E. Fuat Keyman and Ziya Öniş ask, how long can the AKP's hardcore supporters skirt the question of secularism by ignoring controversial issues such as the wearing of headscarves by Muslim women

in public institutions? These and many other factors—not least, the fallout from the war in Iraq—may eventually fracture a party whose rise, as Özel puts it, “may have been too rapid for its own good.” In as much as it “remains a coalition of forces rather than a coherent political apparatus,” it will take much more than the goodwill of its leaders to turn the AKP into the Muslim equivalent of Europe’s Christian Democrats.

Secularism and Islamism

The rise of democratic Islamist forces in Turkey and Iran has generated hopes for a liberal-democratic alternative to the illiberal Islamism that has dominated much of the Middle East. Moreover, the efforts of new Islamic groups such as Turkey’s AKP and Iran’s leading reformist party, the Islamic Participation Front, have compelled scholars and policy makers to ask if Islamists can embrace the principle of separating, or at least distancing, mosque and state. In short, is some form of secularism compatible with and necessary for Islamist participation in a democratic political order? While many chapters in this book touch on these questions, the third section faces them most directly. Some contributors focus on the conceptual challenges of interpreting Islamic ideas in ways that support a more liberal agenda, while others emphasize the role of changing social, economic, and political conditions. While these are hardly antagonistic approaches, those who focus on the challenge of reinterpreting Islam envision a prolonged intellectual and political struggle to overcome what they believe is a deeply rooted illiberal Islamic vision of community.

To overcome this, liberal Muslim thinkers distinguish between what they see as the spiritual message of Islam and its translation over time into “historically contingent” institutions and ideologies. For example, Abdou Filali-Ansary boldly argues that Islamic values and norms are not intrinsically hostile to secularization. If the latter means a distancing of state and mosque that *protects* piety, then Islam is compatible with this notion, since nothing in its spiritual precepts or early history mandates—or even accepts—the idea of a clerical establishment with a sacred mandate to impose a single vision of *the* truth on state and society. The idea that Islam calls for a marriage of mosque and state is, he argues, a relatively recent development. The result of a tenacious misunderstanding by which nineteenth-century Islamic reformists conflated the separation of religion and politics with state-enforced atheism, this confusion has led both Muslims and non-Muslims to think of Islam as the “religion . . . most hostile to secularization and to modernity in general.” With this in mind, Filali-Ansary suggests conceptual, political, and legal strategies that will help Muslims correct this stubborn misapprehension.

Ladan and Roya Boroumand advance a similar argument in their effort to trace the recent historical forces that have given rise to Islamic radicalism in Shi'ite Iran and the Sunni Arab Islamic world as well. Radical Islam, they argue, is not only of recent vintage, but much of its ideological content is inspired by or directly borrowed from Marxist-Leninist or fascist notions of political leadership and community. Thus while Islamists despise the West, some have "imported and then dressed up in Islamic-sounding verbiage some of the most dubious ideas that ever came out of the modern West," not least of which is the very notion of a totalitarian ideology. Given this imposing legacy, the only way forward is for Muslims to rediscover their "own cultural heritage" by "exposing the antimony between what the Islamists say and what Islam actually teaches."

Yet, the reader will surely ask, who has the right and moreover the power to say what Islam "actually" teaches, especially if so many lessons have already been taught? Undoing the consequences of history is no simple task, whether that history is two centuries old, as Filali-Ansary suggests, or just a few decades young, as the Boroumands argue. Since the boundary between what Islam is as a religion and what it becomes as history (or ideology) is in fact not so clear, what may count most is the capacity of one religious vision of politics to take hold in the public mind and thus obscure other alternatives, including liberal Islam. This is surely one of the key lessons suggested by Bernard Lewis's contribution to these pages. Regardless of whether one agrees with Filali-Ansary's assertion that Lewis sometimes conflates "religion" and "historical civilization," one cannot easily dismiss Lewis's claim that for centuries the "idea of freedom . . . remained alien" to Islamic societies. Indeed, the central quest of liberal Islam is to reclaim for Islamic civilization (or Islam) the very idea of individual freedom.

Radwan Masmoudi's "The Silenced Majority" takes up this challenge by arguing that Islamic practices such as *shura* (consultation) and values such as *adl* (justice) are in effect the pillars of *both* Islam and Islamic liberalism. In contrast to this well-established modernist approach, Filali-Ansary insists on a form of historicism that rejects the proposition that Islam's sacred principles carry within them any specific political message. Given what he deems the "inaccessibility of absolute truth," he rejects the idea of Islam as an archetype of truth that can serve as a blueprint for social and political order. Thus he is not keen to embrace historically bounded concepts such as Reformationism or even Islamic liberalism. Instead, he speaks of "enlightened Muslim thought," a term that points to a way of thinking rather than a form of politics. This form of thought has a postmodern feel but a long intellectual pedigree, going back to Ali Abderraziq, an early twentieth-century Egyptian reformer whose argument in favor of separating Islam and politics shook the Islamic world. And while Filali-Ansary recognizes the potential pitfalls

of his “critical” approach—whose relativist spirit might be seen by some Muslims as hostile to religion itself—he nevertheless believes that “enlightened Muslim thought” provides the only conceptually safe harbor for individual freedom, the value he most cherishes. For Filali-Ansary, commitment to freedom of belief, rather than any “assertions of collective identity,” ultimately distinguishes the true from the false liberal Muslim or “reformationist.” This is why, in his “Muslims and Democracy,” he considers Iran’s Abdulkarim Soroush to be one of enlightenment Islam’s leading spokesmen, while he dismisses Tunisia’s Rachid al-Ghannouchi as a “counter-Reformationist” whose ultimate goal is to subordinate the individual to the collective power and authority of the Islamic community.

The reconceptualization of Islam that enlightened (or liberal) Islamic thinkers call for will probably not be achieved for years or even decades. A conceptually complex project, it has frequently been undermined by rapid social, economic, and political changes that have weakened its social base. Indeed, as Abdelwahab El-Affendi notes, liberalism and democracy are potentially antagonistic projects, a point amply illustrated by the election of illiberal Islamists in Algeria, Egypt, Kuwait, and Morocco. Masmoudi agrees. He and his Muslim liberal colleagues, he writes, “are caught between a rock and a hard place,” in that they are equally opposed to the quasi-secular autocracies that rule the Arab world and to the illiberal Islamists who are the first to benefit from the former’s hesitant political openings.

Are there political and institutional solutions to this familiar dilemma? Given what he sees as the “hotly contested” nature of the term “liberal,” and even more so, the distinct possibility that a push for a genuine reformation of Islam will produce more rather than less political stability, El-Affendi appears to favor a pragmatic coalition strategy that brings together a myriad of Islamist parties and trends, including those that “prefer to postpone or bypass the thorny issues implied by a commitment to both liberalism and Islam.” Similarly, rather than exclude illiberal Islamists from the political arena, Vicki Langohr thinks that Arab leaders should promote a policy of “gradual democratization” by which new secular or non-Islamist parties gain effective entrance to the political system. While the participation of such parties would not be sure to make Islamists drop their illiberal agendas and ideologies, it might eventually contain the latter’s influence, making reform less risky and hence more likely. All this assumes, of course, that those in power will be willing to undertake the kinds of reforms that most Arab leaders have thus far skirted. Brumberg makes a similar point in his “Islamists and the Politics of Consensus.” Yet he also argues that absent a legacy of relative political pluralism or “dissonance,” even the best-intentioned reformers will find it hard to manufacture political competition, or to move beyond the state-managed power-shar-

ing arrangements that are typical of liberalized autocracies such as Jordan, Algeria, Morocco, and Kuwait.

Will Anything Really Change?

The war in Iraq took place as this book was going to press. It is difficult to comprehend from this vantage point how the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime—and the postwar reconstruction of Iraq—will affect the overall political climate in the Middle East and the prospects for *sustained* political liberalization and democratization in the region. Certainly, a successful political reconstruction of Iraq along relatively democratic lines could encourage democratic reform elsewhere in the region. Yet it is all too easy to imagine ways in which failure to establish a democratic and genuinely independent Iraq could broadly impair democratic prospects in the Middle East.

Even if political reconstruction in Iraq manages (against long odds) to overcome the challenges of religious, ethnic, and factional divisions, and to avoid a destabilizing popular reaction against the transitional process itself, a huge regional challenge will need to be confronted. The future of democracy in the Middle East will remain bleak absent a permanent, peaceful, and mutually negotiated two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Over the past several decades, this conflict has generated a heavy fog over Arab politics. Arab governments have used it relentlessly to legitimate their rule—by stressing the authenticity of their commitment to something larger than themselves—and have relied on it more and more as the older forms of nationalism and pan-Arabism have lost their luster. The conflict siphons off much energy and passion that Arab intellectuals and political activists might otherwise devote to political failings closer to home. The discussion of the true shortcomings that hamper Arab development—so eloquently expressed in the 2002 *Arab Human Development Report*⁵—has been distorted and deflected by this intense symbolic struggle over Arab identity and dignity. Until this fog lifts—so that the peoples of the Arab world can see and debate more clearly the real obstacles to national progress, and so that radical Islamists lose one of their most powerful rallying cries—genuine and lasting democratization will be unlikely in the region.

Democratization in the Arab world will also require serious thinking about the modes, phases, and sequences through which political liberalization and democratization might ultimately occur in different kinds of states. As the many essays in this volume remind us, while rapid democratization might sometimes invite radical forces and thus lead to more rather than less autocracy, a process of political “reform” intended mainly to sustain autocracy is hardly promising. The key challenge facing the Arab world is not political liberalization per se, but rather how

to transform liberalization into a vehicle for genuine and lasting democratization.

Such a transformation will require innovative thinking. A demand-side approach that makes civil society organizations the sole or chief vehicle of change must be supplemented by a supply-side approach that harnesses a wide variety of state, or state-linked, institutions to the drive for genuine political reform. Courts must be given genuine independence. Constitutions must be redrafted not only to protect basic human rights, but also to give parliaments real authority to speak, legislate, and monitor executive power on the voters' behalf. And political parties must benefit from laws and constitutions that give them the means and the right to speak on behalf of different constituencies and interests. With such an infusion of ideological and institutional pluralism into the still-hobbled civil and political societies of the Arab world, regimes and oppositions that had previously faced off in a zero-sum confrontation could find new ways to compromise and thus redefine the very goals of political liberalization.

Timing and sequencing could prove crucial. As the essays in this volume show, Arab political systems today have a highly distorted political landscape. In the "liberalized" autocracies, many of the parties and interest associations that dominate politics today are in effect arms of the ruling apparatus. The main alternatives are often illiberal Islamist organizations and political parties. Thus, moderate, pluralistic, questioning, and tolerant political forces (whether secular or Islamist) are caught between the rock of the patrimonial state and the hard place of illiberal Islamism. A quick political opening, moreover, could make things worse by forcing moderate forces to compete unprepared. A program of political liberalization that *actually* intended to achieve democratization would provide breathing space for these tendencies. It would lift virtually all restrictions on the press, on intellectual life, and on peaceful associations of citizens. And it would set up independent institutions of "horizontal accountability"—not only courts but electoral commissions, audit offices, anticorruption agencies, and central banks—that would constrain the power of government and so lower the stakes in controlling power. These reforms could then generate the climate for more meaningful, free and fair electoral competition, which might be phased in (at successively higher levels of political authority) over some period of years. Needless to say, such a process of gradual democratic transformation would take considerably longer in a closed autocracy like Saudi Arabia, with no history of organized civil and political pluralism, than it would in Morocco or Jordan. But every Arab state could develop a strategy and make a start—if there was the *will* for truly democratic reform.

Yet it is precisely this will that is lacking. The Middle East faces a paradox that is hardly unique to the region: Real, lasting, and peaceful

democratic change requires the state to implement far-reaching reforms. But for this to occur, the state must also reform itself. Overcoming this paradox will require a push from both within and without. From within, democratization requires political leaders with the vision and political skill to challenge those in power who want to retain liberalization (if at all) simply as a handy tactic for autocrats. From without, democratization will require the West—and especially the United States—to take a new stand. Having talked about the need for democracy in the Arab world, the present and future U.S. administrations must address the heart of the matter, which remains the nature of the Arab state in all its political, social, and ideological manifestations.

While this collection of essays highlights the endurance of Middle East autocracies, we remain hopeful that such a combination of change from within and pressure from without will eventually open a path to real democratization. State-managed liberalization may be a trap, but because the severity of that trap differs from regime to regime, some states are better positioned to adopt the kinds of reforms that we have outlined above. Smaller countries that are not hamstrung by economic crisis, and that are just beginning to travel the path of liberalization, may be better positioned to turn liberalization into a force for real change. To date, the signals from new liberalizers such as Bahrain and Qatar have been mixed. They have opened up politics somewhat, and Bahrain has even held parliamentary elections. But Bahrain's ban on political parties and its constitutional reinforcement of monarchical authority are not encouraging. Experience suggests that the longer a country goes down the path of liberalized autocracy (with its frequent detours and cul-de-sacs), the harder it becomes to chart a new path to real democracy.

That said, some of the more experienced liberalized autocracies that boast some legacy of competitive party politics, and which are led by innovative leaders who can see beyond the logic of day-to-day survival, might also make some progress. Among these Morocco may be the leading candidate. It must tackle profound economic problems and then ensure that its Islamists face strong-enough competition from non-Islamist parties to keep the Islamists within the bounds of pluralistic politics. Kuwait is also a candidate to move beyond liberalized autocracy. The royal family must stop playing secularists off against Islamists, must allow the creation of formal political parties, and must promote constitutional changes that would give parliament real authority. But given the sharp divisions between parliament's Islamist and secularist factions, and in particular the repeated and often successful efforts of the former to pass various illiberal laws, Kuwait's leaders lack the incentive to redefine the rules of the game.

What of full autocracies? While there are far more impediments to change in these regimes than in liberalized autocracies, the term "full

autocracy” covers a range of regimes, some of whose leaders and oppositions may eventually see the advantages of moving from full to liberalized autocracy. For example, while the Al-Saud family’s dependence on the conservative clerical establishment surely limits its capacity for reform, it has also generated unhappiness with Wahhabi ideology within some modern sectors of society. This discontent might eventually be tapped through the Shura Council to create a constituency for reform that can counterbalance the Wahhabi clerics. Turning to the Maghreb, it is not inconceivable that Tunisia’s leaders will one day see the logic of state-managed liberalization. The country’s relative economic success has created a middle-class constituency that President Ben Ali has counted on to back his version of bureaucratic authoritarianism. But this very constituency might one day press him or his successor (as it did the authoritarian leaders of South Korea and Taiwan) to initiate a political opening.

History does not provide fertile ground for optimism about the democratic prospect in the Middle East. Barring fundamental change from within and without, new political reforms seem likely only to repeat the cycle of repression and liberalization, or in some cases, to enlarge the ranks of liberalized autocracies in the Arab world. But virtually every region in the world that has witnessed substantial democratization had, at some prior point, a history that projected a dim future for freedom. Cultures can and do change. Powerful events, social and economic forces, and skillful, determined leaders can reshape history. Autocracies have survived in the Middle East, but have failed at governance and failed to gain popular legitimacy. The people of the region are ready for systemic political change. This readiness at least opens the possibility that, with the right type of strategy, leadership, and international engagement, political change in the Middle East might finally open a path to democracy.

NOTES

1. Freedom House lists 47 such states, but it is not clear that Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Eritrea, and Burkina Faso are Muslim-majority states.

2. Alfred Stepan with Graeme B. Robertson, “An ‘Arab’ More Than ‘Muslim’ Electoral Gap” *Journal of Democracy* 14 (July 2003).

3. For an exploration of the concept of hybrid regimes and the dynamics of “elections without democracy,” see the articles by Larry Diamond, Andreas Schedler, Steven Levitsky, and Lucan A. Way, and Nicolas van de Walle, in the *Journal of Democracy* 13 (April 2002): 21–80.

4. As noted later in this intro, this book went to press just at the time Saddam was overthrown, and most references to Iraq refer to the Ba’athist regime.

5. United Nations Development Programme, *Arab Human Development Report 2002* (New York: UNDP, 2002).