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## The Roots of Authoritarianism in the Middle East

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Over the last 40 years, many countries in the world have been democratized. Between 1974 and 1990 the number of democratic governments in the world nearly doubled. According to Huntington (1991a), a third wave of democratization started in Portugal and Spain in the 1970s and swept the developing world during the 1980s and 1990s. The democratization wave was accelerated with the end of the Cold War. Despite a declining pace and stagnation in the improvement of political rights, human rights and civil liberties, the actual number of democratic countries has thus increased since the mid-1970s. Yet this democratization process has not firmly taken hold in the Middle East.

The Middle Eastern experiment with democracy started in the 1970s. A number of authoritarian leaders of the region inaugurated economic and political reforms, opened up some political space for the opposition and installed multiparty systems with relatively free elections. However, these limited reforms, which never aimed to change political structure, were revoked after economic crisis turned into popular uprising in many of the Middle Eastern countries throughout the 1980s. The region witnessed another political liberalization wave for a short while in the early 1990s. The collapse of the Soviet Union initiated an unprecedented process of democratization in Eastern Europe. In the early 1990s, following the Gulf War, the United States and other Western powers launched a democracy promotion process in the Middle East and supported "political reforms" through democracy aid. The democracy promotion of the West, however, did not lead to democracy; actually, it helped restrain its emergence. The authoritarian leaders of the Middle East used these aids and the reintroduction of elections as a tool to consolidate their power. Many regimes manipulated elections. If they were defeated at the ballot box in spite of these manipulations, they cancelled the elections, banned the opposition and arrested the opposition members. As a result, this short period of "democratization" was followed by the reassertion of authoritarianism.

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The silence in the Middle East was broken by the first successful popular Arab revolution, at the end of 2010 in Tunisia. The Arab Spring created a great hope all around the world for the collapse of authoritarian regimes and the establishment of democratic governments in the Middle East from Tunisia to Egypt. The fall of longtime leaders and the emergence of new ones – along with the establishment of political parties and holding of free and fair elections – have been the most important gains of the uprisings. Citizens started to demand rights and accountability from their governments. There were encouraging signs that democratization was taking hold throughout the region. Unfortunately, this period was not long lived and the optimism of the Arab Spring has faded.

According to Freedom House's 2014 Freedom in the World report, the Middle East has the worst civil liberties scores of any region. Today, if one omits Israel, all of the Middle Eastern countries from Morocco to Saudi Arabia are ranked not free. Tunisia, Lebanon, Morocco, Libya and Kuwait, on the other hand, are the partly free countries of the region. The rest – such as Jordan, Algeria, Egypt, Qatar, Oman, Yemen, Iraq, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Iran, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Syria – are categorized as not free (Freedom House, 2014). Egypt, which was the most promising country of the Arab Spring, lost nearly all of its gains from the Tahrir revolution in 2011. After the oust of Mohammed Morsi – the country's first democratically elected president – by the military, Egypt's freedom status was downgraded from partly free to not free. Three years after the capture and death of the dictator Mu'ammer al-Gaddafi, the political situation in Libya is still fragile. The weak interim government lost control of much of the country and of the massive oil compounds in the desert to militia fighters. Libya still struggles to build democratic foundations for governance. The country does not have a new constitution yet, and political tension and ongoing insecurity cast doubts on Libya's ability to complete its transition to democracy. The situation in Syria, which is by far the greatest tragedy of the region, continues to deteriorate. Syrian protests with demands for freedom and the end to corruption began in March 2011 but turned into a civil war due to the government's systematic use of extreme violence against peaceful protesters. All parties to the conflict have violated international humanitarian and human rights laws, and the relentless violence and brutality further intensifies day by day. The number of killed and injured civilians is increasing, and every day more people are fleeing Syria. Civilians are facing violence, hunger, disease and other hardships under siege and this situation could endure for years. Tunisia looks like the last hope for accomplishing a peaceful change after the Arab Spring. Despite the assassination of two secular leaders in 2013 and the months of deadlock between

the ruling Islamist-led coalition and the largely secular opposition, Tunisia has solidified its transition to democracy with the adoption of a new constitution, the most democratic one of its history.

Almost four years after the Arab Spring revolts, profound uncertainties remain. The recent developments proved that it would not be easy to maintain the democratization process in the region.

### What is authoritarianism?

In general terms, nearly all regimes in the modern Middle East have been defined as authoritarian in terms of regime categorization. Most of them, however, have had political parties, regular elections and some form of liberal freedom since the 1980s. Therefore, despite the firm control on political and economic systems by authoritarian leaders, given the "liberal" features of the regimes, it has become more complicated than defining them as simply authoritarian. Then what are these regimes? Since the mid-1990s, there has been a growing debate on how to classify authoritarian regimes and how to draw a line for the regimes that are located in the gray zone between democracy and autocracy.

Most of these debates take Juan J. Linz's definition of authoritarianism as a reference point despite the criticisms of its shortcomings (Snyder, 2006, p. 227; Hadenius and Teorell, 2006, p. 2). In his pivotal article Linz (1964) conceptualized the authoritarian regime for the first time as a unique regime typology distinct from both democracy and totalitarianism (Linz, 2000, p. 53). Linz defined political systems as authoritarian if they are political systems with limited, not responsible, political pluralism, without elaborate and guiding ideology, but with distinctive mentalities, without extensive nor intensive political mobilization, except at some points in their development, and in which a leader or occasionally a small group exercises power within formally ill-defined limits but actually quite predictable ones. (Linz, 2000, p. 159)

Linz has also underlined the distinction between sultanistic and authoritarian regimes, the two of which are easily confused. His article with Stepan (2013, p. 26) offered two examples to clarify the difference.

Sultanism is exemplified by Rafael Trujillo's Dominican Republic. The dictator, who ruled the country from 1930 to 1961, made his son a brigadier general when the boy was nine. But this kind of thing never happened in another example of dictatorship, Chile, under General Augusto Pinochet. Pinochet, the military strongman who ruled Chile from 1973 to 1990 under an authoritarian regime, headed the

“military as government,” but the “military as institution” had a degree of established organizational autonomy. Linz and Stepan use the level of institutionalization of military as a key variable to draw a line between authoritarian and sultanistic regimes. However, they admit that it is not easy to strictly separate them. Regimes can be almost entirely sultanistic in their characteristics or display some of the sultanistic characteristics. Thus, prior to the Arab Spring, Arab regimes such as Libya, Syria, Yemen, Egypt and Tunisia displayed some features of sultanism to varying degrees, yet none of these Middle Eastern regimes can be categorized as sultanistic according to this definition (Linz and Stepan, 2013, pp. 26–29).

Linz has proposed to classify autocratic regimes along three dimensions (pluralism, ideology and mobilization) and designed a useful typology for authoritarian regimes: (1) bureaucratic military authoritarian regimes, (2) authoritarian corporatism, (3) mobilizing authoritarian regimes, (4) postcolonial authoritarian regimes, (5) racial and ethnic democracies, (6) incomplete totalitarian and pre-totalitarian regimes and (7) post-totalitarian regimes (Linz, 2000, pp. 252–350). Linz and Stepan (2013) added a new type, “authoritarian-democratic hybrid” regimes, to the list of their former categories, including democratic, authoritarian, totalitarian, post-totalitarian and sultanistic regimes (Linz and Stepan, 1996). They used this newest category to define the situation in the Arab world following the Arab Spring. Linz and Stepan argue that no Arab country has ever had a fully institutionalized totalitarian regime; therefore, the term “post-totalitarian” does not apply to the Arab countries where dictatorships have fallen. Such countries can no longer be adequately characterized as authoritarian or sultanistic either, and they are not (or not yet) democracies. So Linz and Stepan developed the term “authoritarian-democratic hybrid” to define a political situation locked in between democracy and autocracy. The authoritarian-democratic hybrid concept has very similar characteristics to competitive authoritarian or hybrid regimes. Linz and Stepan argue that this authoritarian-democratic hybrid is indeed not a regime type; it is a situation where the ruling authority fails to last or to become institutionalized. This situation may turn to democracy or full-fledged authoritarianism; this depends mostly on the role and the decision of the coercive apparatus in the country (Linz and Stepan, 2013, pp. 20–21). O’Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead (1986, p. 9) also emphasized the variation of results in these kinds of regime transitions. A transition from authoritarian rule could produce a democracy, or it could terminate in a liberalized authoritarian regime or a restrictive, illiberal democracy.

At the beginning of the 1990s, there was a growing optimistic expectation in literature about the future of democracy in the non-democratic world. Authoritarianism was seen as merely a transitional phase before democracy. Lately most scholars have abandoned this view after they witnessed the continuity of the political grayness and prefer to describe it as a regime rather than a situation in transition. Since the beginning, however, there has not been a consensus in the literature regarding what to call these regimes and how to describe them. Terry Lynn Karl (1995), in his pivotal article titled "The Hybrid Regimes of Central America," introduced the term "hybrid regime" to define a state that contains both democratic and authoritarian forms of rule. In the 1990s, democracy served as the basis for the new terms, producing a trend commonly referred to as "democracy with adjectives" (Collier and Levitsky, 1997, pp. 431–432). In this trend, scholars titled these regimes as "authoritarian democracy," "neo-patrimonial democracy," "military-dominated democracy," "proto-democracy," etc. Yet the emphasis on democracy was criticized, and this approach was accused of treating mixed regimes as partial or "diminished" forms of democracy (Levitsky and Way, 2002, p. 51). In reaction, a countervailing trend has emerged in the last decade, replacing the term "democracy" with "authoritarianism" (Gilbert and Mohseni, 2011, p. 271). As a consequence of this shift from democracy with adjectives to authoritarianism with adjectives, new terms were derived: "electoral authoritarianism," "competitive authoritarianism," "semi-authoritarianism," "soft authoritarianism." Not all of the terms mentioned here point to the same regime type. Despite the common tendency to use one for another, there are some differences. A regime may display a mixture of authoritarian and democratic features in many ways. According to the tendency of a regime (toward authoritarianism or democracy) or the measures of a researcher, a different term is used. The efforts of conceptualization have created confusion, though the broad literature ensures insight into different types of hybrid regimes.

In order to distinguish hybrid regimes from democratic and full authoritarian regimes, one should draw a conceptual border not only between authoritarianism and hybrids but also between democracy and hybrids. In most of these studies on hybrid regimes, the definition of democracy is taken from Robert Dahl (1971). Dahl uses these criteria to define democracy: (1) free, fair and competitive elections; (2) full adult suffrage; (3) political rights and civil liberties, including freedom of speech, the press and association; and (4) control over governmental decisions about policy constitutionally vested in elected officials. When compared to authoritarianism, a hybrid regime meets one or more

of these criteria. But it also violates most of them frequently and seriously and does not fulfill the entire set of obligations arising from democracy. In most efforts to classify authoritarian regimes, researchers mainly used the degree of competitiveness as a measure and considered the presence of institutional opportunities for opposition participation (Diamond, 2002; Levitsky and Way, 2002). Although this method is criticized as reductionist because of its emphasis on only one dimension of democracy (Hadenius and Teorell, 2006; Gilbert and Mohseni, 2011), it is a broadly accepted method in the literature on the subject.

According to this classification, authoritarian regimes may be categorized as competitive authoritarian, electoral authoritarian (which is also called "pseudo democracy," "virtual democracy," "façade democracy," etc.) or closed authoritarian (conventionally authoritarian). Levitsky and Way (2002, pp. 54–58) compare electoral authoritarianism with competitive authoritarianism in four areas of democratic contestation: elections, legislation, judiciary and media. In electoral authoritarianism, an electoral institution exists but yields no meaningful contestation, legislatures either do not exist or are thoroughly controlled by the ruling party, the judiciary is also dominated by the regime, and the media is entirely state-owned, heavily censored, or systematically repressed. In this kind of regime, opposition forces may periodically challenge, weaken and occasionally even defeat autocratic incumbents. In competitive authoritarian regimes, even though the electoral process may be characterized by large-scale abuses of state power, elections are regularly held, generally free and competitive; legislatures tend to be relatively weak, but they occasionally become focal points of opposition activity; although governments have pressures on formally independent judiciary, they are criticized domestically and internationally due to their interventions; and there is a legal and independent media, though it is frequently threatened and periodically attacked by the government (Levitsky and Way, 2002, pp. 54–58).

It is really complicated to distinguish competitive authoritarian and electoral authoritarian regimes and measure all of these criteria in every country. Larry Diamond (2002, p. 31), who also underlined this difficulty, categorized Middle Eastern countries in 2002 in the following way: Iran, Yemen and Lebanon as competitive authoritarian; Kuwait, Jordan, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Egypt as electoral authoritarian; and Bahrain, Oman, UAE, Qatar, Iraq, Libya, Saudi Arabia and Syria as politically closed authoritarian. Today Tunisia, Iraq and Libya may be categorized as competitive authoritarian. The future of the regime in Egypt is still blurred following the military coup. Elsewhere

in the region, countries continue to be authoritarian to some degree. The only regime rated as democratic in the region is Israel. However, it is a controversial issue considering the political rights of Israel's Arab citizens, its policy toward Palestinians and its activities in the occupied lands. Israel is also out of the research focus of this study because of its exceptional features. The other well-known "democracy" of the region is Turkey, which has never been a liberal democracy. Furthermore, in recent years the ruling Justice and Development Party (the AKP) was widely criticized at both national and international levels for moving toward authoritarian rule. Turkey is still categorized as partly free by the Freedom House, but its press freedom rate was downgraded from partly free to not free in 2014. As the strongest democracy in the region, Turkey still suffers from undemocratic policies nearly 70 years after its first multiparty elections. The foundations of democracy remain unsteady or utterly absent in nearly all countries of the Middle East. This obvious fact leads one to think about the reasons behind the authoritarian tendencies of Middle Eastern countries.

### What are the reasons behind it?

There is no magical answer that explains the democratic deficit of the region. A number of internal and external factors account for authoritarianism in the Middle East, though there is little consensus regarding them. In the 1960s and 1970s much of the literature was based on socioeconomic explanations, which emphasize the relations between high levels of economic development and democracy. Lipset (1959) argued that this relation influenced many of the analyses during this time. Economic explanations are still espoused by many scholars, yet the focus shifted away from development to the source of revenues and the class structure. Other, more enduring explanations have been culture and religion. The researchers regarded the region as exceptionally culturally resistant to democratization; in this sense they have used Arab culture and Islam to explain the authoritarianism in the Middle East. Even though "the Middle East exceptionalism" theory has been highly criticized because of its orientalist perspective in recent years, it is considered the most widespread explanation. The sociocultural division hypothesis and the patriarchy hypothesis, which use the social structure of the society as an explanatory device, have also been debated.

Particularly after the 1990s much of the work has emphasized the role of elections in sustaining authoritarian regimes. In recent years the capacity, the will and the status of the military as a state's coercive apparatus to suppress any democratic initiative has also attracted attention in the literature. History may be the most neglected factor in the studies in this field. Historical explanations have



mainly focused on previous experiences of the countries with democratization or the influence of Islam and Arab culture but pay little attention to the impact of the colonial past. Emphasis on the internal dynamics glosses over the critical role of the great powers on authoritarianism and democracy in the Middle East, not only during the colonial period but also today. In authoritarianism literature, some studies stress the effects of other factors such as the Arab-Israeli conflict, the rate of literacy, the status of women and so forth on the prevalence of authoritarian rules throughout the region. Although some of these studies and their easily refutable arguments fail to explain the reasons for authoritarianism in the region, a group of theories gives insight into how authoritarian regimes have been able to survive for so long.

## The impact of the past

### Institutional inheritance

In order to understand the state structure of the Middle East we should shed a light on the history of the region. The origins and persistence of authoritarian rule in the region can be traced to the colonial period. All of the countries of the modern Middle East and North Africa, except for Iran, Morocco and the periphery of the Arabian Peninsula, were part of the Ottoman Empire, and most of them – with the exception of Iran, Saudi Arabia, North Yemen and Turkey – have been ruled by European powers.

As Anderson (1987, pp. 3–4) pointed out, the state formation and bureaucratic development of the Middle East began in the period of modernization under the Ottoman Empire. Ottoman administrative development, however, was suspended when the Europeans dismantled the empire after World War I. In some cases, such as those in Egypt and Tunisia, Europeans maintained the state formation process. In much of the rest, European rulers destroyed the Ottoman bureaucratic, military and financial establishment and replaced it with their own. This discontinuity created an unstable administration deprived of legitimacy. Besides that, European colonizers disturbed the political power according to their interest and blocked the emergence of rival groups by dividing the society, supporting allied native rulers and keeping civil society weak (Anderson, 1987, pp. 5–7). Although there were some democratization attempts during the British and French mandates, they were more cosmetic reforms to cover up foreign domination than decisive efforts toward the creation of democratic states (Bellin, 2004, p. 150). In Tunisia, South Yemen and Algeria for example, France

and Britain established pseudo parliamentary bodies, but these bodies denied local elites a political voice (Angrist, 2004, p. 231). It was quite the same in the parliaments of Iraq, Jordan and Syria. Consequently, when a large number of Middle Eastern countries gained independence after World War II, the new states inherited weak institutions, weak civil societies and a limited substantive power structure (Chaney, Akerlof and Blaydes, 2012, p. 385).

According to Michele Penner Angrist (2004, p. 229), the nature of nascent local party systems upon the departure of European powers significantly affected the type of political regimes that eventually emerged after Middle Eastern states gained their independence. In countries such as Tunisia, South Yemen and Algeria, political elites were united under a single party to mobilize the masses in widespread protests against imperial powers. In countries with a single dominant party at the time of independence, a one-party state developed. Angrist (2004, p. 233) argues that single, preponderant parties did not only render authoritarianism inevitable but also enabled undemocratic elites to build authoritarian regimes quickly and effectively because they faced no rival actors. Although there was some form of competitive politics in Iraq, Jordan, Egypt and Syria during the independence, it gradually gave a way to an authoritarian rule. As Angrist (2004, p. 244) suggested, if key actors conclude that a given party system configuration threatens their status and interests (gained or maintained under the European domination), they are likely to defect from democratic norms and support antidemocratic actors, institutions and initiatives.

Even though other studies argue the positive effects of a British colonial heritage, they cannot provide any example from the Middle East or Africa. Myron Weiner (1987) in a well-known article claimed that British colonial administration had a powerful influence on the creation of democratic systems in the Third World. However, only six countries meet Weiner's condition; as Huntington emphasized, a much larger number of former British colonies have not sustained democracy (Huntington, 1984, p. 206). In his empiric research Fish (2002, p. 9) also tested this argument and held that the British colonial heritage that left the "Westminster model of parliamentarism" behind does not necessarily provide a significant advantage for any country in democratization. It also means that former colonies of other European powers are not more vulnerable to authoritarianism.

Eric Chaney is another scholar who believes that the reason behind authoritarianism of the Middle East is hidden in the history, but he dates it back before the European domination. According to him

the democratic deficit of the region is more a product of its unique political equilibrium, which was created during the Arab conquest, than of its cultural, ethnic or religious characteristics (Chaney, Akerlof and Blaydes, 2012, p. 367). In his article Chaney focused on the countries conquered by Arab armies during the period of Islamic expansion before 1100 CE . He claimed that the “Arab democratic deficit” is a product of the long legacy of the control structures developed in the early Islamic world. According to his hypothesis, regions conquered by Arabs enjoyed unusually autocratic political institutions as a result of their propensity to adopt slave armies (p. 368). The widespread use of slave armies allowed rulers to undermine the power bases of local elites, leading to their destruction. As political power became increasingly concentrated in the hands of military leaders backed by slave armies, religious leaders emerged as the only check on the sovereign’s power. The alliance between the military and religious leaders did not produce democratic institutions, since they worked together to develop and perpetuate a “classical” institutional equilibrium. This political equilibrium persisted in many areas into the 19th century and has left a legacy of both weak institutions and weak civil society. Over the last century, European colonizers and native rulers have preserved the historical political structure (Chaney, Akerlof and Blaydes, 2012, pp. 382–385). Chaney’s hypothesis provides a different historical insight; however, as Akerlof (Chaney, Akerlof and Blaydes, 2012, p. 401) pointed out, even if we accepted Chaney’s hypothesis, how can we neglect the existence of powers of new groups, such as in Middle Eastern politics, and their impact on today’s regime structure? From the Arab conquest to today, Middle Eastern countries have been occupied many times. Without any doubt the influence of most recent European occupations on the institutionalization of these countries is greater than that of the past. Moreover, we can find these kinds of power alliances in European history as well, though they did not prevent the emergence and maintenance of democracy in Europe.

### An ancient explanation: Islam

Many studies track the roots of Middle Eastern authoritarianism in Islamic history. This view dates back to 1798 with Montesquieu and basically claims that Islamic beliefs made the region more prone to autocratic rule. According to Montesquieu, Muslims must have a despotic government as Islam speaks only by the sword and acts upon men with a destructive spirit, on which it is founded (Montesquieu, 1949, p. 30). Montesquieu’s approach influenced many people after his time, and it was reproduced after the collapse of the Soviet Union by a number of scholars, including Bernard

Lewis (1990, 1993), Samuel P. Huntington (1991a, 1991b) and Elie Kedourie (1992), as a response to the question of the persistence of authoritarianism in the Middle East.

Bernard Lewis (1990, 1993) is one of the foremost scholars defending the idea that Islam is not compatible with democracy. He argued that the lack of separation of church and state in Islam is the main reason for this incompatibility. The Islamic state was in principle a theocracy. Therefore, devout Muslims believe that legitimate authority comes from God alone. Since the ruler (the caliph) derives his power from God, not from the people, and the holy law (sharia) is based on the Qur'an, Muslim people submit to authority without questioning. Lewis explained all these factors as accounting for the prevalence of authoritarianism in the Islamic world.

According to Kedourie (1992, p. 1), "the idea of democracy is quite alien to the mind-set of Islam." Moreover, the notion of a state as a specific territorial entity which is endowed with sovereignty, the notion of popular sovereignty as the foundation of governmental legitimacy, the idea of representation, of elections, of popular suffrage, of political institutions being regulated by laws laid down by a parliamentary assembly, of these laws being guarded and upheld by an independent judiciary, the ideas of the secularity of the state, of society being composed of a multitude of self-activating, autonomous groups and associations – are profoundly alien to the Muslim political tradition. (pp. 5–6)

As a result, Kedourie claimed that there is nothing in the political tradition of Islam and hence the Arab world which gives a place to the constitutional and representative government (p. 5).

Huntington is another notable name who believes that Islam is responsible for the region's democratic deficit. In his view, Islam is not hospitable to democracy because it holds strong cultural obstacles to democratization within itself (Huntington, 1984, p. 208). Huntington argues that Islam "rejects any distinction between the religious community and the political community." In an Islamic state "governmental legitimacy and policy flow from religious doctrine and religious expertise," and as a consequence "Islamic concepts of politics differ from and contradict the premises of democratic politics" (Huntington, 1991b, p. 28). With the beginning of the third wave of democratization, nonetheless, he became more optimistic about the future of Muslim countries. This time, he did not treat these obstacles as substantive facts that prevent democratic development. As he stated, similar cultural arguments were expressed against Catholic countries for democratization and against

Confucianist countries for economic development in the past. Hence, he started to express doubts about viewing a particular culture as a permanent obstacle to change. Islam, just like other religions, is a highly complex body of ideas, beliefs, doctrines, assumptions and behavior patterns. It has some elements that are compatible with democracy, some elements that are clearly undemocratic. Furthermore, cultures are historically dynamic, and the dominant beliefs and attitudes in a society change (Huntington, 1991b, pp. 29–30). Nonetheless, Huntington left his optimism and moderate stance over prospects for democracy in the Islamic states in his controversial article “The Clash of Civilizations?” He then argued that there is a deep conflict between the values of the West and those of Islam. Huntington held that Muslim societies are more prone to political violence and that “the crescent-shaped Islamic bloc, from the bulge of Africa to central Asia, has bloody borders” (Huntington, 1993, p. 34). In Huntington’s view, the existence of political violence in Islamic societies is related to the Islamic culture, which is unfamiliar with Western ideas of democracy (1993, p. 40).

Judith Miller (1993) published an article in the same issue of *Foreign Affairs* based on similar arguments about Islam and democracy. Miller replied to her question “Why should one suspect the sincerity of Islamists’ commitment to truth, justice, and the democratic way?” with this: “In short, because of Arab and Islamic history and the nature and evolution of these groups.” Using Bernard Lewis’s studies to support her outcomes, Miller claimed that Islam is incompatible with the values of pluralism, democracy and human rights.

The assumptions relating the authoritarianism in the Middle East to Islam reflect a certain bias stemming from an orientalist approach. These scholars submit their roughly generalized knowledge on Islam as the only explanation for the democracy deficit. As Hinnebusch pointed out, such arguments see political cultures as essentially fixed and uniform. Hinnebusch referred to the doubts of Huntington on seeing a culture as a permanent obstacle to change, yet he was more certain. According to Hinnebusch, Islam varies too widely by context and time to constitute an unchanging religious obstacle to democratization any more than Catholicism was once wrongly said to be (Hinnebusch, 2006, p. 375). Emphasizing the same point, Bellin held that Catholicism and Confucianism were also accused of incompatibility with democracy; however, it did not prevent countries in Latin America, southern Europe or East Asia from embracing transition (Bellin, 2004, p. 141).

Furthermore, many research surveys and empiric studies questioning the relationship between Islam and democracy/authoritarianism do not find any significant connection between Islam and a democracy deficit. In order to test Huntington's assumption that Muslim societies are more prone to political violence, Steven Fish used the list of incidents of political violence in the world between 1946 and 1999. During this period, there were 207 episodes of major intrastate political violence. Only 72 events, 35% of the total, took place in Muslim countries. Given that 30% of the world's countries are predominantly Muslim; their share of political violence is fair. Fish concluded that the evidence does not show that the Islamic world has been the site of a grossly disproportionate amount of political violence (Fish, 2002, p. 17). Fish also used "political stability/lack of violence" indicators and compared the stability/lack of violence scores for Muslim and Catholic countries. According to his results, the level of economic development is the major factor determining a country's stability/lack of violence, with higher-income countries enjoying greater stability/less violence. The Islam variable is not statistically significant. When one controls for economic development, the evidence for a link between Islam and violence is weak at best (Fish, 2002, p. 18). Fish also repudiated the assumptions that Muslims are more religious than Christians, and political life in Muslim societies is determined by religion which is considered an ally of authoritarianism. Fish argues that there is no evidence to prove the strong correlation between religion and political choices in Muslim-majority countries (Fish, 2002, p. 21). Thus, the survey of Mark Tessler (2002), based on public opinion data collected in Palestine (West Bank and Gaza), Morocco, Algeria and Egypt, showed that strong Islamic attachments do not discourage support for democracy. On the contrary, Tessler concluded that the stronger the Islamic attachments are, the greater the support for democracy (2002, p. 348). Another result of his survey is that support for political Islam does not involve a rejection of democracy. According to Tessler, those with a more favorable view of Islamist movements and platforms are no less likely than others to favor political competition and to desire mechanisms to hold leaders accountable. These people do not see an incompatibility between democracy and Islamic governance. Rather, many of them complain about the current political system and support an alternative that incorporates both the democratic principles of choice and accountability and the Islamic principles of justice and protection of the weak (Tessler, 2002, p. 349).

In another empiric study, Alfred Stepan and Graeme B. Robertson (2003) compared the political performance of Muslim countries from 1973 to 2002 to see the correlation between Islam and

democracy. They argued that differences in the level of democracy between Muslim and non-Muslim countries in the developing world are not significantly different. Of the 29 non-Arab Muslim-majority countries they studied, more than a third, enjoyed significant political rights for at least three years, and more than a quarter experienced these for at least five consecutive years (Stepan and Robertson, 2003, p. 31). Nevertheless, they found a difference between Arab and non-Arab countries when they compared the level of democracy according to electoral competitiveness, political and civil rights and the like. They concluded that "a non-Arab Muslim-majority country was almost 20 times more likely to be 'electorally competitive' than an Arab Muslim-majority country" (Stepan and Robertson, 2003, p. 33). According to their results, although there may be a "democracy deficit" in Arab-majority countries, there is none in the 31 non-Arab Muslim-majority countries. The lack of democratization in this part of the world can be seen as caused not by religion but by Arab culture. In other words, the Muslim gap is mostly an Arab gap, yet they did not analyze how "Arab culture" causes this result.

### Arab culture and neopatriarchy

While Stepan and Robertson, like the other studies mentioned here, disprove the arguments about Islam being incompatible with democracy, their study suffers from a weakness of another cultural explanation. It is possible to find other examples of "Arab exceptionalism" that blame the Arab culture rather than religion for the democracy deficit. These studies blame the political culture of the region, including political institutions, processes or citizen attitudes and values for being inimical to the emergence of democratic institutions.

One of the proponents of this approach, Hirsham Sharabi (1998), explained the region's resistance to democracy with the concept of "neopatriarchy."<sup>2</sup> Sharabi argued that the central feature of Arab society is the repressiveness and unquestioned dominance of the father (patriarch) in the family and of the male in relations between men and women. Thus between ruler and ruled, between father and child, there exist only vertical relations. These relations replicate themselves not only in broader society but also in relations between state and citizen. This structure creates a culture of domination and dependency in social and political life (Sharabi, 1998, pp. 6–8). This traditional domination (patriarchy) has interacted with modernity in the contemporary Arab world. Arab society is "neither modern nor traditional" (Sharabi, 1998, p. 4). Sharabi called this hybrid structure neopatriarchy, which influences social and political life in the Arab world. As a result of that, Arab states, regardless of modern institutional building and legislation, have been sustained in distorted modern forms.

According to Sharabi (1998, p. 7), this state "is in many ways no more than a modernized version of the traditional patriarchal sultanate."

Sharing most of Sharabi's approach to patrimonialism as the dominant pattern of leadership in Middle Eastern politics for centuries, Bill and Springborg (1990) underlined the critical role of associational and institutional groups in the Western political system. The dominant group structure in the Islamic world has been of an informal group rather than a formal one. The formation of a viable formal group structure requires a certain level of organization skills, a minimal degree of trust and cooperation, a reservoir of funds for equipment and staffing, and a willingness on the part of political elites to tolerate the existence of such groups. According to Bill and Springborg (1990, p. 89), the conditions of organization are seldom all present at once in the Middle Eastern societies.

Anderson sharply criticized Bill and Springborg's approach. She emphasized that even a family in an Arab society, not the complex collection of families that constitute tribes, meets most conditions of forming a formal group. She argued that only the fourth condition – political tolerance – is lacking in the Arab world (Anderson, 1995, p. 83). Anderson also draws attention to the urban and labor migration, which has changed the structure of society and decreased the proportion of patriarchs in general. Most scholars today cast doubts on culturalist explanations. Fish (2002, p. 30) shares some concerns of explaining polity by family relations; nonetheless, he warned that the possibility of this connection should not be underestimated. In his view, "individuals who are more accustomed to rigidly hierarchical relations in their personal lives may be less prone to resist such patterns of authority in politics." Hence, the treatment of women is important in that sense, but only as one of several factors (Fish, 2002, pp. 23–32).

In general, cultural explanations treat the culture as a prerequisite to a successfully functioning democracy and believe there is something wrong about the Arab culture. However, the empirical research and data from the Arab world indicate the contrary. According to the data collected from 20 different surveys carried out in nine Arab countries between 2000 and 2006, popular support for democracy is widespread in the region. Cross-regional data from the World Values Survey also indicates that support for democracy in the Arab world is as high as or higher than in any other region (Tessler and Gao, 2005; Tessler and Jamal, 2008). According to Lawrence Rosen (2006), culture is important but this does not indicate that something inherent in Arab culture or Islam prevents the



development of democracy. He argued that institution-building might very well follow a different course in the Arab world than in the West. Rosen warned about the ready-made assumptions that Western constitutional forms will necessarily suit local needs in the Middle East (Rosen, 2006, p. 177).

## The impact of the present

### The role of the West: democracy promotion

It is important to note the impact of external powers on the democratizing process all around the world. The European Union (EU) enlargement process, for instance, plays an important role in the democratization of Eastern Europe. The pressures and incentives of the organization have direct and indirect effects on establishing democracy, not only in the member countries but also in the candidates. However, external democratizing pressure did not bring democracy to the Middle East in the post– Cold War period. During the Cold War years, the authoritarian regimes of the Middle East were supported by both superpowers, namely Soviet Russia and the United States. They provided arms, technical and financial support without questioning the type of the regime unless it threatened their interests. In the mid-1980s, the United States imposed a new policy based on supporting democratization to secure pro-American regimes against the threats of increasingly popular radical Islamic movements. After 9/11 the US administration upheld a policy of promoting democracy in the Middle East. At the beginning they mostly concentrated on fostering free and fair elections and reforming state institutions; later the support for civil society, civil rights and human rights would be part of the democratic aid programs. All these efforts, however, did not create real political change in the Middle East. In democracy promotion the US government has pursued two patterns, one for “friends” of the United States and the other for its “foes” (Dalacoura, 2005). The pressure on the “friends” was very limited. These regimes – such as Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Algeria and Morocco – have initiated reforms, yet of a limited kind and in a controlled manner (Dalacoura, 2005, p. 968). Due to the multiple security and energy priorities of the West, most of the authoritarian regimes never faced real external pressure unless they threatened the West’s vital interests. As a result, the reforms did not limit the powers of leaders; in many cases reforms helped them consolidate their rule. In sum, democratization of the region has always been the secondary goal overshadowed by vital security concerns of the United States as well as Europe. As Carothers pointed out, “When democracy appears to fit in well with U.S. security and economic

interests, the United States promotes democracy. Where democracy clashes with other significant interests, it is downplayed or even ignored” (Carothers and Ottaway, 2000, p. 3).

Similarly, the EU’s democracy promotion prioritized the EU’s strategic and economic interests. European countries mostly neglected a regime’s political oppression at the expense of their strategic interests. For instance Egypt, despite the regime’s prevalent oppression, received the highest amount of European financial aid maintaining the status quo in the Middle East established by Camp David Treaty of 1979. Both the individual European countries and the EU awarded the authoritarian regimes with financial aid; nonetheless, they limited their contact with the Islamist political groups who faced the regimes’ most intense harassment. Hiding behind the pretext that “Islamists are coming,” Middle Eastern regimes have provided very limited space for non-violent Islamic forces to engage in politics. While allowed to run for elections in Jordan, Kuwait, Yemen and Morocco, Islamist parties have experienced continuous repression by the rulers when they have demonstrated a good performance at any elections. The EU’s reaction to the regimes’ repression of Islamists has been silence.

The major problem of the Western democracy promotion lies in the prioritization of multiparty elections over other dimensions of democracy, such as civil liberties. Moreover, Levitsky and Way (2010) argue that the external democratizing pressure does not have the same effect on each country; the result depends on “leverage” and “linkage” effects. If the non-democratic country is vulnerable to pressure from the West (leverage), and there are extensive cross-border ties and flows connecting them (linkage), the pressure will be effective. Otherwise, the degree of effectiveness of external pressure is limited, as in the Middle East. Levitsky and Way (2010, p. 361) explain how energy resources and security issues shape the democracy promotion agenda of the West and limit autocrats’ vulnerability to external pressure. Saudi Arabia or Egypt, for example, can easily argue that political liberalization would put at risk either US security interests or Western access to oil. Exploiting the various security concerns of the West helps authoritarian regimes in the region maintain international support (Bellin, 2004, p. 149).

After nearly 30 years, the results of the West’s democracy promotion are unimpressive and mostly ineffective. The expansion of multiparty elections in the Middle East may be the only remarkable result of this long process, yet the elections did not bring democracy; they rather entrenched the authoritarian status quo in most cases.

## Elections as a tool of an authoritarian regime

Today, most countries in the Middle East have some form of political parties and regular elections. In these regimes, however, the existence of multiparty elections do not mean a step toward democratization since they are not seriously contested and political power continues to remain firmly in regime hands. Regimes permit the opposition movements to contest elections unless they risk the safety of their power. Hence they do not allow free and fair elections (Brownlee, 2007, p. 6). In most cases, opposition parties are banned or disqualified from electoral competition and opposition leaders are jailed when they become a threat to the regime. Independent or outside observers are prevented from verifying results, which creates widespread opportunities for vote rigging (Levitsky and Way, 2002, p. 54). Despite their unwillingness to accept the results of democratic elections, the number of authoritarian regimes that adopt multiparty elections is increasing day by day. From 1975 to 2000, 44 states introduced limited multiparty elections under conditions of continued autocracy. As a consequence of that, authoritarianism with elections has become a modern form of autocracy (Brownlee, 2007, p. 25).

If the elections do not express the voters' demands, then what purpose do elections serve in these authoritarian regimes? Buehler (2013) explained this purpose using the "safety-valve" metaphor. Elections assist authoritarian regimes in weakening and containing the political opposition while satisfying democratization demands from inside and outside. In his case study of the elections in Morocco, Buehler delineated how the Moroccan regime and regime elites manipulated electoral rules and formal institutions to undermine the Islamist opposition between 2007 and 2010. According to him, altering and enlisting formal political institutions (such as political parties, electoral laws and the media) to work in the regime's favor is the best way to break the opposition. Further, manipulating elections is more useful and less problematic than using brute military force to defuse the opposition (Buehler, 2013, p. 151).

Elections play a distinct role in determining regime stability by helping rulers not only to quell opposition and control voters but also to manage incumbent elites. Buehler underlined the need for a "ruling party" in an authoritarian state. In his explanation, a ruling party makes the regime stronger than the rule of a charismatic, willful or ruthless dictator because the party regulates conflicts between elites and prevents their dissatisfaction which may weaken the regime (Buehler, 2013, p. 152). The satisfaction of the elites is crucial for the future of the regime. Albertus and Menaldo's (2012, p. 165)

empirical research shows that a democratic transition is more likely if the elite manage to guarantee their interests. In that sense autocratic elections are designed to establish a regularized method to share power among ruling party politicians. In cases where autocracies do not ban the opposition, the regime allows the elite to organize into independent political parties and to have a place in the legislature (Magaloni, 2006, p. 8; Brownlee, 2007, p. 203). At the same time, the landslide victories of a regime signal to the elite that they do not have any political future outside the ruling system. If they obey the rules of authoritarian rule, they may get power, jobs and interests that are distributed by incumbents. This system does not only discourage the potential opposition but also consolidates the support of elites for the regime (Magaloni, 2006, pp. 16–19; Lust-Okar, 2009, pp. 128, 130).

The elections can turn into a trap for the opposition groups in an authoritarian regime. First of all, elections provide the regime with information about its supporters and opponents. This information is very useful not only to control and quell the opposition when necessary but also to screen the supporters and their loyalty. Furthermore, the past elections and election processes serve the regime by allowing it to arrange the elections according to the ruling party's mass support and its geographic distribution (Magaloni, 2006, p. 9).

Autocratic legislatures and elections also serve to divide the opposition. Incumbents divide the opposition by giving limited concession to only a small part of it and leaving the rest of the opposition out (Magaloni, 2006, p. 9; Lust-Okar, 2009). Ellen Lust-Okar's (2004) comparative analysis on the policies of regimes against the opposition after popular uprisings in Jordan and Morocco shows how an authoritarian regime strengthens itself with the divide-and-rule strategy. Authoritarian elites have the power to determine which opponents may or may not participate in the formal political system. According to Lust-Okar's classification, this variation yields three types of political environments: undivided-exclusive, undivided-inclusive and divided. In an undivided environment, authoritarian rule does not divide the opposition; it allows either all of them or none of them to participate in the political process. In the divided environment, in contrast, incumbents allow some political opponents to participate in the political system while excluding others (Lust-Okar, 2004, p. 160). According to the results of Lust-Okar's case study, when incumbent elites do not create division between opposition groups, either by giving access to political participation or by preventing it entirely, opposition elites are more likely to mobilize political unrest. However, when incumbents effectively divide political

opposition into loyalist and radical camps, opponents are less likely to mobilize unrest (Lust-Okar, 2004, p. 159).

In spite of several arguments for how elections turn into a tool in the hands of authoritarian rulers to sustain the regime, some authors argue that elections can have a destabilizing, even democratizing effect. Philipp Kuntz and Mark Thompson (2009) claimed that in electoral authoritarianism, fraud in the elections has the capacity to spark massive protests. It may mobilize ordinary citizens, strengthen the opposition, help overcome the fear of collective revolutionary action and turn into a trigger that can break down the regime (Kuntz and Thompson, 2009, p. 272). Brownlee (2007) also places importance on authoritarian elections. He states that the shift to authoritarianism with multiparty elections does not represent an unwitting step toward full democratization, but neither do manipulated elections automatically protect rulers. In Brownlee's view, the autocrat's elections are a stage in a long political process that may lead either to a durable authoritarianism or to opportunities for democratization. Despite the fact that the elections in authoritarian regimes are not fair or free, Brownlee points out that these elections provide information about rulers, their critics and the support competing factions have in the wider population. Elections may certainly be manipulated and they do not bring about significant change, but they tend to reveal the political trends (Brownlee, 2007, pp. 6–9).

### Military: on which side?

The military in the Middle East has long been an important political actor playing a central role in the region's political history. According to one view, this privileged position of the armed forces stems from the historical praetorian or patrimonial character of the region, which goes back to the Ottoman Empire reign (Anderson, 1987, p. 2). The security forces either control the state directly or act as the essential apparatus for an authoritarian civilian regime; therefore, they have a decisive impact on the fate of democratic transformation in the Middle East. Bellin argues that "democratic transition can be carried out successfully only when the state's coercive apparatus lacks the will or capacity to crush it. Where that coercive apparatus remains intact and opposed to political reform, democratic transition will not occur." Bellin called this the region's true exceptionalism (Bellin, 2004, p. 143).

In her view, the robustness of authoritarianism requires not only the capacity of coercive apparatus but also its will to repress opposition. Brownlee also underlined the relation between the capacity of the regime and its security apparatus. Both scholars refer to the Thad Skocpol's (1979) thesis that revolutions are only accomplished when the state's coercive apparatus loses its will or its capacity to repress its foes (Bellin, 2004, p. 143; Brownlee, 2007, p. 210). The empirical research of Albertus and Menaldo (2012) also proved that increased coercive capacity under autocracy has a strong negative impact on a country's level of democracy as well as the likelihood of democratization. In the Middle East security forces in many states have had this capacity and will, but how have they managed this? Bellin pointed out the factors that determine the capacity and will of coercive apparatus. The first of these factors is fiscal health. In other words, when the military cannot pay the salaries or guarantee supplies of arms and ammunition, the coercive apparatus disintegrates from within (Bellin, 2004, p. 143). Hence the economic capacity of the state is important. The oil-rich countries or major recipients of different rentier revenues do not hesitate to spend money for the army. Michael Ross (2001, p. 356) claimed that rentier revenues have a repression effect by helping authoritarian leaders build up their internal security forces to quell the protest movements. Even poor countries make it their first priority to pay the military in order to strengthen their security apparatus (Bellin, 2004, p. 148). The region's states are world leaders in the proportion of GDP spent on security. According to the latest report of the Homeland Security Research Center (2014), while the market leaders are China and the United States, in relative terms of GDP share the Middle Eastern countries spend two to four times as much as the international superpowers.

In this respect, foreign aid is crucial particularly for poorer countries in the region to strengthen their security apparatus. Bellin underlined the role of international support in shaping the robustness of security forces. If the security establishment loses this crucial financial, technical, or political support, it is most likely to lose not also capacity but also the will to hold on to power (Bellin, 2004, pp. 143–144). In order to maintain the foreign aid, authoritarian leaders manipulate "the danger of radical Islamist." The Arab-Israel conflict is another excuse used by these regimes to explain and increase their military capacity. Stepan and Robertson (2003) show that the threat posed by Israel to the Arab countries is often indicated as a reason for spending money on the strong security establishment and constructing large militaries in the Middle East. This state of emergency played an important role in reinforcing authoritarianism in the region. Although the Arab-Israel conflict is a significant dynamic in

regional politics, it is not a determinant of the region's authoritarianism. For instance, it cannot explain the reason for large militaries in countries far from Israel's fly zone, such as Saudi Arabia, Morocco or Tunisia.

The institutionalization level of the security forces is another important factor that determines both the capacity and will of the security establishment against the internal uprisings. According to Bellin, a better-institutionalized security establishment, in which entry and promotion standards are rational and the military, based on primordial ties to executive authority, is more willing to allow political reforms. The less institutionalized patrimonial militaries are more resistant to democratic reforms. Under patrimonialism, officers have reason to fear that their positions will be in danger from political reforms while their counterparts in institutionalized armies believe that they can protect their gains and power after the reforms (Bellin, 2004, pp. 144–145). In most Middle Eastern countries, the military is governed by patrimonial logic. Extensive patrimonial ties can help the regime endure challenges and defeat its domestic foes (Brownlee, 2002, pp. 40–41). In Jordan and Morocco, for example, the king regularly appoints his male relatives to key military posts; in Saudi Arabia and Syria entire branches of the military and security forces are family affairs (Bellin, 2004, p. 149). In contrast, in Egypt, Tunisia and Turkey the military is highly institutionalized. This is one factor explaining why the military supported the uprising against autocrats in Egypt and Tunisia during the Arab Spring.

The potential cost of suppressing the dissident movements, Bellin argues, also has an effect on the capacity and will of security forces and the regime. The political and economic cost of repressing relatively small groups is lower than repressing the large ones (Bellin, 2004, p. 146). Hence, under the strong authoritarian rule supported by a large military, the mass protests still have a chance to force the regime to reform. However, if the cost of the reform is higher than repressing the protesters and the regime has the capacity to do so, the authoritarian elites may choose to repress the uprising without paying attention to how large it is.

The strong relation between the regime and its coercive apparatus is one of the main factors supporting robust authoritarian regimes in the Middle East. Even though the support of the armed forces is not always guaranteed, militaries are loyal to the authoritarian rulers as a consequence of the patrimonial structure in most Middle Eastern countries. Citizens in Middle Eastern countries are not much different than the people elsewhere in terms of demanding rights. It is not difficult to find

riots, uprisings and protest movements in the history of the region: the 1982 Hama riots in Syria, the 1950s strikes and uprisings in Saudi Arabia, the 1977 bread riots in Egypt and economic protests in Jordan and Morocco during the 1980s. Nonetheless, these riots were suppressed violently by governments, which spend much of their wealth to build strong security apparatuses to block the population's democratic aspirations.

### Economic development and rentier state

One of the most widespread approaches to the reasons behind authoritarian rule builds a relationship between the political system and the state of economic development. Drawing on the modernization theory, this approach believes that the level of industrialization and economic development (wealth, industrialization, urbanization and education) is profoundly important. Seymour Martin Lipset (1959) in his foundational text "Some Social Requisites of Democracy" claimed that the more economically developed nations according to basic indices of wealth, industrialization, urbanization and education have a greater chance to sustain a democracy. Thus, the average wealth, degree of industrialization and urbanization and level of education are much higher in the more democratic countries (Lipset, 1959, p. 75). Lipset argued that growing wealth and other economic factors cause a series of social changes that lead to democracy; so democracy is unviable in premodern societies. Despite the fact that this approach was sharply criticized because of its simplification in the following years, the modernization theory has been reproduced in response to the globalization and democratization wave of the 1990s. This new version shed light on ongoing cultural changes such as the rise of gender equality in order to overcome the shortcomings of the early version.

The modernization theory has problems explaining the democratization of some countries, such as India, which has relatively low levels of modernization, or the European communist and fascist regimes with quite high levels of income and social mobilization. Hinnebusch (2006) suggested that the failure of contemporary high-income, oil-rich states in the Middle East to democratize also shows the shortcomings of the modernization theory. In his view, "Modernization thresholds have not been exceeded in so far as much of this income derives from external rent that increases (and decreases) without much of the societal mobilization or complexity which Modernization Theory believes make authoritarian governance unviable" (Hinnebusch, 2006, pp. 374–375). Then how can the democracy deficit of the Middle East be explained when one particularly considers the high-income, oil-rich countries?



Many scholars explain this exceptional status of Middle Eastern countries using the specific nature of a region's economy based on rentier income. The rentier state theory has been in wide use since Hussein Mahdavy first formulated it in 1970. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of new democracies, it became popular one more time to explain the democracy deficit in the Middle East. Huntington, for example, argued that the democratic trend may bypass the region since many of these states depend heavily on oil exports, which enhances the control of the state bureaucracy (Huntington, 1991b, pp. 31–32). Beblawi (1990), Anderson (1995) and Ross (2001) asserted that large amounts of oil wealth are inimical to the development of a democratic institution. Although oil production is the dominant source of such rents in the Middle East, it is not the only one. The poor neighboring countries are linked to the oil economy through labor migration and their remittances. Some of them get direct aid from the Gulf countries or transit fees and pipeline rents (Posusney, 2004, p. 130). More than half of the government's revenues in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Kuwait, Qatar and Libya come from the sale of oil. Israel, Egypt and Jordan get a large amount of foreign aid from the United States every year. The governments of Jordan, Syria and Egypt have revenues from payments of pipeline crossings, transit fees and passage through the Suez Canal. Labor remittances are an important source of foreign exchange in Egypt, Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco (Ross, 2001, p. 329). Tourist revenues are also important, particularly to Egypt and some North African countries, as another form of rent (Posusney, 2004, p. 137).

How do rentier incomes cause the democracy deficit or the predominance of authoritarianism in the Middle East? The rentier state theory asserts that access to large revenues not from production or taxes but from rents makes a state autonomous from its society in terms of the source of income. It creates a rentier mentality, which causes "a break in the work-reward causation. Reward – income or wealth – is not related to work"; it is isolated from production (Beblawi, 1990, p. 88). Moreover, the state or the government, which does not demand taxes for the finance, gains power from the distribution of the large amounts of rentier revenues as jobs and welfare benefits. The distribution power also provides the state with power to manage the elite relationships, and this substitutes a wider legitimacy. Social and economic interests are organized in such a manner as to get a good share of rents. In Beblawi's words, "Citizenship becomes a source of economic benefit" (Beblawi, 1990, p. 89). As a consequence people become highly dependent on the state for living, which deters

them from placing pressure on the government for their demands. The state is released from domestic accountability. This economic structure not only promotes an authoritarian regime but also provides wealth to protect it (Anderson, 1987, p. 10; Hinnebusch, 2006, p. 379; Ross, 2001).

The rentier state theory builds a positive relationship between democracy and taxation and accepts this as the main engine of democratization in the West. In this view, taxes grant citizens a degree of power over the rulers to bargain and to demand accountability and representation in the government. As a result, governments that fund themselves through oil revenues are more likely to be authoritarian; governments that fund themselves through taxes are more likely to become democratic (Ross, 2001, p. 335). Some empirical work, however, has produced ambiguous or contrary results about the effect of taxation on the democracy. Waterbury (1994, p. 29), for instance, argues that “neither historically nor in the twentieth century is there much evidence [in the Middle East] that taxation has evoked demands that governments account for their use of tax monies. Predatory taxation has produced revolts, especially in the countryside, but there has been no translation of tax burden into pressures for democratization.”

Since the introduction of the rentier state theory, the economic structure of most Middle Eastern countries has changed. Gray draws attention to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, namely Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Since the 1990s GCC states have become more globalized, spent their rentier wealth to develop their economies and societies and tried to diversify their revenues to reduce their strong reliance on oil. There has also been a change in the states’ relationship with society. All these changes, however, do not mean a radical transformation in GCC states’ regime structure. These states are still not democracies. They protect their authoritarian character and do not allow any opposition and political reforms to challenge the state’s authority (Gray, 2011, p. 2). Hence, the rentier state theory has the power to explain the political dynamics rather than the economic ones. The economic structures of these states have become more complicated with the change in populations, globalization, business pressures and new international imperatives. Gray claimed that the classical rentier state theory is insufficient to explain this complex structure in GCC economies (Gray, 2011, pp. 36–37).

## Conclusion

Most Middle Eastern countries have been governed by authoritarian regimes for long time. They have even used the democratization steps to maintain their regime stability. The Middle East has historically been the least free region in the world. Why are Middle Eastern countries resistant to democratization, or why do authoritarian regimes take root in this region? It is impossible to give a simple answer to this complicated question. As summarized in this chapter, many in the field are seeking an answer. Scholars have different approaches. Marsha Pripstein Posusney (2005, p. 3) outlines two major approaches within the political science literature on authoritarianism and democratization: "The 'prerequisites' school, whose arguments posit economic, cultural, or institutional necessities for transitions from authoritarianism to begin; and the 'transitions' paradigm, which sees democratization as a contingent choice of regime and opposition actors that can occur under a variety of socioeconomic and cultural conditions."

Both schools' arguments have a certain validity, but they are also limited in explaining the complex structure of authoritarianism across the Middle East. History, for instance, gives insight into the establishment of authoritarian rule, yet the present of the Middle East cannot be understood by looking at historical reasons only. As elsewhere in the world, history cannot be the fate of the region. The history of Europe is also full of examples of authoritarian, monarchical regimes and dictatorships. Not long ago, in the 1930s, the contest between authoritarian and democratic visions of society dominated the political struggle in most European countries. But at the end they accomplished the democratic transformation. The last couple of decades have borne witness to significant cyclical, structural, economic, cultural and technological changes that lessen the importance of history for today. The Arab Spring, in spite of ongoing problems, casts doubt on claims that history, Islam or Arab culture is a systematic obstacle to democracy. These arguments at most give us an idea about how authoritarianism has established itself or found a ground in the region, but they do not explain how these regimes have still maintained their lives.

Present conditions have more influence on strengthening authoritarian regimes at the expense of democratization. As has been summarized, the election engineering and divide-and-rule politics deactivate the opposition and make the maintenance of authoritarian rule possible. In cases where opposition exists, it is suppressed by a strong coercive apparatus, which is strengthened by the rentier incomes and Western support. The Middle East has seen many demonstrations demanding rights,

economic equality, freedom, dignity and social justice; but each time people were silenced and suppressed violently by security forces. Therefore, blaming the culture and religion for the prevalence of authoritarian regimes across the region is overly simplistic. It is no doubt that countries of the region are connected through historical, religious and cultural ties. They have similar social structures and economic problems. Each factor, though, affects each country to a different extent. Because of that it is better to study each country individually to understand the reasons for democracy deficit.

Democratic ideals are not easy goals to reach. Only 45% of the countries in the world are rated as full democracies, which indicates that the majority of countries are rated as more or less authoritarian. Even “full democracies” such as the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany have problems. In the twenty-first century it is still almost impossible to find a country that has democratic institutions meeting all requisites of democracy. Of course it should not imply that we should accept authoritarian rule. However, if it is still difficult for the West to pursue the democratic ideals born out of its own historical experience, how can we expect the rest of the world to experience democracy without any trouble? There are still reasons to be optimistic for the future of democracy in the Middle East if we accept that these countries should follow their own path to democracy. Rankings show that the quality of democracy advanced in the whole region after the Arab Spring. It is true that rankings of countries including Egypt, Syria, Bahrain and Lebanon declined in 2014’s ratings; nonetheless, trends in freedom are still higher than they were before the uprisings (Freedom House, 2014). A sustained democratic change is not impossible in the region but it mostly depends on the conditions, which are shaped not by the people but by regional and international alliances.

## Notes

1. In his book, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Samuel Huntington (1991a) argued that the democratization process in the contemporary world has been occurring in three waves beginning in the early 19th century and continuing into the present day. The first wave of democratization began in the 1820s with the widening of suffrage to a large portion of the male population in the United States and continued for almost a century until 1926, bringing into being some 29 democracies. However, Mussolini rise to power in 1922 started a reverse wave, which lasted until 1942, and reduced the number of democratic states in the world to 12. The second wave began following the Allied victory in World War II and reached its zenith in 1962 with 36 recognized democracies in the world. It was followed by a second reverse wave between 1960 and 1975 that

brought the number of democracies back down to 30. The third wave began in 1974 with the Carnation Revolution in Portugal, carried on through the 1980s in Latin American and Asia Pacific countries and continued in Eastern Europe after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

2. The literature on patrimonialism/neopatrimonialism is closely related to studies by Max Weber, in particular his 'Economy and Society' (1922 [1978]). Patrimonialism refers to traditional domination. It can be described as a form of political domination in which authority rests on the personal and bureaucratic power exercised by a royal household, where that power is formally arbitrary and under the direct control of the ruler. To maintain his power the ruler relies on a staff that is totally dependent on him for its position and maintenance. Samuel Eisenstadt (1973) was the first to use the term "neopatrimonialism" with the additional adjective "modern" as distinct from "traditional patrimonialism."

3. "Praetorianism" refers to a situation/system in which a military exercises independent political power by threatening to use force. The military has the potential to dominate the political structure and change the government.