Authoritarianism in Arab countries

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Introduction

Until the Arab uprising of 2011, both scholars and decision-makers have wondered why Middle Eastern political regimes had not followed the third wave of democratisation that affected Eastern European countries as well as many nations in Asia and Africa in the nineties.

While in the nineties (and even before) some processes of political liberalisation took place in the Middle East and North Africa, none of them culminated in a genuine democratic transition and, in some cases, repression and coercion even increased. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in its prominent Arab Human Development Report released in 2002, also pointed out the existence of a freedom deficit in the region as one of the major handicaps of this region.

Most of the literature on this topic focuses on the Arab countries, distinguishing the Arab Middle Eastern countries from non-Arab Middle Eastern countries such as Israel, Iran and Turkey. Several types of political regimes coexist in the Arab world: monarchies and republics allowing for different degrees of political participation. In this particular region, the fact of being a monarchy or a republic does not preclude the level of political pluralism but the adaptation of these systems to domestic pressures may be different due to their distinct legitimacy. In the third section of this module, we will review categories that have been introduced to qualify the varying degrees of authoritarianism, discussing whether soft authoritarian regimes are an intermediate step towards democracy or a way to assure the durability of these regimes.

Recommended introductory reading

Ayubi, Nazih (1995). *Overstating the Arab state: politics and society in the Middle East.* London: I.B. Tauris.

Diamond, L. (2010) "Why Are There No Arab Democracies?" *Journal of Democracy* (vol. 21, n° 1, January 2010, pp. 93–112).

Droz-Vincent, Philippe (2004). *Moyen Orient : pouvoirs autoritaires, sociétés bloquées.* Paris: PUF

Flory, Maurice; Korany, Baghgat; Mantran, Rober; Camau, Miche; Agate, Pierre (1990). *Les régimes politiques arabes.* Paris: PUF.

Guazzone, Laura; Pioppi, Laura (2010). *The Arab State and Neo-Liberal Globalization: The Restructuring of State Power in the Middle East.* Reading: Ithaca Press.

Martín Muñoz, Gema (1999). *El Estado Árabe, crisis de legitimidad y contestación islamista.* Barcelona: Bellaterra.

Picard, Élizabeth (dir.) (2006). *La politique dans le monde arabe.* Paris: Armand Colin

Schlumberger, Oliver (2008). *Debating Arab Authoritarianism: Dynamics and Durability in Nondemocratic Regimes.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Objectives

1. Introduce students to the theoretical debates on the existence of an Arab exceptionality in comparative analysis on democratisation.

2. Familiarise students with the concept of the rentier state and its effects on the study of democratisation and enduring authoritarianism in the Middle East.

3. Discuss the possibilities of democratic transitions led from the reformist elements of the regimes.

1. Is there an Arab or Muslim exceptionality?

The need to identify the factor that hampers democracy in the Middle East has been particularly challenging because traditional explanations did not work in this specific part of the world. That is, conventional theories pointing at economic development and standard of living as the most stable and robust determinant of a country's propensity to democracy cannot explain the lack of democracy in the Middle East and North Africa.

Per capita income has been widely accepted to correlate with democracy since the well-known article by Seymour Lipset published in the *American Political Science Review* (n.53). According to him and Karl Deutsch (who published in 1961 in the same journal an article entitled "Social Mobilization and Political Development"), democracy is caused by a collection of social and cultural changes —including occupational specialisation, urbanisation and higher levels of education— that in turn are caused by economic development.

Generally speaking, the Arab region has made considerable and substantial progress in economic and social development since the 1960s, but this progress was not associated with increased political rights, much less democratisation. As said by Ingelhart, if democracy resulted from simply becoming wealthy, then Kuwait and Libya would be model democracies.

For quite some time, Middle Eastern cases were almost absent from the most important works on political transitions, including those that explicitly focus on the developing world. This led many authors to concentrate on the peculiarities of this particular region, that is, on the aspects that make this region different and, thus, hostile to democracy, several authors referred to religion and culture.

The works of Bernard Lewis and Elie Kedouri underlined a hypothetical incompatibility between values and the Islamic religion that dominates the region. Some quantitative studies such as the article by Steven Fish entitled "Islam and Authoritarianism", argue that "even given limitations in the quality of the data, it is possible to conclude from the analysis that predominantly Muslim countries may be especially prone to authoritarianism".

Reading

Inglehart, Ronald (1997). *Modernization and Postmodernization*. Princeton: Princeton University Press (p. 161).

Reading

See **Posusney, M.P.** (2004). "Enduring authoritarianism: Middle East Lessons for Comparative Politics". *Comparative Politics* (vol. 36, n° 2, p. 127).

This author argues that Muslim societies are distinct in a manner that may affect politics: the treatment and status of women and girls. By pointing at this specific factor and not to the essence of Islam itself the author argues —in contradiction with the thesis of Bernard Lewis— that democracy could take roots in Muslim countries as long as there is progress in the field of gender equality.

Is the democratic deficit a phenomenon characterising all of the Muslim countries or only the Arab world? Alfred Stephan, for instance, in his article "Religion, Democracy and Twin Tolerations" makes a powerful critique of any deterministic association between Islam and authoritarianism. He emphasises that all great religions can reconcile with democratic ideas and empirical evidences support his claim by pointing out Muslim majority countries that sustain electoral democracies (Indonesia, Turkey, Bangladesh) and the millions of Muslims residing in democratic countries.

Stephan and Robertson will later argue that the electoral gap is an Arab phenomenon rather than a Muslim one. The studies conducted by Tessler and Gao showed that the support for democracy is not lower among Muslim individuals compared to other religious beliefs. Hisham Sharabi has also put the emphasis on the Arab factor. Sharabi elaborated on the idea of neopatriarchy, arguing that social life in the Arab societies, from the family level up to the national level, is dominated by a domination link in which authority is exercised by a paternalistic figure.

More recently, several authors moved the debate to the conditions that explain the robustness and success of authoritarianism rather than the absence or failure of democracy. They argued that the emphasis on the study of democratisation (instead of authoritarianism) led authors to examine what did not exist instead of what was actually going on in the Arab world.

Eva Bellin's article in *Comparative Politics* is particularly illuminating on the elements explaining the robustness of authoritarianism. According to Bellin, the Middle East and North Africa are in no way unique in their poor endowment with the prerequisites of democracy. She argues, for instance, that the Middle East has indeed experienced the fledgling emergence of a civil society (human rights groups, professional associations, self-help groups) only to see most of them repressed or co-opted by the state. Statist regimes have increasingly liberalised their economies (often under pressure from international forces) but autonomous political initiative by private sectors is typically punished.

Eva Bellin suggests that specifically robust coercive apparatuses in these states foster robust authoritarianism. How do Middle Eastern countries sustain such elaborate coercive apparatuses?

Recommended readings

Kedouri, Elie (1994). *Democracy and Arab Political Culture*. London: Frank Cass.

Lewis Bernard (1996). "Islam and Liberal Democracy: A Historical Overview". *Journal of Democracy* (nº 7, April 1996).

Lewis, Bernard (2002). *What Went Wrong? Western Impact in the Middle Eastern Response*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Reading

Stephan, Alfred (2000). "Religion, Democracy, and the 'Twin Tolerations". *Journal of Democracy* (nº 11, pp. 37–57).

Recommended readings

Sharabi, Hisham (1988). *Neopatriarchy, a Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Stephan, A; Robertson, G.B. (2003) "An 'Arab' more than 'Muslim' electoral gap". *Journal of Democracy* (vol. 14, nº 3, pp. 30–44).

Tessler, M.; Gao, E. (2005) "Gauging Arab Support for Democracy". *Journal of Democracy* (vol. 16, nº 3, pp. 83–95).

"Here is where access to rent comes into play. This access has long distinguished the region. (…) Their rent derives from different endowments —petroleum resources, gas resources, geo-strategic utility, and control of critical transit facilities. (…) This gives them access to substantial discretionary resources so that, even if the country is overall in poor economic health, the state is still able to hew to conventional economic wisdom and pay itself first, that is, give first priority to paying the military and security forces"

Eva Bellin

Similarly, the role of the armies and security forces during the uprisings of 2011 is widely seen as one of the major factors influencing the failure, the partial or the total success of these revolutions and is giving a new boost to the studies on the role of security forces in the Middle East.

Other authors such as Holger Albercht and Olivier Schlumberger argue that we should examine dimensions that go beyond coercion in order to explain the durability of authoritarianism in the Arab world. According to them, sources of internal legitimacy for the Arab States consist of a combination of the following: (1) allocative power through international rent income (oil and gas) (2) traditional religious legitimacy and (3) distinct developmental concepts based on collectivist ideologies.

While traditional religious legitimacy has remained essentially intact, the other two legitimating foundations of Arab states eroded structurally as a consequence of world oil prices (the rent factor) or economic liberalisation, or both. Thus, over the past 15 years, the Arab regimes have faced a structural loss in political legitimacy. Throughout the Arab world, economic crisis and direct or indirect foreign pressure turned into virulent crisis of legitimacy. While all Arab regimes have been affected, the formerly radical progressive states were hit hardest because their prime basis of legitimacy was washed away.

Holger Albercht and Olivier Schlumberger, as well as other authors such as Volker Perthes or Ferran Izquierdo and Athina Lampridi-Kemou, underline that to explain the durability of authoritarian regimes in the region, it is fundamental to understand the dynamics of the politically relevant elites in these countries, how they reach power and which kind of mechanisms they utilise to preserve this privileged position.

Ferran Izquierdo and Athina Lampridi-Kemou describe the situation as follows:

Recommended readings

Bellin, Eva (2004). "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East". *Comparative Politics*, nº 36, pp. 139–157

Droz-Vincent, Philippe (2011). "Authoritarianism, Revolutions, Armies, and Arab Regime Transitions". *The International Spectator* (nº 46, pp. 5–21).

Sayigh, Yezid et al. (2011). "Roundtable: Rethinking the Study of Middle East Militaries". *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (nº 4, pp. 391–407).

"At the pinnacle of each system, we find a tiny minority of primary elites who control the majority of the power resources. These elites came to power after freeing themselves from colonial rule and winning the competition to control states. Since then, they have achieved great stability, closing the door to any outside elites' renewal. In most countries, although not all, the central power core is usually very homogeneous, both at social and moral levels. In almost all Arab states, the state is the basic resource in the competition for differential power accumulation (…). Moreover, in most cases, the power of the state is based on foreign income and coercion, which increases the importance of other actors' subordination to those who control it. Over time, regimes have acquired an incredibly introverted quality and become increasingly centred on personal ties, including those which are hereditary. This dynamic, commonplace in monarchies, has even occurred in republics".

Ferran Izquierdo; Athina Lampridi-Kemou

To sum up, next to controversial contributions that pointed out at the religious and cultural background of the Arab peoples, as the factor that explained the democracy deficit in the Middle East and North Africa, other authors argued that what needed to be explained is the exceptional durability and robustness of authoritarianism in this part of the world. The strength of the coercive apparatus, the origins and composition of the politically relevant elites and, on top of it, the prevalence of the state as the main power resource have been presented as solid explanations for the exceptional authoritarian durability in this region.

Recommended readings

Albrecht, Holger; Schlumberger, Oliver (2004). "'Waiting for Godot': Regime Change Without Democratization in the Middle East". *International Political Science Review* (vol. 25, nº 4, pp. 371–392).

Perthes, Volker (2004). *Arab Elites: Negotiating the Politics of Change*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Izquierdo, Ferran; Lampridi-Kemou, Athina (2012). "Sociology of power in today's Arab world". In Izquierdo, Ferran. *Political Regimes in the Arab World: Society and the Exercise of Power*. London: Routledge.

2. The rentier state: definition and effects on democracy, authoritarianism and state-building

Hazem Beblawi in his seminal chapter written in 1987 defined a rentier state as a special case of a rentier economy (an economy which relies on a substantial external rent) "in which only few are engaged in the generation of this rent (wealth) while the majority of the population is being involved in the distribution and utilization of it" and "in which the government is the principal recipient of the external rent in the economy". He argued that the distinction between generating wealth and its utilisation is not always clear but that in the case of the oil-producing countries, the role of oil revenues is so overwhelming that it can be approximated to be the cause of other activities. He adds that "an open economy with high foreign trade is not a rentier state, simply because it relies on the outside world, even if it generates its income from natural endowment (for instance, tourism) in as far as the majority of the society is engaged in the process of wealth generation.

Bibliography

Beblawi, Hazem (1987). "The rentier state in the Arab world". In Beblawi, H & Luciani, G. *The rentier state*. London: Croom Helm/IAI (pp. 51–52).

The concept of the rentier state is widely seen as "one of the major contributions of the Middle East regional studies to Political Science". While this concept has been extensively used to describe oil-rich countries from the Middle East, it has been adapted to study other oil-rich countries from Africa and Asia and has contributed to those authors that argue that there is a "resource curse", meaning the paradox that countries with abundant natural resources (particularly fuel and minerals) tend to have less economic growth and lower development records. One of the specificities of the Middle Eastern context is that the pure or even hybrid rentier nature of several countries has been pointed out as a determining factor to explain their authoritarian and coercive inclination.

Bibliography

Anderson, Lisa (1987). "The State in the Middle East and North Africa". *Comparative Politics* (nº 20, p. 9).

The claim that oil and democracy do not mix is often used by area specialists to explain why the high-income states of the Middle East have not become democratic and it is the central thesis of Michael Ross in his well-known article entitled "Does oil hider democracy?" This article provides quantitative data supporting "both the validity and the generality of oil-impedes-democracy claim". These data suggest that…

> "a state's reliance on either oil or mineral exports tends to make it less democratic; that this effect is not caused by other type of primary exports [agriculture] that it is not limited to the Arabian Peninsula, to the Middle East, or to sub-Saharan Africa; and that it is not limited to small states. These findings are generally consistent with the theory of the rentier state"

> Ross, Michael (2001). "Does Oil hinder Democracy?" *World Politics* (nº 53, p. 346).

Ross tests three possible explanations: a rentier effect, which suggests that resource-rich governments use low tax rates and patronage to relieve pressures for greater accountability; a repression effect, which argues that resource wealth retards democratisation by enabling governments to boost their funding for internal security; and a modernisation effect, which holds that growth based on the export of oil and minerals fails to bring about the social and cultural changes that tend to produce democratic government.

Other authors have focused on the study of the effects of the rentier state on state building. According to Schwarz, in his article in the *Review Of International Political Economy*, these effects are twofold:

> "First, excess oil revenue in the hand of the state reduces the state's necessity to extract resources for its own population. Rentier states have the privilege to distribute and allocate excess oil revenues without references to economic consideration. Second, a high level of rentierism has a negative effect on the human, social and economic development of the country. While the economic benefit from oil-revenues may be only short lived, the long-term consequences are market distortions, corruption, unproductive economic resources and lack of human development".

> Rolf Schwarz

According to Schwarz in his article in the *European Political Science Review*:

> "a central factor in analysing state formation in the Arab Middle East. It explains the emergence of institutionally weak states but does not hinder state making altogether; rather this differs in its process and outcome. While institutions might superficially look the same, they function differently and fulfill different roles (distribution and not extraction). Rentierism has contributed to the emergence of what has been called a 'state class', a 'state bourgeoisie' or a 'rentier bourgeoisie'".

> Rolf Schwarz

Giacomo Luciani, in 1998, argued that based on the notion of 'no taxation without representation', the diminished need of the state to levy taxes from its citizens impedes the emergence of a strong state that legitimately represents its citizens.

In the Middle East the high level of wealth and welfare allocation has led to an implicit social contract that substituted political rights for state-provided welfare and to the co-optation of strategic social groups.

Recommended readings

Ross, Michael (2001). "Does Oil hinder Democracy?". *World Politics* (nº 53: pp. 325–361).

Schwarz, Rolf (2008). "The political economy of state-formation in the Arab Middle East: Rentier states, economic reform, and democratization". *Review Of International Political Economy* (vol. 15, nº 4, pp. 599–621).

Schwarz, Rolf (2011). "Does War make states? Rentierism and the formation of states in the Middle East". *European Political Science Review* (vol. 2, nº 3, pp. 419–443).

Luciani argued, in 1994, that

> "the existence of a rentier state serves as a strong impediment to democratic rule and pluralistic institutions".
>
> Giacomo Luciani

But which is the casual mechanism? On the one hand, rentierism favours social institutions that are adverse to a democratic rule. Rent-based state formation leads to particular structures within rentier states. The allocation of rents follows political criteria (loyalty, proximity to rulers, family relationships) and thereby leads to a reinforcement of traditional loyalties and a lack of bureaucratic capacity. The preservation of tradition occurs within the vicinities of modern state institutions and represents a modern phenomenon captured in terms of neo-patriarchy, neo-patrimonialism, and neo-tribalism. Not only does the existence of a rentier state serve as a strong impediment to democratic rule, it also helps to conserve socio-political norms in Arab societies and polities, such as the patrimonial nature of social interaction and primordial loyalties, based on allocation patterns.

On the other hand, Schwarz argued, in 2008, that

> "abundant oil revenues have permitted a degree of militarization which would have been impossible to maintain if states had to rely on domestic resource extraction for its financing"
>
> **Schwarz, Rolf** (2008). "The political economy of state-formation in the Arab Middle East: Rentier states, economic reform, and democratization" *Review Of International Political Economy* (vol. 15, nº 4, p. 601).

This is the argument of Michael Ross as he affirms that

> "rulers in the Middle East may follow the same tactics as their authoritarian counterparts elsewhere, but oil revenues could make their efforts at fiscal pacification more effective (…) Citizens in resource-rich states may want democracy as much as citizens elsewhere, but the resource wealth may allow their governments to spend more on internal security and block the populations' democratic aspiration".
>
> **Ross, Michael** (2001). "Does Oil hinder Democracy?" *World Politics* (nº 53: pp. 334–335).

But, what happens when the rent starts to decline, either because there is a decrease in production or a drop in the energy prices? This fiscal crisis occurred, for instance, in the eighties and led to two phenomena that will be analysed in depth in the coming section and the next module. On the one hand, it led several countries to start a process of political reform to recover part of an eroded legitimacy. On the other hand, it provided a fertile ground for opposition movements, and particularly for Islamist groups, to fill the gap providing social services and disputing the cultural and political hegemony of incumbent elites.

Recommended readings

Beblawi, Hazem; Luciani, Giacomo (Eds.) (1987). *The Rentier State*. London: Croom Helm / IAI

Luciani, Giacomo (1988). "Economic foundations of democracy and authoritarianism: the Arab world in comparative perspective". *Arab Studies Quarterly* (vol. 10, nº 4, pp. 457–475).

Luciani, Giacomo (ed.) (1990). *The Arab State*. London: Routledge.

Luciani, Giacomo (1994). "The Oil Rent, the Fiscal Crisis of the State and Democratization". In Ghassan Salamé (ed.) *Democracy without Democrats? The Renewal of Politics in the Muslim World*. London: I. B. Tauris (pp. 130–155).

Bibliography

Schwarz, Rolf (2008). "The political economy of state-formation in the Arab Middle East: Rentier states, economic reform, and democratization". *Review Of International Political Economy* (vol. 15, nº 4, pp. 609, 610, 615).

3. Liberalised autocracies and the applicability of the transition model to the contemporary Middle East

Until the 2011 uprisings, we can identify four periods in which autocracies in the Middle East experienced diverse forms of political liberalisation. The first one, in the 19th century corresponded to the reforms undertaken in the Ottoman Empire (known as *tanzimat),* which lead to many social, economical and political transformations including the adoption of a short-lived Ottoman constitution in 1876. Several parliamentary institutions were created, both at the Ottoman level but also in specific territories under Ottoman sovereignty but which enjoyed a large level of autonomy such as Egypt (the *Majlis a-Shura* was created in 1825) and Tunisia (the *Majlis al-A'la* created in 1861).

The second period took place in the first half of the 20th century, with the celebration of competitive elections in Egypt, Syria and Iraq. The first modern political parties (communists, nationalists, liberals and islamists) were created in this period. However, this liberal experiment blossomed in a context of limited sovereignty as these three countries were subjected to direct or indirect colonial control. In their fight for independence, the victory of revolutionary coups in all these countries put an end to this experience and introduced single-party systems.

The third period corresponded, in the seventies, with processes of economic and political liberalisation in countries such as Bahrain or Egypt. In Egypt, Anwar al-Sadat, responding to both internal and domestic pressures, introduced the *Infitah* (opening) programme, which mainly focused on economic liberalisation but which also put an end to a single-party system that had dominated Egypt since Nasser's revolution. However, this did not lead to full competitive elections, but rather to a hegemonic party system that allowed for some level of pluralism but excluded the possibility of an alternation in power. The transition to a multi-party system in Egypt in 1976 was followed by similar moves in Tunisia, Algeria, Yemen, Jordan and Somalia. However, these transitions were limited and were carefully crafted and controlled by the ruling groups of these countries.

The fourth period started at the end of the 1980s and lasted until the 2011 Arab uprisings. Most Arab regimes were forced to relax their grip on power in the face of major political and economic shocks in the 1980s and 1990s and also in a context of renovated international pressures for democratisation in the 2000s which served as a justification for the US-led intervention in Iraq and which had an effect in other Arab countries, which were forced to allow a larger level of political pluralism (Egypt is a case in point in that respect) or at

least introduce some cosmetic measures in areas such as municipal elections (this is the case of most Gulf countries). All in all, these measures were more in the spirit of political liberalisation and not genuine democratisation.

As argued by Badawi and Makdisi while political liberalisations in the Arab world have entailed a measured expansion of political and civil rights and freedom of association, limits were often imposed on these rights to ensure they did not scale up to levels that would allow the citizenry to exercise collective control over public policy. Thus, the prospect of a regime losing power in an election was not conceivable.

Despite these shortcomings, this process has been a major focus of scholarly attention since the early 1990s. The celebration of multiparty elections, fewer restrictions on the media, a higher level of individual freedoms and the proliferation of nongovernmental organisations have all contributed to the impression of a more liberal Middle East. In the 1990s, a group of authors highlighted the existence of some tentative processes of liberalisation in Arab countries and even spoke of a democratising mini-wave. The debate turned around the question on whether this limited and controlled liberalisation was a natural and intermediate stage that would lead to full democratisation, applying the existing literature on the study of transitions towards liberal democratic systems.

Most of the analyses conducted so far highlighted that these liberalisation openings were a strategy of authoritarian regimes to preserve their power and privileges. Raymond Hinnebusch argues that authoritarian regimes constructed institutions incorporating sufficient social forces to enable them to manage their societies, thus raising the threshold of modernisation beyond which authoritarian governance becomes unviable. While, subsequently, internal economic vulnerabilities and global pressures on these regimes became substantial, the post-populist solutions adopted, economic liberalisation and westward-looking foreign policy alignment, all allowed an adaptive pluralisation of authoritarianism (PPA) while obstructing democratisation.

Eberhard Kienle in his analyses on Egypt has elaborated on the existence of a process of de-liberalisation and he referred to a grand delusion, arguing that these strategies constituted a general *réprise de control* by the regime.

Recommended readings

Hourani, Albert (1983). *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Salamé, Ghassan (ed.) (1994). *Democracy Without Democrats?: The Renewal of Politics in the Muslim World.* London: I.B. Tauris.

El-Sayyid, Mustapha Kamel (1995). "The third wave of democratization in the Arab world". In Tschirgi, Dan (ed.). *The Arab world today.* Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Brynen, R.; Korany, B.; Noble, P. (eds.) (1995) *Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World.* Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner.

El- Badawi, Ibrahim; Makdisi, Samir (2007). "Explaining the democracy deficit in the Arab world". *The Quarterly Review of Economics and Finance* (nº 46, pp. 813–831).

Daniel Brumberg, in his article entitled "The trap of liberalized autocracies" also argues that periods in which freedoms and rights are extended coexist with a reinforcement of the coercive apparatuses. In his review of contemporary political systems, Brumberg distinguishes between two groups: dictatorships or full autocracies (Syria, Tunisia, Libya and Saudi Arabia) on the one hand, and liberalised autocracies (Kuwait, Morocco, Jordan, Yemen, Algeria and Egypt) on the other. He argues that some level of economic and political dissonance "facilitates the juggling act that is central to regime survival. Rulers of liberalized autocracies strive to pit one group against another in ways that maximize the rulers' room for manoeuvre and restrict the opposition's capacity to work together. Yet such divide-and-rule tactics also gives oppositionists scope for influence that they might not have in an open political competition that yields clear winners and losers. Consensus politics and state-enforced power sharing can form an alternative to either full democracy or full autocracy, particularly when rival social, ethnic or religious groups fear that either type of rule will lead to their political exclusion.

Larry Diamond in his well-known analysis of hybrid regimes ranged all Arab countries in three groups: politically closed authoritarianism, hegemonic electoral authoritarian regimes and competitive authoritarianism. Not all authors agree on the utility of these categories. Based on Juan Linz assumption that limited pluralism is a defining element of authoritarianism, Albercht & Schlumberger consider that the relevant variable for classifying a policy as authoritarian is not its level of pluralism but whether pluralism is restricted or not, which is a simple yes-or-no question.

Besides this discussion on typologies of authoritarian regimes, the literature on the Middle East and North Africa has given particular attention to the function of elections and the composition and role of emerging civil society in this particular context. The article published by Albercht and Schlumberger in 2004 is an excellent contribution in this particular domain. Their thesis is that multiparty elections and the proliferation of associations are mechanisms of authoritarian regimes to bolster internal and external legitimacy.

These authors consider that...

> "the authoritarian game was accomplished through a "social pact" between the ruler and the ruled, financed by the massive oil rents that flooded the region from the mid-1970s onward. (…) With fewer financial resources, Arab regimes simply change their co-optative strategies: they shift from allocative to inclusionary co-optation (…) with the aim of either widening a regime's power base or directly controlling society."

Holger Albrecht; Oliver Schlumberger

Regarding the elections, these authors argue that

Recommended readings

Diamond, Larry (2002). "Thinking About Hybrid Regimes". *Journal of Democracy* (vol. 13, nº 2, pp. 21–35).

Brumberg, Daniel (2002). "The Trap of Liberalized Autocracy". *Journal of Democracy* (vol. 13, nº 4, pp. 56–68).

Brumberg, Daniel (2003). "Liberalization versus Democracy. Understanding Arab Political Reform". *Working Papers. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, nº 37.

Hinnebusch, Raymond (2006). "Authoritarian persistence, democratization theory and the Middle East: An overview and critique". *Democratization* (vol. 13, nº 3, pp. 373–395).

Kienle, Eberhard (2001). *A Grand Delusion: Democracy and Economic reform in Egypt*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Szmolka, Inmaculada (2011). "Democracia y autoritarismos con adjetivos: la clasificación de los países árabes dentro de una tipología general de regímenes políticos". *Revista Española de Ciencia Política* (nº 26, pp. 11–62).

"while the Moroccan or Jordanian parliaments, for example, may be elected democratically, this is not where strategic political decision-making takes place. Likewise, the Egyptian, Syrian and Tunisian presidents are elected but not in competitive elections. Lastly, the inner circle of approximately 15 generals that constitute *le pouvoir* in Algeria are not elected at all. Nowhere in the region can the centre of power be contested."

Holger Albrecht; Oliver Schlumberger

On the proliferation of parties and associations they consider that

"rather than being forums for competing programs or ideas, most political parties (along with trade unions, professional syndicates, and chambers of commerce and industry) focus on access to decision-making power and resources. This also holds true for what is sometimes called the "loyal opposition," that is, for those parties that criticize individual policies, but do not challenge the regime leadership (...) Nongovernmental organizations as independent agents of the aggregation and articulation of societal interests have been transformed into tools of co-optative control. True, some nonprofit organizations have initially gone largely unnoticed both by Arab regimes and Western donors. Yet, as soon as such organizations try to aggregate and articulate interests autonomously, the regimes usually suppress or co-opt them and their leaders. States themselves establish parallel structures that resemble those of independent NGOs. (...) While the increasing number of NGOs and their widened activities do represent a change in themselves, they can hardly be considered as effective agents of change."

Albrecht, Holger; Schlumberger, Oliver (2004). "'Waiting for Godot': Regime Change Without Democratization in the Middle East". *International Political Science Review* (vol. 25, nº 4, p. 383).

Two researchers from the Carnegie Endowment for International Piece, Marina Ottaway & Michele Dune, analysed the politics of managed reform in the Middle East, considering that

"there are people within the ruling establishments who see the need for change. Reformers within the ruling establishments can be important agents of political change – and particularly of carefully managed reforms". They recognized that "because reform has been introduced mostly from the top, the goal has not been democratization but modernization, both as a genuine attempt to improve the quality and efficiency of governance and as a cosmetic device to make the system look better and thus more acceptable domestically and internationally".

Marina Ottaway; Michelle Dune

This brings us to the discussion, introduced in previous sections, on the composition of politically relevant elites. Looking at Arab public elites today, one evident feature is that elites have changed in their composition: in almost all Arab countries, private-sector business representatives have found their way into the politically relevant elites. In turn, many elite members with bureaucratic or military background have started to run private businesses (...). We do see a growing economisation of both political elites and policies. As a parallel development, established avenues of recruitment, via military academies or through the ruling party, became less attractive to the new generation.

On a similar token, Izquierdo and Lampridi-Kemou argue that

"present-day competition for power within the regime is mainly brought about in generational terms. The children of elites who settled in power after decolonization are now disputing with the gerontocracy over primary roles, generating repeated tensions between the old and new guard. This may be reflected in small transformations in the system, particularly in the processes of economic liberalization. However, neither the old nor the young elites are interested in alternatives to the system; they only seek to find advantages in the circular competition within the same regime. Therefore, the new guard's insistence on economic liberalization is, in many cases, a consequence of the old guard's control over foreign income and the state's coercion apparatus, i.e. the military and the *Mukhabarat*; the young must therefore focus their interest on other resources such as capital, in order to gain some kind of presence. Nonetheless, the objective for them all is still state control, since this remains the foundation of power in Arab countries despite incipient economic liberalizations".

Izquierdo, Ferran; Lampridi-Kemou, Athina (2012). "Sociology of power in today's Arab world". In Izquierdo, Ferran. *Political Regimes in the Arab World: Society and the Exercise of Power*. London: Routledge.

To sum it up, liberalism is not a recent phenomenon in the Middle East and North Africa. The last period of political and economic liberalisation in the Middle East and North Africa (starting in the 1990s) has reflected the need to accommodate authoritarian systems to a new domestic and international reality rather than a genuine willingness of these regimes to evolve towards a genuine democratic system. The celebration of multiparty elections and the proliferation of NGOs and professional organisations did not challenge the incumbent regimes. Yet, this period of controlled and limited liberalisation can provoke tensions among the politically relevant elites, which, in some cases, will be presented in generational terms.

Recommended readings

Albrecht, Holger; Schlumberger, Oliver (2004). "'Waiting for Godot': Regime Change Without Democratization in the Middle East". International Political Science Review (vol. 25, nº 4, pp. 371–392).

Ottaway, Marina; Dune, Michelle (2007). "Incumbent Regimes and the "King's Dilemma" in the Arab World: Promise and Threat of Managed Reform". *Carnegie Paper*. Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Piece.

Izquierdo, Ferran; Lampridi-Kemou, Athina (2012). "Sociology of power in today's Arab world". In Izquierdo, Ferran. *Political Regimes in the Arab World: Society and the Exercise of Power*. London: Routledge.

Summary

This module provides an overview of how political scientists have explained the democratic deficit in the Arab world and the authoritarian resilience in this particular region. While some authors have pointed at cultural and religious factors to explain the lack of democracy, others have identified rentierism, the nature of the state as a power resource, and the exceptionally robust coercive apparatuses as elements that favour authoritarian resilience. This module introduces the discussion on typologies of authoritarianism and the concept of liberalised autocracies to qualify those regimes which undertake political and economical reforms but which did not end up in the establishment of democratic systems.

Summary