Democracy in the Arab World

Explaining the deficit

Edited by
Ibrahim Elbadawi and
Samir Makdisi

Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern Politics

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Despite notable socio-economic development in the Arab region, a deficit in democracy and political rights has continued to prevail. This book examines the major reasons underlying the persistence of this democracy deficit over the past decades and touches on the prospect for deepening the process of democratization in the Arab world.

Contributions from major scholars of the region give a cross-country analysis of economic development, political institutions and social factors, and the impact of oil wealth and regional wars, and present a model for democracy in the Arab world. Case studies are drawn from Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Sudan and the Gulf region; they build on these cross-country analyses and look beyond the influence of oil and conflicts as the major reason behind this democracy deficit. The chapters illustrate how specific socio-political history of the country concerned, fear of fundamentalist groups, collusion with foreign powers and foreign interventions, and the co-option of the elites by the state also contribute to these problems of democratization facing the region.

Situating the democratic position of the Arab world in a global context, this book is an important contribution to the field of Middle Eastern politics, development studies and studies on conflict and democracy.

Ibrahim Elbadawi, formerly Lead Economist at the Development Research Group of the World Bank, he is currently Director of the Macroeconomics Research and Forecasting Department at the Dubai Economic Council and has published widely on macroeconomic and development policy and the economics of civil war. His regional specialization covers Africa and the Middle East, where he is widely networked with academic research and policy forums in the two regions. He is also a visiting research fellow with the Center for Global Development and an Associate Editor of the *Middle East Development Journal.*

Samir Makdisi is Professor Emeritus of Economics, Founder of the Institute of Financial Economics, and Distinguished Senior Fellow, Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut. He has served as Deputy President of AUB; as chair of the Board of Trustees at the Economic Research Forum for the Arab Countries, Iran and Turkey; on the Board of the Global Development Network; and as Minister of Economy and Trade for the Republic of Lebanon. He has published widely on macroeconomic, financial and developmental issues in the Arab World.

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"*Democracy in the Arab World* is a welcome contribution to the literature examining the democracy deficit in the region. Unlike other studies that deal with democratization, the book zeroes in on the major drivers behind the democracy deficit in various Arab countries and offers a complex set of analytical explanations. Eschewing simplistic dichotomies and culturalist dogma, *Democracy in the Arab World* diagnoses the critical role of conflicts and oil, but also reveals the influence of political leadership, foreign interventions and the cooption of elites, in inhibiting the democratic process in the region despite its notable socio-economic development. Another major strength of the book is that it bridges the gap between theory and history. An impressive list of researchers and scholars of the region!"

Fawaz A. Gerges, *London School of Economics*

Democracy in the Arab World

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Edited by Ibrahim Elbadawi and Samir Makdisi

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This book is dedicated to all Arab intellectuals who have striven towards a restoration of national dignity and revival of the Arab World that goes beyond material achievements, in the hope that their aspirations for democracy, freedom and justice will eventually be accomplished.

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Contributors

Gouda Abdel-Khalek: Professor of Economics at Cairo University. Formerly, he was Visiting Professor at Johns Hopkins University, University of California at Los Angeles, and the University of Southern California. He is the author of *Stabilization and Adjustment in Egypt* (2001). He has a PhD from McMaster University.

Abdelwahab El-Affendi: Reader in Politics at the Centre for the Study of Democracy, University of Westminster, and Co-ordinator of the Centre's Democracy and Islam Programme. He is the author of *The Conquest of Muslim Hearts and Minds: Perspectives on U.S. Reform and Public Diplomacy Strategies* (2005). He holds a PhD from the University of Reading.

Ali Abdel Gadir Ali: Deputy Director General, Arab Planning Institute, Kuwait. Formerly Chief, Economic and Social Policy Analysis Division, UNECA. He has also taught at the Universities of Khartoum and Gezira, Sudan. He is the author of *The Challenges of Poverty Reduction in Post Conflict Sudan* (2006). His PhD is from the University of Essex.

Sami Atallah: Economist and currently a PhD candidate in politics at New York University. He has consulted for government ministries and international organizations in the Middle East, and holds graduate degrees in economics and quantitative methods from Yale and Columbia Universities.

Atta El-Battahani: Associate Professor of Political Science and Political Economy at Khartoum University, and Senior Adviser for the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance in Sudan. He is the author of *Nationalism and Peasant Politics in the Nuba Mountains Region of Sudan* (2009). He received his PhD from the University of Sussex.

Ammar Bouhouche: Professor of Political Science at the University of Algiers. Formerly, he was Chair of the Department of Public Administration at Al Albeyt University (Jordan). He is the author of *Modern Theories in Public Administration* (2006). He holds a PhD from the University of Missouri at Columbia.

Eric Davis: Professor of Political Science at Rutgers University and former Director of the University's Center for Middle Eastern Studies. He is the author of *Memories of State: Politics, History and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq* (2005). He has a PhD from the University of Chicago.

Ibrahim Elbadawi: Director, Macroeconomics Research Department, Dubai Economic Council. Previously he served as Lead Economist at the Development Research Group of the World Bank and Professor of Economics at the University of Gezira in Sudan. He is co-editor of *Can Africa Claim the 21st Century?* (2000). He received his PhD from North Carolina State and Northwestern Universities.

Taher Kanaan: CEO, Jordan Centre for Policy Research. He also serves as Board Member for the Institute of Palestine Studies, Economic Research Forum, and Arab Anti-Corruption Organization. Formerly he was Programs Director, Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, and Deputy Prime Minister for Development (Jordan). He is the author of *Higher Education in Jordan, Access and Equity* (2009). He has a PhD from Cambridge University.

Fadia Kiwan: Professor of Political Science and Director of the Institute of Political Science at Saint Joseph University, Beirut, and member of the UNU Council. She has also taught at the Lebanese University. She is the editor of *Social Role of Working Women in a Comparative Perspective* (2008). She received her PhD from Université Paris I-Sorbonne.

Belkacem Laabas: Economic Expert at the Arab Planning Institute, Kuwait. Previously he was Senior Lecturer at the Institute of Economics, Algiers University. He is the editor of *Arab Development Challenges of the New Millennium* (2002). He has a PhD from the Bradford University.

Samir Makdisi: Professor Emeritus of Economics; Senior Fellow, Institute of Financial Economics; and Distinguished Senior Fellow, Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Relations, at the American University of Beirut (AUB). He has served as Minister of National Economy (Lebanon) and as Deputy President of AUB. He is the author of *The Lessons of Lebanon: The Economics of War and Development* (2004). He has a PhD from Columbia University.

Marcus Marktanner: Assistant Professor of Economics and Fellow at the Institute of Financial Economics, the American University of Beirut. He holds a PhD from the Technical University of Ilmenau, Germany.

Joseph Massad: Associate Professor of Modern Arab Politics and Intellectual History at Columbia University. He is author of *Desiring Arabs* (2007). He received his PhD from Columbia University.

Gary Milante: Research Economist at the World Bank. He has a PhD from the University of California at Irvine.

Laura Munro: Formerly an Economic Researcher at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). She has been pursuing graduate work at Columbia University since September 2009.

Raed Safadi: Deputy Director of the Trade and Agriculture Department at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Previously he worked at the World Bank, taught at the University of Antwerp, and served as Chief Economist at the Department of Economic Development, Government of Dubai. He is the Editor of *Globalization and Emerging Economies* (2008). He received a PhD from Georgetown University.

Mustapha K. Al Sayyid: Professor of Political Science at Cairo University. He has also taught at the American University in Cairo, as well as Harvard and Colgate Universities. He is Lead Expert for the *Arab Human Development Report, 2009*. He has a PhD from the University of Geneva.

Bassam Yousif: Assistant Professor of Economics at Indiana State University. Previously he taught at California State University, Fullerton. He is the author of a forthcoming book, *The Development History of Iraq*. He received his PhD from the University of California, Riverside.

Radwan Ziadeh: Founder and Director of the Damascus Center for Human Rights Studies. Since October 2008 he has been a visiting scholar at the Carr Center for Human Rights at Harvard University. He is the author of *Political Islam in Syria* (2008). He has an MA degree from Damascus University.

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Introduction

Ibrahim Elbadawi and Samir Makdisi

When the Arab countries were still under colonial tutelage, the burning question for them was how and when to gain independence. Most of them in fact became independent only after the Second World War,[1] and democracy did not arise as a political issue except as a potential post-independence question. However, with the exception of Lebanon and early isolated cases of democratic engagement that did not last long, Arab political regimes since independence have generally been characterized by varying forms of authoritarian rule, despite notable growth in the levels of real per capita income and levels of education.

Intermittent attempts at political reform might over time have permitted limited political liberalization, but the essential nature of authoritarian rule has not changed materially. Indeed, throughout this period Arab intellectuals and groups advocating substantive political reform have condemned authoritarianism and the absence of democracy in the Arab world. Denial of full political rights of citizens and restrictions on civil liberties and, hence, lack of representative and accountable governments, are also blamed for the failure of Arab regimes to achieve sustainable and equitable economic and social development, or to address the major issues presently faced by the Arab world, including, among others, the Palestinian question.

The primary objective of this book is to address the following important questions: why has the Arab region generally experienced what has been termed a 'democracy deficit' (however democracy is defined, a matter we take up below), and what explains the general persistence of this deficit over the decades since independence? A secondary objective is to discern the growth and development consequences of autocracy.

To identify the factors that explain the continuation of the Arab democracy deficit, a two-tier research approach was adopted that combines both quantitative and qualitative analyses: cross-country work followed by intensive country case studies. The cross-country work is an extended modernity regression model of democracy (measured by the widely used Polity IV index) for a global sample covering most Arab countries. It is preceded by an analysis of the crisis of Arab democracy, which draws a political framework for the penchant of Arab autocratic regimes to hold on to their rule.

The model finds that after controlling for a host of economic, social and historical variables, as well as for religion, a negative and highly significant Arab region-specific effect remains, that we refer to as the Arab dummy. This finding suggests that, given the level of economic development of the Arab world, as well as other historical and social characteristics, even an extended theory of modernization (in the sense of the Lipset hypothesis of 1959) fails to explain the persistent nature of the Arab democracy/freedom deficit, and stands in contrast to the experience of countries in other regions of the world where economic development has been positively correlated with the democratization process. What we do find is that oil and, more importantly, regional conflicts (notably the Arab–Israeli conflict, but also other civil and international wars) seem to be the major factors that account for this negative Arab dummy.

The most striking result of the analysis of cross-country work is that once it is interacted with the conflict variable, the direct Arab dummy effect not only disappears, but its interaction effect is negative and highly significant, while the same effect is positive and significant for other developing regions. This finding does not carry over to other determinants of democracy (e.g. oil or female labour force participation), where interactions with the Arab and other dummies were neither significant nor do they influence the direct region-specific effect. These results remain robust against a variety of diagnostic tests.

The above findings suggest two important conclusions. First, unlike conflict, both oil and gender[2] – like other determinants of democracy – had an impact that does not vary across regions. Second, however, the Arab world *is* different with regard to the impact of conflicts on democracy; while conflicts have led, for whatever reasons, to a subsequent democratization process in other regions, in the Arab world they have not. Thus, drawing from the robust and persistent findings of the econometric analysis, the central premise of this work is that oil and conflicts are the two major overarching factors behind the persistence of the gaping democracy deficit in the Arab world. At the same time, it probes beyond the generality of cross-country work by focusing on selected Arab countries in an attempt to identify country-specific factors that could provide supplementary explanations for the survival of their autocracies.

Thus, with the cross-country model as a starting point, the following eight case studies, carried out by teams of economists and political scientists, were selected for in-depth analyses of the factors that account for their persistent, though varying, democracy deficits: Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Sudan, Syria and the Gulf region. Their choice was governed by one or a combination of the following three criteria: that they be: (1) major countries in the region and/or important oil producers, (2) countries involved in the Arab–Israeli conflict and/or have experienced civil wars, and (3) be highly polarized or fractionalized countries.

The case studies critically assess how oil and conflict have influenced, directly and/or indirectly, the evolution of democracy in the countries concerned. Equally importantly they analyse country-specific factors (historical, political, economic and institutional) that further explain the persistence of the democracy deficit – factors that are not necessarily captured by the global model, thereby shedding

additional light on why autocracy has tended to survive in the Arab world. These idiosyncratic country-specific factors were found to be critical in shaping the dynamics of the influence of oil and conflict in blunting and pre-empting democracy in these countries and thus help explain the observed diversity across these countries in terms of the extent and stability of autocracy. What is noteworthy is that religion as such (Islam, of course, being the major religion of the Arab world) does not appear to play a significant role.

There have been a number of studies, both inside and outside the Arab world, on the characteristics of contemporary Arab societies and how they relate to the nature of prevailing undemocratic Arab regimes. Gender inequality (whose multifaceted aspects have been addressed by a vast and growing feminist literature), familial, patron–client or tribal relationships**,** and, in some cases, religion, have been put forward as explaining the intrinsically non-democratic nature of Arab societies. In this vein, culturalist approaches in particular, have been advanced as alternative explanations of the persisting Arab autocracy.[3]

However, as Chapter 1 argues, major scholarly work has put aside social preconditions or the region's cultural aversion for democracy as being responsible for the turbulent and undemocratic politics of the region. Culturalist approaches that make too many assumptions about the universal acceptance, uniform exposure and internalization of particular views are not supported by historical evidence. This conceptual analytical perspective strongly coheres with our own cross-country empirical work in Chapter 2. We find that while the ratio of female labour force participation is positively and significantly associated with democracy, unlike oil and conflict, it does not, however, explain the direct Arab dummy effect. Moreover, unlike conflicts, the gender effect is uniform across all regions, suggesting that the Arab world is not different from other regions with regard to the potential impact of the empowerment of women on democracy. Similar findings have also been found in the empirical literature, with an even more robust set of gender indicators. For example, based on their extensive empirical cross-country analysis, Donno and Russett (2004: 601) conclude that, 'Overall, it does not seem either that Islam or Arab countries are autocratic because they oppress women's rights or that Islamic or Arab countries oppress women simply because their governments are autocratic.'

Indeed, other societies in the developing world have similar social characteristics to those attributed to the Arab region, yet they still made the transition to democracy. Thus, whatever the explanation for this transition in some societies, and for its absence in the Arab world, the persistence of the Arab democracy deficit has remained a question that we felt needed to be critically addressed, and was at the heart of this research, while the causes and nature of the transition from autocracy to democracy lay outside its purview.[4]

In undertaking the task of explaining why the democratic process has failed to take root, we have been cognizant not only that notions and meaning of democracy have been explained in various ways, but that its empirical measurement suffers from certain limitations. There is perhaps broad agreement (as noted in Chapter 1) that the concept of democracy encompasses a political system in which

members regard themselves as political equals, collectively sovereign and possessing all the capacities, resources and institutions they need to govern themselves. Democratic regimes become consolidated (i.e. no significant political group attempts to overthrow them) when, among other things, the state becomes authoritative, civil society is active and the political and economic institutions that guard democratic values are well established.

Whereas liberalism and democracy are distinct concepts, they have tended to converge. Contemporary democratic regimes are generally liberal ones, though in a few cases non-liberal fundamentalist or other parties have come to power via free elections. This phenomenon poses an interesting challenge to the prospects of the continued congruence between liberalism and democracy, mainly (but not solely) in developing countries, where fundamentalist movements are potentially strong and could assume the reins of power democratically. Whatever these prospects, fear of such movements is not an argument at all, though some writers have propagated it to promote the perpetuation of autocratic regimes. Instead, greater civic and political rights across the board should be promoted, and, in the Arab region, it is imperative that outstanding regional conflicts, primarily the Palestinian question, be justly resolved.

In our view the root causes for the growth of fundamentalism in the region may be traced to three interacting factors: the unwillingness of the Arab governing classes to democratize, fearing loss of domestic control and privileges; the persistently strong Western support of Israel's position not to recognize legitimate Palestinian rights; and Western support of Arab autocracies in the belief that this support would protect the West's oil and other regional interests. Meeting the challenges posed by these interlocking factors would, among other things, greatly help in promoting the cause of democracy in the Arab world.

It is particularly important to distinguish between formal/procedural and consolidated/substantive democracy. In the former case a polity may demonstrate the trappings of democracy – including elections, ideologically diverse political parties and the appearance of political participation, to name a few indicators – but may not possess a political culture in which citizens evince loyalty to a set of democratic rules of the game, to the idea of an autonomous civil society and to notions of individual social and political rights, including gender equality, as would be the case in a substantive or mature democracy. In the Arab region this distinction is important. A number of Arab political regimes have the trappings of a democratic system, i.e. they create nominally democratic institutions with the objective of stabilizing their regimes, but remain essentially autocratic (for empirical analysis of this question see Gandhi and Przeworski, 2007).

The gap between a theoretical understanding of a democracy and its actual implementation is often wide, especially in developing countries. But even among the so-called mature democracies there are distinct differences in this regard. For example, the influence of corporate capital on the democratic process, including control of the media, is much stronger in certain Western countries than in others; or the degree of social equity and the quality of social coverage (pertaining to the social rights of citizens), as well as of civil liberties and political participation, may

differ markedly from one country to another. Such differences, it might be argued, render some of these countries more democratic than others (see Economist Intelligence Unit, 2007). In other words, empirical measurements of democracy that attempt to capture its basic features – such as political competition, participation, and civil liberties – do not necessarily succeed in fully reflecting the true democratic status in any given country; this is debatably more true in developing than in developed countries. In part this may be attributable to methodological flaws of the measurements, but could also be attributed to their coding rules, which do not always capture accurately the abuses of the governing classes and/or of special interest groups.

Equally importantly, any measure of democracy must fully recognize the universal right to political participation as reflected, for example, in universal suffrage. The Polity IV index (and other indices, with one or two exceptions) does not account explicitly for female suffrage. To that extent it suffers from an inadequate assessment of the democracy status of any given country in the period prior to the enactment of the right of women to participate in national or even municipal elections. This problem is of greater relevance for measures that attempt to identify transitions to democracy than measures concerned with the level of democracy at any particular point in time, as in the case of Polity IV, especially as they focus on recent periods that witnessed a growing extension of female suffrage across countries.[5]

Suffrage is, of course, part of the wider issue of gender equality that Polity IV and other indices of democracy do not explicitly recognize. In many countries the struggle for women's rights has led to a higher level of gender equality accompanied by wider female participation in various domains, including the political and economic domains. Such gains reflect the recognition that a real democracy implies gender equality as well as equal opportunities for all segments of society.[6]

Important as they are, the above limitations of Polity IV do not bear significantly on the polity analysis of the case studies included in this volume, particularly as the analysis focuses on explaining the persistence of their autocratic regimes and not on any transition from a state of autocracy to a state of democracy. Lebanon is an exception in that from the beginning of independence it has had its own special form of (constrained) democracy.

Regarding universal suffrage, in six of the case studies (Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Sudan) women's suffrage was introduced prior to the period of the study that begins in 1960 or shortly afterwards. Jordan introduced the right of women to vote in 1974. The Gulf region, with the exception of Bahrain and Kuwait, has yet to introduce female suffrage. The former introduced it in 2002 and the latter in 2005. The remaining Arab countries, not included in this volume, introduced female suffrage before 1965.

As for the wider question of gender equality, the pace of its implementation in the Arab world, under the influence of women's movements and international pressure including international agreements such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), has varied from one Arab country to another. In all of them however, various forms and

degrees of gender discrimination continue to exist, giving an additional signal of the non-democratic nature of political regimes in place.

What matters for our purposes is that for all the countries in this volume the persistence of autocracies goes beyond the question of universal suffrage or gender equality in general. Those states that introduced female suffrage early on have remained non-democratic despite subsequent limited political reforms. And for the few that followed suit later on, the granting of women's right to participate in the political process, a positive step on its own, did not change the basic nature of the political regime in place. This assessment remains valid even after we account for other measures that might have been introduced to reduce gender inequality. With or without greater gender equality, as we note below, the Arab countries (with the exception of Lebanon) remain autocratic and the question of explaining the persistent Arab democracy deficit remains to be addressed.

Thus, while we have relied on a widely used empirical measure of democracy, i.e. the Polity IV index, in both the cross-country work and the individual case studies, we have, with the above in mind, been fully cognizant of some of its limitations both on methodological and definitional grounds. Perhaps, as pointed out by some researchers, one main empirical limitation of this index (along with alternative indices of measurement) is the applied aggregation rule: no justification is provided for the weighting schemes of the index attributes, which may lead to potential double counting.[7]

On the other hand, Polity IV possesses a number of positive attributes (e.g. clear and detailed coding rules), and whatever its flaws its wide use by researches renders it useful for comparative empirical assessments of the democracy status of different countries and regions. Furthermore, it appears to cohere with other indices of democracy (e.g. Van Hannen's and the more subjective Freedom House) in terms of the cross-regional comparisons and the dynamic behaviour over time. Indeed, the fundamental results regarding the role of oil and conflicts as the two major factors behind the Arab democracy deficit were robustly corroborated when the democracy model was tested using the Freedom House and Van Hannen's indices as dependent variables (Chapter 2). This enhances its validity though it does not necessarily establish its total reliability.[8] In any case, measures of democracy can and should be supplemented by additional investigations and, where necessary, their assessment should be modified accordingly.

Now, while the Polity IV rankings of Arab countries may not always have accurately reflected their evolving political situation, in general they have not been far off the mark in assessing the status of democracy in the Arab region.[9] In Chapter 2 we note that Arab autocracies have persisted in relying on various forms of oppression, including legitimacy by default, the engineering of crisis politics, and, more recently, the pretext of containing fundamentalist movements. There is plenty of evidence that the political and civic rights record in Arab countries has been marred by serious violations, attested to by various reports of Arab and international human rights organizations. All this lends support to the empirical assessment that, excepting one case (Lebanon), various shades of autocracy have prevailed in these countries since independence. The limited political liberal-

ization that some of them undertook at various times does not materially change this picture. Indeed, the case studies clearly point out how political regimes and practices reflect various forms of autocratic behaviour, the intensity of which could change from one period to another depending upon circumstances. The obstacles to the strengthening of democratization in the Arab region are yet to be overcome.

Over the course of the project, three workshops were held during which the research teams discussed the progress of their work and critiqued the methodologies employed. These proved to be extremely beneficial. They allowed for a constructive and enriching exchange of views among the participants in the project. Mutual feedback helped shape the final drafts of the studies. Toward the end of the project a dissemination conference was organized to present the findings of the cross-country and case studies to academics and civil society organizations, among others. Their feedback provided many helpful insights. In addition, a few separate individual country workshops were also organized to engage experts in the research findings of the case studies concerned. All these engagements were greatly advantageous to the progress of the research being undertaken. They allowed for a critical discourse of research methodologies and findings that could only serve to improve the ultimate outcome of the research project.

The volume is divided into three parts. Part I, on conceptual and cross-country work, sets the framework of the analysis. Part II, the main part, includes the case studies, which are divided into three groups: the Mashreq countries, the oil-dependent countries and the Nile Valley countries. Part III is an interpretive synthesis summing up the question of democracy in the Arab world.

Notes

1 They had been governed by the Ottomans since 1516/17, and by the British and French following the First World War and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, Egypt and the rest of North Africa had effectively been lost to Ottoman rule many decades before the First World War.

2 Admittedly, due to data limitation, we could only account for the gender question through the share of females in the labour force, which is only one aspect of women's empowerment.

3 See e.g. Al-Naqib (1996a, 1996b); Kedourie (1994); Sharabi (1988). According to Sharabi, patriarchy is a deep-seated characteristic of Arab societies that has survived through the ages and managed to adapt itself to modernity by transposing the acquired dependency relations vis-à-vis imperialist powers into the enduring features of the old patriarchy, hence becoming 'neopatriarchy'.

4 The extent to which current theories of transition to democracy that are based on the historical experience of the Western countries are useful in identifying the path from autocracy to democracy in the Arab world is an issue that will need to be carefully examined.

5 For a critical evaluation of this question see Paxton, 2000.

6 For whatever it might imply, the regression model of Ch. 2 indicates the positive impact on democratization of the growing share of the female labour force.

7 For a critical evaluation of alternative empirical measures of democracy, see Munck and Verkuilen, 2002.

8 Furthermore, some researchers have referred to data-induced measurement errors (Bowman *et al.*, 2005) which could reduce the validity of the long-term cross-national scales of democracy, and other researchers to the non-interchangeability of the various indices of democracy (Liu, 2003–4; Casper and Tufis, 2003) which reduce their reliability.

9 For some of the case studies, their authors judged that the assigned Polity IV country scores did not always reflect appropriately the evolving political situation and relied instead on their own modified polity scores.

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Part I

Democracy and development

Conceptual and cross-country perspectives

1 Political culture and the crisis of democracy in the Arab world

Abdelwahab El-Affendi

When the scandal over the abuse of Iraqi prisoners in the Abu Ghraib prison broke out in early 2004, Seymour Hersh, one of the key figures behind the revelations, pointed to the irony that Abu Ghraib had been a notorious torture centre under the Saddam Hussein regime that was thoroughly looted and stripped even of windows and doors after the fall of the regime. The United States military took over the deserted building, gave it a thorough face lift, with 'the floors tiled, cells cleaned and repaired, and toilets, showers, and a new medical center added' (Hersh, 2004a). Then they proceeded to do exactly what the Saddam regime had done there before, only this time they took pictures to amuse themselves.

In the heated controversy that followed, the US authorities and mainstream media argued that the torture at Abu Ghraib was an aberration, the responsibility of only a 'handful of rogue elements' in the US military. However, many analysts argued that the abuses reflected the erosion of democratic and human rights standards in the post-9/11 era, and were linked to the overall US policies in Iraq, Afghanistan and Guantanamo, involving the widespread use of torture on terror suspects (Hersh, 2004b). Some even compared the process to the creeping Nazification of Germany in the 1930s (Rajiva, 2005).

Other observers compared this latest Western incursion into the Arab world to the first: that of Napoleon Bonaparte in 1898. That one also used the pretext of bringing 'liberty' to the Arabs, and ended equally disastrously. Two prominent US historians (Richard Bulliet of Columbia University and Juan Cole of the Global Americana Institute) made the comparison almost simultaneously in August 2007. Napoleon had 'proclaimed his intention of liberating the Egyptians from their Mamluk oppressors. And he brought an army of scholars and advisers with him to make the occupation of Egypt a model of European benevolence' (Bulliet, 2007). Both leaders displayed a 'tendency to believe their own propaganda (or at least to keep repeating it long after it became completely implausible).

> Both leaders invaded and occupied a major Arabic-speaking Muslim country; both harbored dreams of a 'Greater Middle East'; both were surprised to find themselves enmeshed in long, bitter, debilitating guerrilla wars. Neither genuinely cared about grassroots democracy, but both found its symbols easy to

> invoke for gullible domestic publics. Substantial numbers of their new subjects quickly saw, however, that they faced occupations, not liberations.
>
> (Cole, 2007)

Napoleon's promise of liberation soon confronted the locals as 'an avalanche of bothersome regulations' and predatory practices aimed at raising revenue for the invaders (Flower, 1972: 48). When the people could take it no more and revolted, the advocates of liberty used the most brutal of tactics, including resorting to indiscriminate shelling of Cairo and even the mosque. Every rule in the book was broken, and all pretence of promoting liberty or respecting Islam was dropped. Al-Azhar was occupied and desecrated.

> Horses were tethered to the Kiblah, furniture was hurled around and the Koran kicked about the floor. El Djabarty, aghast, saw soldiers spit on the carpets, urinate on the walls, and litter the mosque with broken wine bottles . . . Heavy fines were imposed all round, and ten Sheikhs believed to have been implicated were stripped naked and shot in the Citadel.
>
> (Flower, 1972: 50)

Sound familiar? It could be Fallujah 2004, Hebron 1986, Hama 1982, or Halabja 1987.

1. Democracy, liberalism, occupation

This convergence of regime conduct across times and cultures should cast a sharp light on some of the unspoken assumptions that underpin much of the current discussions on democracy and democratization. One could cite numerous other examples, from the way the British conducted themselves in the face of the 1857 rebellion in India, through the French atrocities in Algeria, to Israel's behaviour today, to highlight aspects of this phenomenon, which I would like to call the 'Napoleon–Saddam Syndrome'. It is a condition that seems to infect rulers and other political actors in the region, regardless of their cultural background or origin, and suck them into a spiral of abuses, oppression, mounting resistance and more repression, leading to eventual collapse.

An inkling of the nature of this pathology can be found in remarks made by Israeli leaders who, in their attempt to defend Israeli's aggressive and often brutal behaviour towards the Palestinians by claiming that the Middle East is a brutal area where only the language of violence is understood, betray a sense of siege and isolation (Barak, 1999). The resulting paranoia is self-reinforcing; the actor who feels threatened by everyone around him acts in a manner that further alienates people and confirms his fears. Ironically, this paranoia is also shared by entrenched and increasingly beleaguered Arab regimes, and the excuses are comparable. When challenged about the horrendous abuses they engage in, Israeli officials often use the refrain: 'This is not Switzerland, you know.' Arab despots respond to mild suggestions that they moderate their abuses of human

rights by quipping: 'If I were to do what you ask, the fundamentalists would take over . . . Is that what you want?' This invariably silences the interlocutor, who quickly changes the subject (Zakaria, 2001).

Many theoreticians tend to follow the autocrats in emphasizing the role of the 'environment,' usually delineated in cultural terms. For example, Flower argues that Napoleon's problem was that his slogans about the 'rights of man' had little resonance with 'the inward-looking Egyptians' (Flower, 1972: 47), before giving a catalogue of the endless oppressive measures introduced by Napoleon under these slogans. This blaming of the victims suggests that it is not just Napoleon and Bush who tend to believe their own propaganda, but that many analysts do so as well. For the Egyptians did not rebel against the 'rights of man', but against unbearable oppression by an alien and insensitive power which ruled by force of arms.

To start, we can draw one logical conclusion from the encounters just mentioned: that the amount of repression needed to sustain a regime is proportional to the depth and breadth of rejection it faces from the people. That the US occupation forces in Iraq are having to use similar techniques of repression to the Ba'athist regime they displaced is a sign that they are facing comparable resistance from Iraqis. By definition, democracy should not face popular resistance, since democracy is rule by the people, which cannot be in revolt against itself. So if a certain order provokes a fierce resistance, that order is, by definition, not a democracy.

While there are many disagreements about defining democracy, David Beetham is right to argue that:

> Disputes about the meaning of democracy which purport to be conceptual disagreements are really disputes about how much democracy is either desirable or practicable; that is, about where the trade-off should come between democratic and other values.
>
> (Beetham, 1993: 55)

For Beetham, democracy can be defined as:

> A mode of decision-making about collectively binding rules and policies over which the people exercise control, and the most democratic arrangement to be where all members of the collectivity enjoy effective equal rights to take part in such decision-making directly – one, that is to say, which realizes to the greatest conceivable degree the principle of popular control and equality in its exercise. Democracy should properly be conceptualized as lying at one end of a spectrum, the other end of which is a system of rule where the people are totally excluded from the decision-making process and any control over it.
>
> (Beetham, 1993: 55)

There is a broad agreement on this conception of democracy as a political system 'in which the members regard themselves as political equals, as collectively sovereign, and possess all capacities, resources and institutions they need in order to

govern themselves' (Dahl, 1989: 1). The theoretical disputes, as Beetham points out, revolve around rival and contestable claims as to how much democracy can be realized in a sustainable form. This is an important consideration since democracy has been 'a remarkably difficult form of government to create and sustain' (Held, 1993: 13).

Sustainability, or 'consolidation', is a key concern for theoreticians of democratic transitions, and is said to occur when democracy becomes 'the only game in town', i.e. 'when no significant political group seriously attempts to overthrow the democratic regime or to promote domestic or international violence in order to secede from the state' (Linz and Stepan, 1998: 49). One could argue that this requirement is too stringent, since it could imply that today's Spain or Britain during the IRA insurgency are not consolidated democracies. However, the general idea is that a democracy can be considered consolidated when such activities do not pose a serious threat to its stability. Linz and Stepan stipulate six conditions needed for a democracy to be consolidated: an authoritative state, a lively civil society, an autonomous political society, the prevalence of the rule of law, an effective state bureaucracy and an institutionalized economic society (Linz and Stepan, 1998: 51–8).

However, modern democracy has another dimension to it. As Bernard Crick puts it, what is usually meant by democracy today is 'a fusion (but quite often a confusion) of the idea of power of the people and the idea of legally guaranteed individual rights' (Crick, 1998: 257). More often described as 'liberal representative democracy' (Held, 1993: 18–20), to distinguish it from ancient direct democracies (like those of Athens) or from other forms that do not respect individual liberties, modern democracies are also referred to as 'constitutional democracies'. Liberal constitutionalism seeks to limit the powers of the state through guarantees of individual rights and private property. Liberalism ('a doctrine devoted to protecting the rights of the individual to life, liberty, property, and the pursuit of happiness': Plattner, 1999: 121) could and did exist without democracy, while constitutionalism could be, and has been, used to curb democracy. The designers of the American constitution in particular had used complex constitutional curbs on democratic rights (indirect elections of the president and senate, special role for the Supreme Court, etc.) in order to guard against the 'tyranny of the majority' as much as to guard against the tyranny of the few (Blondel, 1998: 74).

Given that liberalism contains principles that 'have been profoundly hostile to democracy', the evolution of modern democracy has been the 'history of successive struggles between liberals and various types of democrat over the extent and form of democratization' (Beetham, 1993: 58). In spite of this, the convergence was seen as inevitable, since liberalism's values of liberty and rights cannot long survive the denial of equal rights for all (Plattner, 1999: 122). In fact, attempts made to abolish some of the liberal features of modern democracies 'in the name of a more perfect democracy have only succeeded in undermining the democracy in whose name [these rights] were attacked' (Beetham, 1993: 57). To a large extent then, modern democracy can be seen as having been 'conceptualized and structured within the limits of liberalism' (Parekh, 1995: 165).

However, and of central relevance to our current investigation, the consciousness of the distinction and tension between liberalism and democracy has led to another startling conclusion. Taking as its premise the same point made above (that democracy and liberalism have become inseparable), some analysts have argued that in cases where democracy could lead to illiberal regimes (as was the case in the former Yugoslavia or some Arab and Muslim countries where Islamists could come to power), it might not be wise to promote democracy. Instead, some form of authoritarian liberalism should be championed (Miller, 1993; Zakaria, 1997; Plattner, 1999). From this perspective, it could be seen that what Napoleon and George W. Bush were trying to promote in the Arab world was not really democracy, but some form of authoritarian liberalism (cf. Cole, 2007). The claim that Arab culture is hostile to democracy has thus been reinterpreted to argue that Arabs are in fact hostile to liberalism.

2. The basics of 'culture talk'

The appeal to culture as an explanatory variable determinant of social and political change, most recently publicized by Huntington's 'Clash of Civilizations' thesis, has a long pedigree, stretching back to Max Weber's famous citing of the 'Protestant Ethic' as the driving force behind modern capitalism (Wedeen, 2002: 713). Other theorists trace the genealogy back to de Tocqueville and even to Aristotle (Diamond, 1994: 10). The political culture approach has in recent years been eclipsed by rival approaches, after a brief ascendancy in the first half of the last century (Almond, 1994: pp. x–xi; Diamond, 1994: 1). Proponents of this approach stake the claim 'that we can identify distinctive and relatively stable distributions of political values, beliefs and understandings among populations' that can act as independent explanatory variables for political behaviour (Diamond, 1994: 1). In this regard, certain cultural attributes can cause democracy to flourish, including a level of individualism, moderation, pragmatism and mutual trust among the elite, coupled with an 'intelligent mistrust of leadership' (Diamond, 1994: 12). Central also is a solid commitment to the democratic process by all actors as stipulated above.

> This overriding commitment to democratic proceduralism is a critical political cultural condition for democracy. In combination with policy pragmatism and political tolerance, it promotes moderate partisanship, and these qualities together are most likely to limit the politicization of social life and the rancor of political intercourse.
>
> (Diamond, 1994: 11)

It is of course a truism to say that the culture of a society determines how individuals and groups conduct themselves publicly, especially if political culture is defined as 'a people's predominant beliefs, attitudes, values, ideals, sentiments, and evaluations about the political system of its country, and the role of the self in that system' (Diamond, 1994: 7). For if one includes evaluation of the political