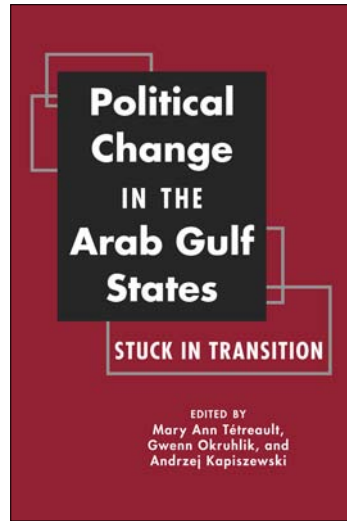


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Political Change in the Arab Gulf States: Stuck in Transition

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Gwenn Okruhlik, and
Andrzej Kapiszewski

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Twenty-First-Century Politics in the Arab Gulf States

*Mary Ann Tétreault, Andrzej Kapiszewski,
and Gwenn Okruhlik*

THERE IS WIDESPREAD agreement that a deficit of freedom undermines human development.¹ There is less agreement about the connection between political and economic development, yet many believe that there is a dramatic gap between the levels of political freedom and economic development in Arab countries as compared to the rest of the world.² One oft-cited indicator of the Arab states' failure to develop politically is that, with the exception of Iraq and Lebanon, none of the Arab-majority countries has a democratically elected government. Economic development also lags, surprisingly so in view of the region's oil resources. Labor productivity in these countries dropped between 1960 and 1990 while it soared elsewhere in the world, and it remains low for various reasons, including overemployment and labor importation in oil-exporting countries.³ Even Africa outperformed the Arab region with regard to rates of economic growth during that time.

The contradictions embedded in these observations are products of creative and sometimes inappropriate aggregation as well as the tendency of analysts to consider too few "causes" when they examine "effects."⁴ In an effort to disentangle assumptions from findings, in this volume we look at domestic politics in the seven Arab states that border the Gulf.

There is no better example of the disjunction between "what everybody knows" about the Arab world and the complex and multifaceted reality in this region than the monarchies of the Gulf. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Oman, the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), enjoy relatively high incomes and, in consequence, their citizens enjoy relatively high standards of living. We show in this volume that, despite their "conservative" political systems, all

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six governments have carried out significant political and economic reforms. We also show, however, that, although civil rights and liberties are greater and citizens have more say in national politics now than they did a decade ago, there is no indication that any of these countries are launched on a “transition to democracy.” Indeed, the complex politics of the GCC states offers an opportunity to test propositions about economic and political development—about transitions broadly conceived.

In Iraq as well as in the only non-Arab Gulf state, Iran, the picture offers little if anything more in the way of optimism about development and freedom, despite a popularly ratified constitution in Iraq and a postrevolution referendum that was used as a mandate to re-create Iran’s constitution, although in a way that failed to elicit the same enthusiasm.⁵ Despite hydrocarbon resources that rival those of their neighbors, both Iraq and Iran labor under the political and economic aftereffects of imperialist exploitation; violent revolutions to overthrow client governments; and, in the case of Iraq, invasion and war purportedly undertaken precisely to make it more democratic. Both continue to endure high levels of government corruption and repression. With regard to the rule of law, both have constitutions that, although differently flawed, contain provisions that undermine national unity and governmental accountability while the elections held under these organic laws are ambiguous with regard to their ability to produce stable and effective legitimate governments. Why do the Gulf states—and Middle Eastern states generally—seem to be exceptions to the third wave of democratization, a global political sea change that presumably was able to effect democratic transitions everywhere else in the world?⁶ Indeed, the optimism that swept academic and policy communities in response to third-wave political openings in Latin America and Europe has given way to pessimism almost as deep.

Events seem to have overtaken theories that were cherished for their elegance, but proved to be wanting when it came to predicting the trajectory of politics in cases outside the regions that had served as the template of *transitology*, the study of transitions from authoritarian rule. In a recent article, Philippe Schmitter, one of the founders of this analytical school, emphasizes that he and his research partners not only did not see themselves as the initiators of a new paradigm for understanding democratization in Latin America, but they also were unprepared for what Schmitter called “divine surprises” comprising the wave of democratization in Eastern Europe. Indeed, Schmitter asserts that stretching the “assumptions, concepts, hypotheses, and tentative conclusions” represented in that early work seemed at the outset to be “problematic” in the light of the divergence between the ideas it reflected and “most prevailing theories about ‘really existing democracy.’”⁷ We agree that the transition paradigm was carefully conceived and offered with many caveats, yet it often was inappropriately

applied, in part as the result of the very real progress toward democracy made in states across the world, including some widely regarded as problematic at best.⁸ The now highly criticized shortcomings of the transition paradigm⁹ arise both from a *problématique* sited in the unique politics and history of Latin America and, perhaps especially, from wishful thinking on the part of those who embraced it so enthusiastically that they were convinced that the end of (authoritarian) history had arrived.¹⁰

In this volume, we consider recent political and economic openings and closures in the Arab Gulf states, an integral part of the Middle East, a region that transitologists generally agree is resistant to democratization. The substance and trajectories of political change play out in different ways in different places—there certainly is unevenness to this process within and across cases. This is as true among Arab Gulf states as it is between them and others. Kuwait is, in some ways, the Gulf's political outlier. In 1981, elections were held for a new National Assembly following five years of constitutionally illegal closure of the parliament by the regime. The prodemocracy movement that sought to end the second illegal closure culminated in 1990 when the ruler called for elections to an illegal advisory council that, ironically, took office just in time for the Iraqi invasion. During the occupation, prodemocracy activists pressured the ruler to agree to the restoration of the constitution should Kuwait be liberated, but it took additional pressure from coalition members after liberation to bring this about. Since then, democratization as a process continues to be three steps forward and at least two steps back, but what we emphasize here is that it is a process whose end point is yet to be determined.

Saudi Arabia and Oman are outliers on the other end of the spectrum. In Saudi Arabia, the centrality of the ruling family in national political life has been consolidated rather than diffused even under the guise of a “reform” agenda.¹¹ Social forces are vibrant, but have thus far been offset by the overwhelming power of the state. In the most understudied of all GCC states, Oman, discussions of reform are limited to expanding the scope of a partially elected Shura Council that has no defined scope or any legislative or advisory authority.¹² Its political future remains grim as decisionmaking continues to be dominated by the sultan and a tight cohort of advisers and individuals from the ruling family and their close associates.¹³ In addition to being head of state, the sultan is prime minister as well as minister of foreign affairs, defense, and finance. But perhaps the most distinct threat to the future of Oman is the nexus between a somewhat totalitarian structure and the lack of an apparent successor to the Omani throne. While “succession crises” have occurred frequently in modern Gulf history, Oman is the only Gulf state that has no official heir to the throne.¹⁴ Discussion of the country's political trajectory and future is therefore contentious at best (see Chapter 5).

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Elsewhere in the Gulf, political opening proceeds at a snail's pace. Mediated by autocratic rulers, small steps are being taken. Yet even though many social and economic reforms have been instituted in these regimes, the fundamental distribution of political power remains unchanged in the Arab Gulf states. Why this is so is one of the questions we explore in this volume.

The events of the past decade have left most students of the Gulf, including the optimists, much more pessimistic than they were a decade ago about the prospects for democracy there and elsewhere in the Middle East in the near to medium term.¹⁵ There are many reasons for the persistence of authoritarianism in the Middle East. They include the historical legacy of postcolonial/postimperial state-led development; indigenous social forces that were diminished if not crushed during the imperial era; and, in non-GCC states, the coercive capability of the state apparatus. Meanwhile, postimperial oil revenues from abroad lubricate the state bureaucracy and provide enviable—and envied—living standards to local populations. Even at the height of scholarly optimism, most analysts, including transitologists, omitted the Middle East from their lists of likely candidates for democratization.¹⁶

The size and reach of those oil revenues explain why rentier state theory is a common explanation for authoritarianism in the Middle East. Especially in oil-exporting states themselves, rentier income from labor remittances and service fees, foreign aid, and other external sources of income provide nontax income for states.¹⁷ Oil exporters are sometimes characterized as political communities that live by the inverse of the slogan pushing the American colonies to revolt from Britain in the late eighteenth century; that is, they are regimes flying the banner of “no representation without taxation.”¹⁸ Rulers garner support from citizens or subjects by allocating resources to rather than extracting resources from them. (This is why they also are sometimes referred to as “allocation states,” discussed below).¹⁹ But payoffs to citizens are not the only source of state strength. Money also buys the means of coercion, supplying rentier states with resources to repress dissent.²⁰ Meanwhile, reliance on income generated by an enclave industry that creates little in the way of forward and backward economic linkages²¹ retards societal diversification and, thereby, both the expansion and the effects of social changes with the potential to shift cultural norms and expectations. It also retards or sidelines economic changes that could reduce direct citizen dependence on the state.²²

The omission of the Middle East from transitology wish lists of future democracies sparked Michael Ross's interest in testing rentier state theory in a global framework. He sought cases outside the community of oil-exporting countries and also outside the Middle East to determine whether and, if so, how and how much, high levels of mineral export earnings per se

inhibit democratization.²³ A somewhat different take on the link between mineral wealth and democratic development appears in a look at substate units of a democratic country, explored by Ellis Goldberg, Erik Wibbels, and Eric Mvukiyehe, who found differences in institutional structures and praxis that helped explain variations in democratic practice among mineral-rich US states.²⁴ Ross concludes that oil and other forms of mineral wealth do reduce possibilities for democratization, in and out of the Middle East, and that all three causal mechanisms—allocation, repression, and low rates of social and cultural change—are implicated. Goldberg, Wibbels, and Mvukiyehe show that, even within the same federal nation-state, the quality of democracy in its constituent parts is shaped by mineral wealth. It is surprising that this finding holds up so well in places where mineral wealth is privately rather than state owned: “American state governments behaved (in collusion with private mineral firms) in much the same manner as international rentier states. . . . [The] combination of low taxes and extensive public outlays . . . seems to contribute to politicians’ persistence in office.”²⁵

Rentier state theory notwithstanding, a minority among Middle East analysts interpreted the divine surprises that so startled Schmitter and his colleagues as holding out the possibility of transition from authoritarianism in the Middle East. Even in the Gulf monarchies, this perspective initially seemed justified as political openings began to appear, the most significant being the widely covered and discussed 1992 election in Kuwait.²⁶ A hopeful focus on the Middle East as a site of transitions was refashioned into a policy of interventionist regime change during the George W. Bush administration, when the US-led invasion of Iraq, and what had been predicted to be the modern equivalent of a splendid little war, was supposed to inaugurate a wave of political and economic reform in the region as a whole (see Chapter 11). Pressure from US policymakers on Middle East rulers, along with incentives in the form of free trade agreements, membership in the World Trade Organization, proposed cooperation with the European Union, and widespread public interest among citizens in several Gulf states, encouraged Gulf rulers to embrace the notion of reform.

The reforms they introduced were mostly cosmetic, however, designed to ease tension at pressure points, but not intended to transfer power from rulers to more broadly based institutions. For example, the Bush-era focus on women’s rights and elections made it relatively easy for Gulf monarchs to comply with the letter of democratization while sidestepping more fundamental change. Indeed, the irony of *al islah* (reform) is that sometimes reforms serve to reassert the authority of ruling families.²⁷ In the months preceding the much-heralded Saudi Arabian municipal elections of 2005, for example, civil servants were warned that they would face disciplinary action, including loss of their jobs, if they criticized any government programs or state policies.²⁸ Women were excluded from suffrage. Some of the

most articulate proponents of elections were arrested and jailed for the duration of the campaigning and voting. In the end, the government appointed fully half of each municipal council.²⁹ Under the guise of competitive elections, the ruling family had consolidated its power in political life.

Most of the reforms directed toward women are equally ambiguous. Women have long served as markers and counters in male-dominated conflicts between regimes and oppositions in the Middle East as elsewhere. The main contenders rarely care about women themselves, however, or what their political rights can or even might accomplish as independent variables in political equations. At best, like tribal voters, women are conceived by male citizens and by rulers as inherent supporters of the status quo, whether because of their essential conservatism or their situational subservience: they will vote simply as the men in their families direct.³⁰ The ease with which women's political participation was instituted in Bahrain, Oman, and Qatar—although not in Kuwait, whose parliament has real legislative authority—testifies to the assumption that election outcomes would not change if women were to vote. Yet some objected to women voting for the same reasons that they object to a woman driving, leaving the country without her husband's permission, or engaging in other behavior that men feel encroaches on their right to dominate women (see also Chapter 9).³¹

It is clear that elections are fraught with contradictions as indicators of democracy or even of democratization. They are easily manipulated from above (see Chapters 2 and 4), and frequently stolen outright by unscrupulous incumbents. Perhaps for this reason, elections appear to attract authoritarian rulers in search of methods to reduce external and internal pressure for reform, so much so that such regimes constitute a subcategory of authoritarianism. These competitive authoritarian regimes do not meet the minimum procedural standards for democracy because their elections are so heavily tainted, yet the possibility (and occasional actuality) that opposition members can turn incumbents out introduces an "inherent" tension in this strategy.³²

Another approach to deflecting pressures for political reform is economic liberalization. Also a highly emphasized indicator of democratization by analysts of the George W. Bush era, economic liberalization addresses the third mechanism underlying the persistent authoritarianism investigated by Ross. Economic liberalization offers the prospect of transferring economic resources from the state to private actors. By adding to the wealth of existing economic elites, liberalization contributes to the construction of power centers able to compete to varying extents with state elites as directors of key aspects of the political economy.³³ Insofar as economic liberalization transfers resources directly to citizens, it can spark or add to the development of the class fractions and personal interests that modernization theorists,³⁴ among others,³⁵ thought would result in a flourishing civil socie-

ty. Yet arguably the most successful exercises in post–World War II middle-class creation came in the Arab Gulf countries, and not as the result of foreign investment, but rather from wealth transfers and investment in human capital by rentier states.

Rivers of money, openings of various kinds, and the internal contradictions alluded to above have led to similarly peculiar outcomes in the regimes of the Arab Gulf states, with the exception of Iraq, which has moved on to a different, if related, set of transition problems, dilemmas, and possibilities. We see all seven of these states as being “in transition” in the sense that their systems of governance are much different from what they were fifty, or twenty-five, or even ten years ago. They have been transformed from tribal regimes into states with notable administrative capacity, increasingly coherent identities, and varying degrees of social, political, and economic inclusion among citizens. All of this occurred in the context of domestic and external pressures vastly more intrusive and influential than those experienced by most early developers.³⁶ The country case chapters in this volume indicate both the extent of this movement and the forces that keep it going. Yet even the most charitable interpretation of the politics of these actively changing states would not conclude that any is a “really existing democracy” as Schmitter defines it, and few would see them as embarked on a path toward democracy. Even so, they have moved, and sometimes in a progressive direction. Thus, we conclude that they are stuck in transition, states in motion each of whose multiple drivers is steering toward a different destination. There are more economic openings than explicitly political or social openings³⁷ but all of them are limited and engineered to minimize threats to the power of regimes.

Transitions Toward Democratization: From Authoritarianism or Within Authoritarianism?

We take a broad view of transition, seeing it simply as a process of structural change that alters the institutions and processes by which a political community is governed. We do this from what Mary Ann Tétreault and Mohammed Al-Ghanim call transitology’s “original position”,³⁸ that is, the assumption that the outcome or destination of transition is uncertain and, therefore, that it is premature to think of it as proceeding to democracy or anywhere else before a stable end point is reached.³⁹ Daniel Brumberg, in contrast, believes that the end point has been reached already. It is “the trap of liberalized autocracy,” a sort of caldera into which regimes fall after having overcome initial resistance to reform. Once reforms have been effected—in different ways that usually derive from elite pacts—reformers find themselves confronted by insuperable obstacles to progressing further.⁴⁰

Brumberg argues that such regimes are not in transition: they have arrived as liberalized autocracies, hybrid regimes that are functional and stable.

Like Brumberg, we see life in the caldera as active. Unlike him, we do not see it as stable. We regard the churning in the caldera as struggle in progress, and potentially capable of overcoming the reformers' one-down position (i.e., capable of pushing institutionalized political liberalization further). In consequence, although the events of the past decade leave most students of the Gulf—and the Middle East as a whole—pessimistic about the likelihood of continued real political opening,⁴¹ we see the jury as still being out. There is movement—sometimes backward, sometimes forward—but movement nonetheless. Indeed, we hope that the current pessimism is as overstated as the earlier optimism.

During the optimistic era, US observers urging democratization were all too willing to interpret virtually any election, however “flawed,” as evidence of transition in a country already deemed as being in transition (see Chapter 11). This infatuation with elections was communicated to the Gulf where the staging of elections for foreign and domestic consumption became an art form (see, especially, Chapter 2). In Iraq, elections follow timetables that are heavily influenced by external—usually US—political imperatives (see Chapter 3), and mostly domestic ones at that.⁴² While we do not argue that elections are meaningless or unimportant, we do believe that they have to be seen as part of an elaborate dance engaging regime leaders and aspiring leaders, domestic forces pressing for liberalization, and external audiences whose good opinion Gulf governments seek to retain. Like Eric Bjornlund,⁴³ we believe that elections must be viewed holistically. Political dynamics can be understood only if we account for events prior to and after the actual vote.

Other approaches to explaining instances of significant political change focus on context, including personalities, movements, institutions, the overall environment, and the impact of particular events such as wars, economic collapses, or a massive public failure of the state.⁴⁴ From this “new institutionalist” perspective, political change is path dependent.⁴⁵ Its trajectory is influenced by existing institutions and enduring legacies from previous ones, the quality of leadership, and the impetus or constraint imposed by domestic and international political forces⁴⁶ and events. It is subject not only to derailment, but also to unplanned-for opportunities. This makes movements for democratization and government responses to them appear more like ad hoc reactions than the unfolding of a rational strategy,⁴⁷ a situation that may actually be the case.

The new institutionalist school also offers an explanation for regression and for the failure to seize an opportunity to initiate a transition that arguably would have served the interests of elites. An example of the first is the shift toward authoritarianism in Venezuela. Terry Karl foresaw it as one

of several problematic effects of elite decisionmaking during the 1958 pact-ed transition because Communists were kept from the negotiating table. In consequence, the legitimate and, at that time, relatively moderate demands of workers received far less attention from the new regime than the inclusion of a strongly proworker party would have ensured.⁴⁸ A similar shortsightedness operated among Syrian elites in the 1960s, even among members of the same political party who lost—wasted?—an opportunity to move toward transition under a prime minister unusually willing to endure high political costs in the cause of national unity.⁴⁹ Arguments based on culture, institutions, and development trajectories are frequently used to delegitimize prospects for democratization in the Arab Middle East. Arguments focused on Islam as producing societies ideologically unsuited to support democracy remain common, as were similar arguments about Catholicism before the openings in Eastern Europe and Latin America. We suggest instead that religion can be and has been used to institutionalize repression, just as it has been used as a vehicle for attacking it.⁵⁰

Institutions are more problematic. Political power struggles within ruling families loom large in negotiating institutional changes. Thus, institutional reforms were often instruments of intra-elite power games as much as they were attempts to modernize the state. As a result of these prior decisions, and even before there was strong path dependence via the rentier condition, patrimonial politics and struggles largely determined institutional design, and certain institutions continue to retain a “fiefdom” character.⁵¹

Historical memory in the Gulf monarchies incorporates elements of nationhood as well as tribalism.⁵² Its shorter and more troubled history incorporating several divergent visions of a united Iraq⁵³ may explain part of the difficulty the Iraqi nation has faced putting itself back together as the third Gulf war since 1980 winds down. Indeed, institutions throughout the Gulf are contested and fragile. The tradition of *shura* (consultation), as opposed to separation of powers and rule of law, is used by Gulf rulers to argue that Arab or Islamic states have culturally embedded institutions that are more compatible with local values and customs than the constitutions, parliaments, and elections favored by prodemocracy forces. Like Christianity in the West, however, Islam is as often the handmaiden of autocratic rulers as a vehicle to challenge them.⁵⁴ Tribal organization and sectarian loyalties also are deployed to design constituencies and elections, and the institutions they produce (see Chapters 2, 4, 5, and 7). Constitutions have been overridden and rewritten as rulers attempt to force institutions to support their continued hold on power (see Chapter 2). Sites and processes of institutionalization may be incremental and multifocal; trade-offs are plenty. The challenges are daunting given the commanding heights and coercive capacities of authoritarian rulers.

The early transitions literature dealt with regime change in Latin

America and Eastern Europe. In both regions, the ability of authoritarian and totalitarian states to maintain control was substantially exhausted, politically and economically—unlike the contemporary situation in the Gulf states. The literature was written when rationalism was becoming the dominant ideological paradigm in political science and rested in part on the assumption that opening regimes politically, such as by increasing civil liberties and holding elections, no longer could be avoided. Despite the caution Schmitter and his colleagues urge, many early transitions did result in democratization, which often, although not always or entirely, was achieved.⁵⁵ In addition to political opening during this period, many states sought to stimulate their economies. They expanded trade and opened themselves to direct foreign investment; some made small moves toward domestic economic rationalization. Even authoritarian regimes in the Middle East saw an open door (*infitah*) as a possible route to growth.⁵⁶ At the same time, persistent economic difficulties increased the attraction of foregrounding domestic institutions that could be made to bear some of the responsibility should development remain elusive, even to states with no desire to democratize at all.⁵⁷ The concept of transition as a process of regime change and opening as an economic wedge that might initiate transition thus became intertwined.

Rethinking Transitions from Authoritarianism in the Gulf Context

As we stated at the outset of this chapter, whatever hopes existed for democratization in the Gulf have been substantially dashed by the appearance of competitive authoritarianism/electoral authoritarianism and other types of hybrid regimes. We suggest that they should be considered in the context of stickiness rather than as outright failures.

Transitions everywhere are anything but linear. They encompass progressive movement alongside retrograde movement and simple inertia, drifting along an already established pathway. The interesting questions include: Which factors contribute to what kind of outcome, and how do they do it? What do such openings and closures in political space look like? How are they felt and assessed? And perhaps most important, why do they happen and what do they accomplish? The Gulf's ruling families persist in the face of internal and external challenges. Is this manifestation of authoritarian resilience and opening different from persistent authoritarianism elsewhere?

Even cosmetic reforms may have unintended consequences. They raise expectations of further opening, limiting the ability of regimes to push back to square one as cheaply and unobtrusively as they might have done without

them. Reforms also lay down structures such as elections and the popular mobilization that even sham elections necessitate. Alternatively, cosmetic reforms may provide cover for regimes that subsequently regress by undermining or crippling institutions and closing political space. We observe today in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, the UAE, Bahrain, and Oman substantial closure in terms of freedom of expression and assembly. The publication of newspapers is suspended, critics are arrested, blogs are blocked, and Internet cafes are monitored. Social and cultural gathering spaces are sites of contestation and, thus, frequently curtailed by the state. All of the countries considered here have “elastic” laws that prohibit such ambiguous things as criticism of ruling families; insults to Islam or human dignity; speech or writing that insults neighboring or friendly countries, threatens social stability, violates public order or morals, criticizes family values, or violates the security of the state or its public image.⁵⁸

Although the cases under consideration are disparate, we also know that there is substantial emulation and political learning going on, and not only among regime actors.⁵⁹ Information sharing also supports cooperative behavior among domestic groups, just as it can trigger pushback from groups that see themselves as losing ground to rivals, as Jerzy Zdanowski shows in Chapter 7 on Saudi Arabia. Elections as sites of struggles over how institutions operate and for whose benefit are focal points of Gianluca Parolin’s chapter on Bahrain and Mary Ann Tétreault’s on Kuwait (Chapters 2 and 4, respectively). The results of elections may change the shape of the playing field along with the fortunes of aspiring leaders and their constituencies, as Juan Cole’s examination of Shi’i politics in Iraq in Chapter 3 shows. Qatar’s amirs have used liberalization to clothe their family coups in the garments of progress for some time, and Jill Crystal argues in Chapter 6 that even the establishment of Al-Jazeera was very much in Qatar’s facade tradition. Yet as N. Janardhan shows in Chapter 10, enlarging Qatar’s public sphere also provided a model for other new regional broadcasters whose clientele is somewhat different from Al-Jazeera’s, not incidentally highlighting the station’s differential treatment of its own rulers as compared to the way it treats others.

“Stuckness” is illustrated in different ways in J. E. Peterson’s chapter on Oman, which suggests that top-down liberalization is virtually the only source of political opening—so far. Christian Koch presents a more active picture of liberalization in the UAE, but concludes that prosperity continues to dampen widespread enthusiasm for political power sharing there (Chapters 5 and 8, respectively). Perhaps the chapter that is most illustrative of the concatenation of elite and popular forces and their impact not only on women’s rights but also on economic rationalization is Eleanor Doumato’s take on the politics of women’s rights (Chapter 9). Matteo Legrenzi’s chapter on GCC security, and Mary Ann Tétreault’s on US foreign policy, show

the continuing influence of the United States in the Gulf, whether it is explicit, in the form of military transfers or direct pressure to democratize, or implicit, as illustrated by the shift from George W. Bush's push for democratization to Barack Obama's hands-off approach to the domestic politics of US allies (Chapters 12 and 11, respectively).

As these chapters also show, if we can say that the Arab Gulf states are stuck in transition from authoritarianism, we cannot say that they are stuck for the same reasons, in the same place, or facing in the same direction. The different tactics for navigating democratization pressures and expectations have, not surprisingly, produced different institutions, expectations, and civil society structures. Development trajectories also vary, and the relative vulnerability of the Gulf states to what we call internal *juxtapositions*, the results of trends initiated or amplified by past policies and events, may prove to be extensive (see Chapter 13). What we can say is that the main force for stuckness is virtually identical across all six Gulf monarchies and is struggling to emerge in Iraq. Like autocrats across time and space, rulers in the Gulf are unwilling to give up their positions on the commanding heights of their governments and societies. It is not that they tried in vain to democratize and were stymied at every step by resisting populations. Rather, it is that they have used the facade of reform to hide their determination to hold on to the power that they have—and even to extend it.

The chapters in this volume illustrate these main points. They show where democratization might be restarted and where a particular ruler's strategy has effectively used up the transition potential of a particular course of action.⁶⁰ Each chapter deals with pressures to democratize emanating from inside and out, how (much) rulers responded to them, and whether and how rulers got around them. The authors assess the degree of forward movement, inertia, and rollback that comprise the resilience that enables these regimes to come back again and again, in spite of popular efforts by citizens and encouragement from abroad to restart and nurture systemic change. They also identify juxtapositions in each society, ranging from demographic challenges to cultural politics, the ebb and flow of oil and gas income, and the strength and direction of momentum in their core constituencies that could strengthen or attenuate the ability of rulers to keep to their authoritarian ways.

Among the juxtapositions peculiar to the Arab Gulf states and few others is the potential of oil to complicate transitions and rollback. Comparisons between regions during the 1990s have noted superior rates of growth in Africa and Asia as compared to growth in the Arab Middle East. This difference reveals the acute dependence of oil-exporting states on economic externalities over which they have little control, chiefly oil prices, currency exchange rates, and stable consumer demand for hydrocarbons. During the 1990s, the Arab Gulf states labored under depressed oil prices.

Beginning with the new millennium and especially since the beginning of the Iraq War in March 2003, these burdens eased as oil prices soared. They returned in different forms as the result of the macroeconomic instability that accompanies hydrocarbon price inflation: rapidly rising consumer prices, the expansion of debt, and, in the most recent era of macroeconomic destabilization, the global economic collapse following the 2008 banking crisis. The Gulf oil exporters' external dependency has not altered significantly since the early days of their industries, despite income accruing to sovereign wealth funds, the expansion of private sectors whose businesses depend on demand from the state sector and its millions of employees supported by oil revenue, and changes in market structure that continue to enlarge the role of oil exporters in hydrocarbon markets downstream from production.

External dependency separates what Giacomo Luciani defines as production states, which depend on their domestic economies to generate employment and tax revenues, from allocation states, which rely on economic transfers from abroad to generate income for citizens and the state.⁶¹ Although most of the literature on rentier states stresses the economic independence of governments from domestic populations that is conferred by oil revenues,⁶² it underestimates the nature and strength of demands on them, especially during periods of low income, and the impact of these demands on state repression.⁶³ An example of juxtaposition par excellence, external dependency reduces the capacity of states to manage domestic conflict at the precise time at which domestic conflict is most likely to arise.⁶⁴ It also neglects the issue of strategic security addressed by Legrenzi in Chapter 12.

Other juxtapositions also stem from the oil wealth of the Arab Gulf states. Prosperity allowed governments to educate their populations and provide generous income, health care, and other forms of social support. Sadly, it also instituted a pattern of changed expectations and behavior such that the nation's dependency on external rents was echoed in popular dependency on state largesse to sustain extravagant lifestyles. This dependency is seen by analysts of the rentier state school as key to maintaining authoritarianism in the Middle East, not only in the oil-exporting states themselves, but also in neighboring labor-exporting states (like Egypt and Jordan) that send workers to the oil exporters, along with states that receive high levels of foreign aid and investment (again, like Egypt and Jordan). As we have noted, a closer look would show that these rulers, and probably Iraq's as well, are using facade reform as a tactic for holding on to power rather than as a strategy for peaceful transition to power sharing.

Although the strength and organization of civil societies also vary widely among the Arab Gulf states, it is arguably here that the greatest potential for pushing transition toward more open societies and politics lies. Of course, as we noted earlier, transition from and even within authoritari-

anism may (or may not) be a fact of life in some of these states. But even where it exists, its destination is far from clear. Under the right—or better, the wrong—conditions, populist authoritarianism such as in Egypt during the 1950s and 1960s, or Syria during the secession period, could result from failed management of juxtapositions.⁶⁵ Such juxtapositions thus constitute critical junctures in the possible transition from authoritarianism in the Arab states of the Gulf.

We turn now to the case studies to examine how and why these authoritarian regimes persist in the face of internal and external challenges, how they protect their centrality in political life even under the guise of reform, and the various forms in which authoritarian durability and resilience are manifest.

Notes

The authors would like to thank Mohammed al-Ghanim for his excellent research assistance during the final stages of preparing this chapter.

1. Among the most ethically and empirically grounded expressions of this perspective is Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Anchor Books, 1999).

2. UNDP, *Arab Human Development Report 2002* (New York: United Nations, 2002), www.undp.org; and UNDP, *Arab Human Development Report 2003* (New York: United Nations, 2003), www.undp.org. The hierarchy among variables used to explain the persistence of authoritarianism in the Middle East varies. Some blame Islam for the lack of democracy in the Middle East—for example, Bernard Lewis, “Islam and Liberal Democracy,” *Atlantic Monthly*, February 1993, pp. 89–94; M. Steven Fish, “Islam and Authoritarianism,” *World Politics* 55, no. 1 (2002). Others point to oil revenues as a primary cause of authoritarianism—examples include Hazem Beblawi, “The Rentier State in the Arab World,” in *The Arab State*, ed. Giacomo Luciani (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 85–98; Michael L. Ross, “Does Oil Hinder Democracy?” *World Politics* 53, no. 3 (2001): 325–361; and Terry Lynn Karl, *The Paradox of Plenty: Oil Booms and Petro-States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). The nomination of Arab culture as the greatest obstacle to democratization is the message of works like Hisham Donno, Daniela Donno, and Bruce Russett, “Islam, Authoritarianism, and Female Empowerment: What Are the Linkages?” *World Politics* 56, no. 4 (2004): 582–607.

3. See, for example, Syed Ali, *Dubai: Gilded Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); John Chalcraft, “Monarchy, Migration, and Hegemony in the Arabian Peninsula,” paper prepared for the Kuwait Programme in Globalization and Governance, London, June 2010; and Nader Fergany, “Aspects of Labor Migration and Unemployment in the Arab Region,” Almishkat Center for Research, Cairo, www.mafhoum.com.

4. See Donno, Donno, and Russett, “Islam, Authoritarianism, and Female Empowerment.”

5. The Iraqi constitution was submitted to voters in October 2005. For background about the ratification of Iran’s postrevolution constitution, see Nikki Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press,

2003), pp. 246–249; and S. Waqar Hasib, “The Iranian Constitution: An Exercise in Contradictions,” *Al-Nakhlah*, Spring 2004, www.fletcher.tufts.edu.

6. “Third wave” comes from Samuel P. Huntington, “Democracy’s Third Wave,” *Journal of Democracy* 2, no. 2 (1991): 12–34.

7. Phillippe C. Schmitter, “Twenty-Five Years, Fifteen Findings,” *Journal of Democracy* 21, no. 1 (2010): 17.

8. Larry Diamond, “Thinking About Hybrid Regimes,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 21–35.

9. See, for example, Thomas Carothers, “The End of the Transition Paradigm,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 1 (2002): 5–21.

10. See, for example, Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: HarperPerennial, 1993).

11. For more on the structural challenges to Saudi reform, see Madawi Al-Rasheed, *al-Saudiyyah wa ma’zaq al-islah al-siyasi fi al-qarn al-hadi wa-al-’ishrin* (London: Saqi, 2005).

12. Freedom House, *Freedom in the World—2009: Oman* (Washington, DC: Freedom House, July 16, 2009), www.unhcr.org.

13. Francis Owtram, *A Modern History of Oman: Formation of the State Since 1920* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004), pp. 193–208.

14. For more on the upgrading of authoritarian rule in Oman’s contemporary history, see Dahir Mas’ud, *al-Istimrārīya wa-al-taghyr fi tajribat al-tahdīth al-’Umānīyah, 1970–2005* (Beirut: Dar al-Farabi, 2008).

15. See, for example, Lisa Anderson, “Searching Where the Light Shines: Studying Democratization in the Middle East,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 9 (2006): 189–214; Russell E. Lucas, *Institutions and the Politics of Survival in Jordan: Domestic Responses to External Challenges, 1988–2001* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006); Marsha Pripstein Posusney and Michele Penner Angrist, eds., *Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Regimes and Resistance* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2005); and Oliver Schlumberger, ed., *Debating Arab Authoritarianism: Dynamics and Durability in Nondemocratic Regimes* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007).

16. Oliver Schlumberger, “Arab Authoritarianism: Debating the Dynamics and Durability of Nondemocratic Regimes,” in *Debating Arab Authoritarianism: Dynamics and Durability in Nondemocratic Regimes*, ed. Oliver Schlumberger (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), pp. 1–20.

17. Hossein Mahdavy, “The Patterns and Problems of Economic Development in Rentier States: The Case of Iran,” in *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East*, ed. M. A. Cook (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 428–467. This framework was taken up late by other scholars, such as Giacomo Luciani, ed., *The Arab State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

18. For example, see Paul W. H. Aarts, “Oil, Money, and Participation: Kuwait’s *Sonderweg* as a Rentier State,” *Orient* 32, no. 2 (1991): 205–216. For a theoretical framework assessing Arab rentiers more generally, see Hazem Beblawi, “The Rentier State in the Arab World,” pp. 85–98.

19. Giacomo Luciani, “Allocation vs. Production States: A Theoretical Framework,” in *The Arab State*, ed. Giacomo Luciani (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 65–84. For a view of the devaluation of politics in much rentier analyses, see Gwenn Okruhlik, “Rentier Wealth, Unruly Law and the Rise of Political Opposition: The Political Economy of Oil States,” *Comparative Politics* 31, no. 3 (1999): 295–315. Rentier states also foster opposition as a result of their political choices about how to distribute revenues.

20. Mark J. Gasiorowski, *U.S. Foreign Policy and the Shah: Building a Client State in Iran* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

21. Jane Jacobs, *Cities and the Wealth of Nations: Principles of Economic Life* (New York: Random House, 1984). Jacobs was an early critic of globalized industries, of which oil is the paradigmatic example.

22. Timothy W. Luke, "Dependent Development and the OPEC States: State Formation in Saudi Arabia and Iran Under the International Energy Regime," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 20, no. 1 (1985): 31–54; Luciani, "Allocation vs. Production States."

23. Michael L. Ross, "Does Oil Hinder Democracy?" pp. 325–361.

24. Ellis Goldberg, Erik Wibbels, and Eric Mvukiyehe, "Lessons from Strange Cases: Democracy, Development, and the Resource Curse in the U.S. States," *Comparative Political Studies* 41, nos. 4–5 (2008): 477–514.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 506.

26. Mary Ann Tétreault, *Stories of Democracy: Politics and Society in Contemporary Kuwait* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); also Michael C. Hudson, "After the Gulf War: Prospects for Democratization in the Arab World," *Middle East Journal* 45, no. 3 (1991): 407–426; and Paul Aarts, "Democracy, Oil, and the Gulf War," *Third World Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (1992): 525–538.

27. Gwenn Okruhlik, "The Irony of Islah (Reform)," *Washington Quarterly* 28, no. 4 (2005): 153–170; Gwenn Okruhlik, "State Power, Religious Privilege, and Myths About Political Reform," in *Religion and Politics in Saudi Arabia: Wahhabism and the State*, eds. Mohammed Ayoob and Hasan Koselbalaban (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2009), pp. 91–107.

28. Hebah Saleh, "Saudi Warning to Critical Civil Servants Dents Hopes of Reform," *Financial Times*, September 16, 2004.

29. Pascal Menoret, *The Municipal Election in Saudi Arabia*, Arab Reform Initiative, December 27, 2005, <http://arab-reform.net>.

30. Mary Ann Tétreault, "A State of Two Minds: State Cultures, Women, and Politics in Kuwait," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 33, no. 2 (2001): 203–220.

31. The point we make here is that what the rest of the Gulf is voting for is not a body that can claim a share of power or authority. Although people will vote as they choose (and perhaps not choose women for a while as also happened in Kuwait), whether women get to vote and run for office or not is less of an issue than whether any citizen gets a share of political power.

32. Quote from Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, "Autocracy by Democratic Rules: The Dynamics of Competitive Authoritarianism in the Post–Cold War Era," paper prepared for the conference "Mapping the Great Zone: Clientelism and the Boundary Between Democratic and Democratizing," New York, April 2003, p. 2. See also Diamond, "Thinking About Hybrid Regimes"; Daniel Brumberg, "The Trap of Liberalized Autocracy," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 4 (2002): 56–68; Valerie J. Bunce and Sharon L. Wolchik, "Defeating Dictators: Electoral Change and Stability in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes," *World Politics* 62, no. 1 (2010): 43–86; and Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

33. Jonathan Nitzan, "Differential Accumulation: Toward a New Political Economy of Capital," *Review of International Political Economy* 2, no. 3 (1995): 446–515; and Jonathan Nitzan and Shimshon Bichler, *The Global Political Economy of Israel* (London: Pluto, 2002).

34. For example, see Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East* (New York: Free Press, 1958).

35. Simon Bromley, *Rethinking Middle East Politics* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994).

36. Charles Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," in *Bringing the State Back In*, eds. Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 169–191.

37. See, for example, the articles in A. Ehteshami and S. Wright, ed., *Reform in the Middle East Oil Monarchies* (Reading: Ithaca, 2008).

38. This appears in Guillermo O'Donnell and Phillippe C. Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions About Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), p. 2.

39. Mary Ann Tétreault and Mohammed al-Ghanim, "Transitions in Authoritarianism: Political Reform in the Persian Gulf Reconsidered," paper prepared for annual meeting of the International Studies Association, Montreal, February 2011.

40. Daniel Brumberg, "The Trap of Liberalized Autocracy."

41. "Real political opening" is derived from Schmitter's "really existing democracies"; that is, it is a visible movement toward a situation in which state and society see themselves as democratic, other self-identified democracies recognize the regime as democratic, and the regime is classified as democratic by scholars and analysts; Schmitter, "Twenty-Five Years," p. 28. Thus, a real political opening must be stable—no regression, although a little backsliding might be expected—and recognized as a significant opening by the nation itself, by peer states, and by knowledgeable observers.

42. Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); also Chapter 3 in this volume.

43. Eric C. Bjornlund, *Beyond Free and Fair: Monitoring Elections and Building Democracy* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2004).

44. Terry Lynn Karl, "Petroleum and Political Pacts: The Transition to Democracy in Venezuela," *Latin American Research Review* 22, no. 1 (1987): 63–94; Maksim Kokushkin, "New Institutionalism and New Alternatives to Normative Positivism," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, New York, August 2007; Doron Shultziner and Mary Ann Tétreault, "How Democratization Is Won Under Non-democratic Regimes: Emotion, Psychology, and Agency in the Kuwaiti Women's Rights Movement," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, DC, August 2008.

45. Geraldo Munck and Carol Leff, "Modes of Transition and Democratization: South America and Eastern Europe in Comparative Perspective," *Comparative Politics* 29, no. 3 (1997): 343–362.

46. Karl, "Petroleum and Political Pacts"; John Foran, *The Future of Revolutions: Rethinking Radical Change in the Age of Globalization* (London: Zed, 2003).

47. Mohammed Al-Ghanim, "'Transitions to Nowhere?' Kuwait and the Challenge of Political Liberalization," paper presented at annual meeting of the Northeast Political Science Association, Philadelphia, November 2009.

48. Karl, "Petroleum and Political Pacts."

49. Steven Heydemann, *Authoritarianism in Syria: Institutions and Social Conflict, 1946–1970* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); and Mohammed al-

Ghanim, "Republicanism and the Failure of Elite-Pacted Transitions in Syria, 1961–1963," unpublished manuscript, Georgetown University, Washington, DC, December 2009.

50. See Mary Ann Tétreault and Robert A. Denmark, eds., *Gods, Guns, and Globalization: Religious Resurgence and International Political Economy* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2004); Gwenn Okruhlik, "Making Conversation Permissible: Islamism in Saudi Arabia," in *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, ed. Quintan Wiktorowicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), pp. 353–384; Gwenn Okruhlik, "Networks of Dissent: Islamism and Reform in Saudi Arabia," *Current History*, January 2002, pp. 22–28; and John Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

51. See, for example, Steffen Hertog, "Shaping the Saudi State: Human Agency's Shifting Role in Rentier State Formation," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 39, no. 4 (2007): 539–563.

52. The continuing conflict between contemporary attitudes and actions and the divergent historical memories of nations and tribes is captured by Anh Nga Longva, "Citizenship in the Gulf States: Conceptualization and Practice," in *Citizenship and the State in the Middle East*, eds. Nils A. Butenschön, Uri Davis, and M. Hassassian (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), pp. 179–200.

53. Phoebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Boulder: Westview, 1985).

54. Brumberg, "The Trap"; also Haya al-Mughni and Mary Ann Tétreault, "Gender, Citizenship, and Nationalism in Kuwait," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 22, nos. 1–2 (1995): 64–80.

55. Schmitter, "Twenty-Five Years." See also Diamond, "Hybrid Regimes"; and Levitsky and Way, "Autocracy by Democratic Rules."

56. See the first edition of Alan Richards and John Waterbury, *A Political Economy of the Middle East* (Boulder: Westview, 1990).

57. Bromley, *Rethinking Middle East Politics*; John Waterbury, "Democracy Without Democrats? The Potential for Political Liberalization in the Middle East," in *Democracy Without Democrats? The Renewal of Politics in the Muslim World*, ed. Ghassan Salamé (London: I. B. Tauris, 1994), pp. 23–47.

58. For more information about these and other examples, see the individual Country Reports for 2009 in US Department of State, "Human Rights Report," March 11, 2010, www.state.gov; and Reporters Without Borders, "Reporters Without Borders Updates Its Press Freedom Index," October 20, 2010, <http://open.salon.com>.

59. Steven Heydemann, "Upgrading Authoritarianism in the Arab World," Analysis Paper no. 13 (Washington, DC: Saban Center, October 2007); Levitsky and Way, "Competitive Authoritarianism."

60. Heydemann, "Upgrading Authoritarianism."

61. Luciani, "Allocation vs. Production States."

62. Karl, "Petroleum and Political Pacts." See also Ross, "Does Oil Hinder Democracy?"

63. Kirin Aziz Chaudhry, *The Price of Wealth: Economies and Institutions in the Middle East* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Shireen T. Hunter, "The Gulf Economic Crisis and Its Social and Political Consequences," *Middle East Journal* 40, no. 4 (1986): 593–613.

64. See also Brumberg, "The Trap."

65. Al-Ghanim, "Republicanism and the Failure of Elite-Pacted Transitions."

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