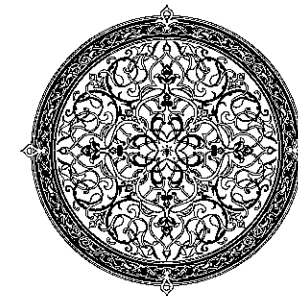


TWELFTH EDITION

The Middle East



Ellen Lust, Editor

Yale University

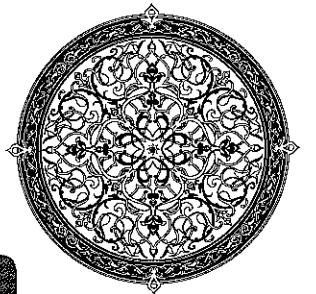


A DIVISION OF SAGE
WASHINGTON, D.C.

SUGGESTED READINGS

- Angrist, Michele Penner. *Party Building in the Modern Middle East*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006.
- Ayubi, Nazih N. M. *Over-Stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East*. New York: I. B. Tauris, 1995.
- Brownlee, Jason. *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Luciani, Giacomo, ed. *The Arab State*. London: Routledge, 1990.
- Lust-Okar, Ellen. *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World: Incumbents, Opponents, and Institutions*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Moustafa, Tamir. *The Struggle for Constitutional Power: Law, Politics and Economic Development in Egypt*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Ottaway, Marina, and Julia Choucair-Vizoso. *Beyond the Facade: Political Reform in the Arab World*. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2009.
- Posusney, Marsha Pripstein, and Michele Penner Angrist. *Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Regimes and Resistance*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2005.
- Salame, Ghassan, ed. *The Foundations of the Arab State*. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Schlumberger, Oliver, ed. *Debating Arab Authoritarianism*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007.

CHAPTER 5

Actors, Public Opinion,
and ParticipationAmaney Jamal¹

THE ARAB WORLD HAS REMAINED durably authoritarian, yet also quite vibrant in its various forms of political participation. Political participation is a multifaceted concept, and its nuances and dynamism are also shaped by local contextual realities specific to the Arab world. Although the expressive modes of participation may differ according to particular structural and contextual issues, people continue to engage in the political process for a variety of reasons that are part of universal dogma.

It is common in the Arab world for citizens to talk about the importance of participation for improving one's political and economic situation, giving back to society, elevating standards of living, and working towards a better human rights and democratic record. Improving the lot of citizens is thus a primary motivation behind everyday formal and informal participation in political life. Other motivations for participation may be less about institutional or structural change and more about influencing change at the individual level. Securing employment and achieving better pay or resources are often considered political acts—especially in this region, where parliamentarians are more likely to be effective as service providers instead of as political representatives. Political activity thus takes on a more immediate and economic dimension.

This chapter examines citizen motivation for participation and the pathways through which they do so. These spheres are sometimes formal avenues, such as political parties, elections, and civil society organizations; sometimes they are not. The chapter begins with a discussion of citizens' attitudes and interests. It then examines their participation in formal and informal venues, assessing the limitations of formal and civil society activity in the context of greater democracy. The chapter then turns to how new political, economic, and technological realities have realigned patterns of political engagement across the region. Most of the empirical evidence for this chapter comes from cases in the Arab world. However, please note that Arab cases are also incorporated in the chapter. Different patterns and modalities of political participation in Iran, Israel, and Turkey are also examined.

Citizen Attitudes in the Arab World

A variety of political attitudes structure Arab patterns of political participation. Arab citizens remain concerned about their daily economic situation and other regional problems. They show distress, indeed even resentment, about the role of external forces in their countries. They happen to be strong supporters of democracy while simultaneously supporting Islamism. Indeed, Arab citizens not only showcase sophisticated understandings of democracy, they also demonstrate healthy levels of political engagement.

Economic Problems and Emigration

The Arab Barometer asked citizens to choose the most important problem facing their country today. The survey offered the following response categories: (a) economic situation, (b) corruption, (c) authoritarianism, (d) ending the U.S. occupation of Iraq, and (e) the Arab-Israeli conflict. Across the Arab world, with the exception of Kuwait, the number one problem cited among Arab citizens was the economic situation, which included poverty, unemployment, and inflation; 54 percent of citizens gave this response. The second most important problem was the level of corruption, with 27 percent indicating its severity.

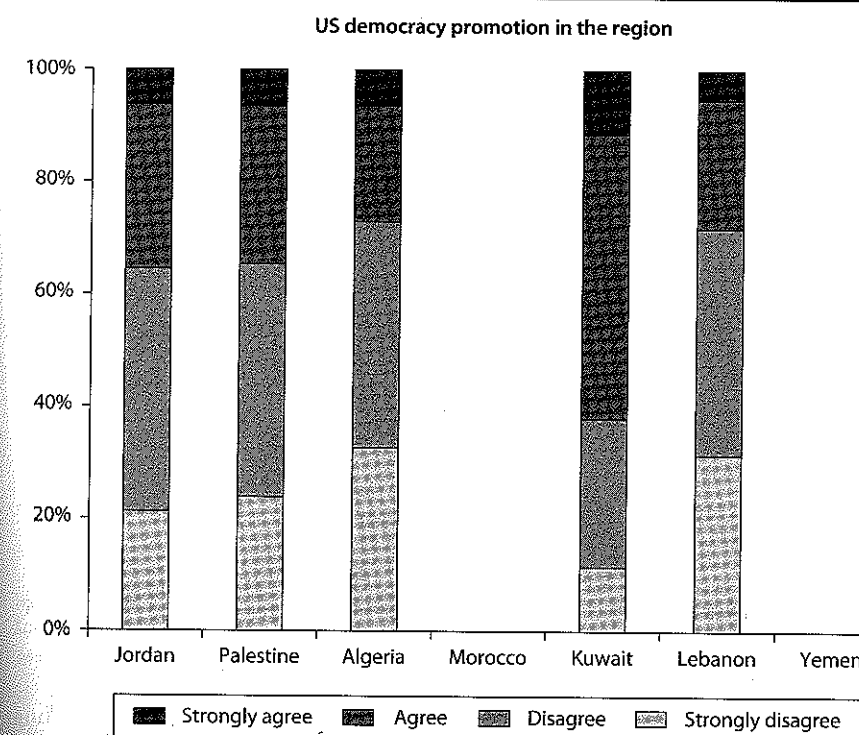
Women more than men were likely to cite the economic situation as a problem. Those unemployed and those more educated also indicated that the economic situation was a serious problem in their countries. Age did not appear to be a factor underwriting this perspective. All generations similarly agree that the economic situation is in need of reform.

The dire economic situation could be a reason why considerable percentages of citizens indicate that they would like to emigrate: 35 percent of Arab citizens indicated that they would like to emigrate, and 50 percent of this group cited economic reasons for their decision. Lebanese, Moroccans, and Algerians showed the highest levels of a desire to emigrate, with close to 45 percent in each country indicating this wish. The youth population was more likely than the older cohorts to indicate this preference. Additionally, men more than women would like to emigrate, as did those most educated (holders of professional degrees). This tendency certainly will contribute to the Arab brain drain. Already 25 percent of all Arab holders of doctoral degrees work outside the Arab world. This is largely because professional opportunities and professional norms are stronger in Western countries.

Democracy. A cursory glance at citizen viewpoints toward the United States finds that citizens are skeptical of U.S. efforts to promote democracy in the region (Figure 5.1). The United States is obviously not seen as an honest broker, and its involvement raises questions about its levels of sincerity toward the democratization project. Hence, majorities in the countries for which we have data disagree with the statement that U.S. democracy programs have been successful in the region. The exception is Kuwait,

FIGURE 5.1

CITIZEN ATTITUDES ABOUT U.S. DEMOCRACY PROMOTION IN SELECTED ARAB COUNTRIES



Source: Arab Barometer Project, 2006. Mark Tessler and Amaney Jamal, principal investigators. www.arabbarometer.org.

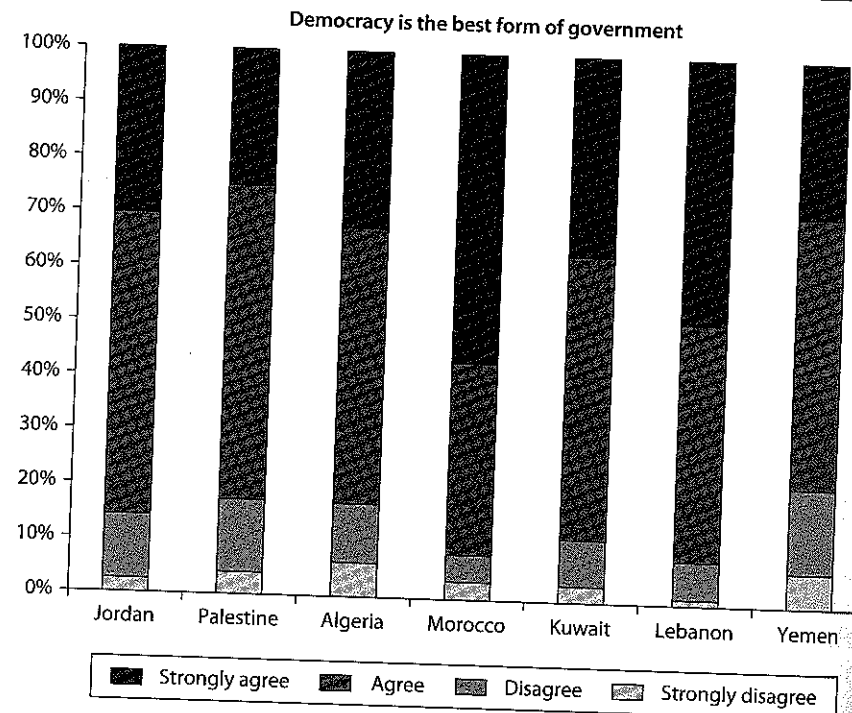
which has good ties with the United States more generally, especially after the Gulf crisis of 1990–1991.

Although citizens tend to view the United States with skepticism and tend to favor Islamism, they also seem to believe that democracy is the best form of government (Figure 5.2). Citizens across the region, by majorities above 75 percent, believe that democracy is the best form of government.

Some people might be struck by the overwhelming support for democracy in a region that has little democracy, but additional data substantiate that Arab citizens show a healthy understanding of the concept of democracy. When asked whether they thought Saudi Arabia or the United States was democratic, the results were compelling. Despite negative opinions of the United States, the vast majority (74 percent) of Arab citizens stated their belief that it was a complete or somewhat complete democracy. Only 34 percent said the same thing about Saudi Arabia, with the majority believing that Saudi Arabia was indeed not a democracy (Figure 5.3). These

FIGURE 5.2

CITIZEN ATTITUDES IN SELECTED ARAB COUNTRIES ABOUT WHETHER DEMOCRACY IS THE BEST FORM OF GOVERNMENT



Source: Arab Barometer Project, 2006. Mark Tessler and Amaney Jamal, principal investigators. www.arabbarometer.org.

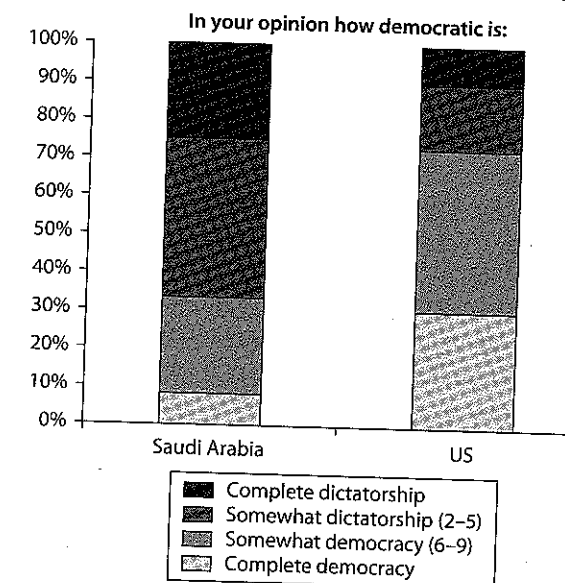
findings illustrate that Arab citizens understand what elements of a political order can be considered democratic, that their understanding of democracy is on target, and that, if anything, they also understand that they don't enjoy the rights and liberties that citizens in other places of the world enjoy.

For foreign policy actors, the prevailing concern is whether forces of Islamism can be reconciled with democratic values. Yet, in the Arab world it appears that neither Arab intellectuals nor ordinary citizens accept the view that Islam and democracy are incompatible. Rather, from mosque sermons to newspaper columns, from campus debates to coffee-shop discussions, large numbers of Arabs and other Muslims contend that the tenets of Islam are inherently democratic.

Religion. Many believe that the religious orientations and attachments of Muslim citizens create a normative climate that is hostile to democracy. The Arab Barometer data allow an examination of these concerns about the relationship between democracy

FIGURE 5.3

ARABS' UNDERSTANDING OF DEMOCRACY IN THE UNITED STATES AND SAUDI ARABIA



Source: Arab Barometer Project, 2006. Mark Tessler and Amaney Jamal, principal investigators. www.arabbarometer.org.

and Islam. To the extent that religious orientations and attachments do discourage democracy, support for democracy should be lower among more religious men and women. This, however, is not the case. In fact, Muslims who are more religious are as likely as Muslims who are less religious to believe that democracy, despite its drawbacks, is the best political system.

The Arab Barometer has identified the frequency of Quran reading as a valid and reliable measure of religiosity, and respondents are categorized according to whether they read the Quran every day, several times a week, sometimes, rarely, or never. It is striking that at least 85 percent of the respondents in each category state that democracy is the best political system. Thus, because public support for democracy is necessary for a successful and consolidated democratic transition and because available evidence indicates that religiosity does not diminish this support for democracy among Muslim publics, it seems clear that the persistence of authoritarianism in the Arab world cannot be explained by the religious orientations and attachments of ordinary men and women.

Existing scholarly studies have also found that support for Islamism and support for democracy can indeed be compatible. Garcia-Rivero and Kotzé argue that support for Islamic political parties is not driven by a dislike or rejection of democratic forms of government but, instead, by a rejection of the domineering state in these

countries. In fact, in some countries, they find that support for democracy is directly linked to support for Islamism.² Jamal and Tessler also find that many Arab citizens express support for a role for Islam in government and politics.³

This is not the view of all citizens, however. In contrast with support for democracy, which is expressed by the overwhelming majority of the respondents in the Arab Barometer and other recent surveys, men and women in every country where surveys have been conducted are divided on the question of whether Islam should play an important political role. Further, among respondents who believe democracy to be the best political system despite any possible drawbacks, 54 percent believe that men of religion should have influence over government decisions while 46 percent disagree. Hence, support for a role of religious individuals in government, which in many ways taps into a dimension of political Islam, is quite strong.

In general Arab citizens are quite politically engaged. The majority report that they follow the news about politics and government in their respective countries, and 57 percent of Arabs report following news in their own societies. Palestinians exhibit the highest levels of political interest, with 79 percent saying that they follow the news very often or often. Algerians are the least likely to say they follow politics, with 45 percent reporting that they follow politics often or very often. Political interest is structured by other pertinent variables as well; those who are more educated, for instance, are also more likely to follow the news.

Formal Avenues of Political Participation

Multiparty competition has gradually increased in the region since the 1990s. Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, Jordan, Yemen, Kuwait, Lebanon, and Palestine have witnessed an increase in parliamentary elections. Bahrain introduced elections in 2002, and Saudi Arabia held its first municipal elections in 2005. In response to the increase in elections and citizens' growing access to information and media in the region, the number of voters—both men and women—actively participating in the electoral process is also increasing. Multiparty systems have certainly created the pathways for greater participation in political parties, elections, and rallies.

Political Parties and Elections

Political parties are one of the most obvious outlets for direct political engagement. Through political parties, people can articulate their interests, mobilize their votes, and allocate their support to certain policy positions and interest groups. Political parties also play an important, albeit somewhat limited, role in Arab political society. Some existing political parties predate the independence era and have survived Arab authoritarianism. Many others did not survive and were either liquidated or co-opted by existing regimes.

During the populist era (1960s and 1970s), regimes encouraged only proregime parties, generally government parties such as the Baathist Party in Syria and Iraq

the National Liberation Front (FLN) in Algeria, and the Neo-Destour in Tunisia. By the late 1980s, in the face of economic crisis and structural adjustment pressures, many regimes allowed for additional political opening and liberalization. This led to the entry of new political parties.⁴ Since the 1990s, the number of political parties in the region has mushroomed. Ali Abootalebi argues that regimes allowed a growing number of political parties to participate in Arab societies in part because it was in the strategic interest of regimes to counter the dominating influence of Islamist movements in the civic and oppositional landscape.⁵

Why Are Political Parties Weak in the Arab World? In the Arab world political parties remain weak. They are often unable to formulate wide and encompassing issue-oriented policies or outlooks. Many Arab political parties remain personalistic, tribal, kin-based, and narrow, lending themselves to a model of clientelistic distribution rather than constituency interest aggregation.

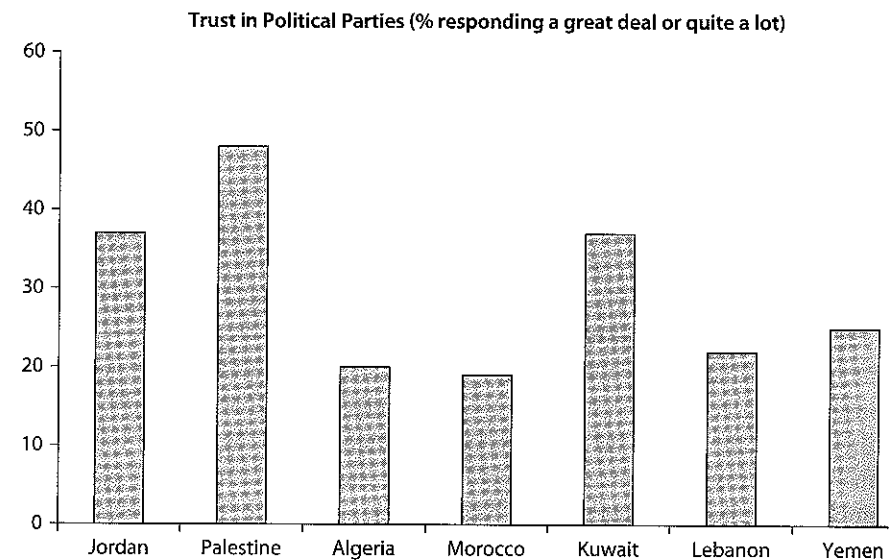
Political parties in the Arab world have not developed into organizations that espouse issue-based platforms for several possible reasons. First, because of weak legislatures, political parties have been unable to influence meaningful policy changes. Because they cannot influence meaningful policy changes, incentives for parties to develop wide policy-oriented perspectives are lacking. Second, because parties are incapable of influencing policy, they remain key sources of patronage and connections to government services (such mediation of services vis-à-vis the government is known as *wasta*). If political parties cannot deliver on policies because they cannot influence parliaments, they tend to retain constituent loyalty at election time through the distribution of clientelistic perquisites and benefits. Political parties thus tend to have a pro-regime bias because, more often than not, they are rewarded for catering to the regime, and it is these benefits that keep party constituents happy.

Another factor that disadvantages political parties is that trust in parties in general remains quite low (Figure 5.4). According to Arab Barometer project data for seven Arab countries—Algeria, Jordan, Palestine, Morocco, Kuwait, Lebanon, and Yemen—political parties in these countries do not achieve more than 50 percent support from citizens. The country that received the highest levels of political trust in its political parties is Palestine, with close to 48 percent of the population reporting that they have a great deal or quite a lot of trust in political parties. Jordan and Kuwait came in second. Algeria, Morocco, Lebanon, and Yemen all receive ratings of 25 percent or below.

Such lukewarm support of and trust in political parties in the region can be attributed to the ineffectual roles political parties play in parliaments, a result of low parliamentary autonomy and efficacy. Parliaments remain weak because they are not authorized to design, pass, and implement policies without the heavy-handed role of the regime. As such, political parties have become vehicles of clientelistic redistribution, agents that promote personalistic ties and relations, and bodies that for the most part have been unable to articulate all-encompassing policy platforms.

FIGURE 5.4

TRUST IN POLITICAL PARTIES IN SELECTED COUNTRIES IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA REGION



Source: Arab Barometer Project, 2006. Mark Tessler and Amaney Jamal, principal investigators. www.arabbarometer.org.

Party identification and policy issues matter less in the voting behavior of Jordanian voters than the possibility of receiving *wasta*. Access to state resources thus becomes the primary motivation for participation in elections. Citizens do not necessarily possess democratic aspirations or policy preferences when they vote; instead, they hope to leverage more benefits from existing regimes. Finally, oppositional political parties are less tolerated and their activities are hindered. Opposition parties have very few channels through which to launch complaints of electoral harassment or wrongdoing. Once they gain access to parliament, their ability to influence policy remains limited owing to executive oversight of the legislative body.

What Do Regimes Gain from Permitting Political Parties? If Arab regimes want to keep political parties weak and ineffectual, why do they continue to push the electoral agenda? The nature of electoral politics in the Arab world has led many to believe that such elections help authoritarian rulers to solidify their bases of support. In the context of the Arab world, elections are a way to manage the political elites by bringing them into the political process, thus keeping the elites accountable to the existing regime.⁶ Authoritarian leaders often manipulate elections so that the electoral process results in outcomes that give domestic credibility and legitimacy to leaders in power. By uniting potential supporters and would-be opponents in an election context, Arab regimes are able to remain durable and stable across time.⁷

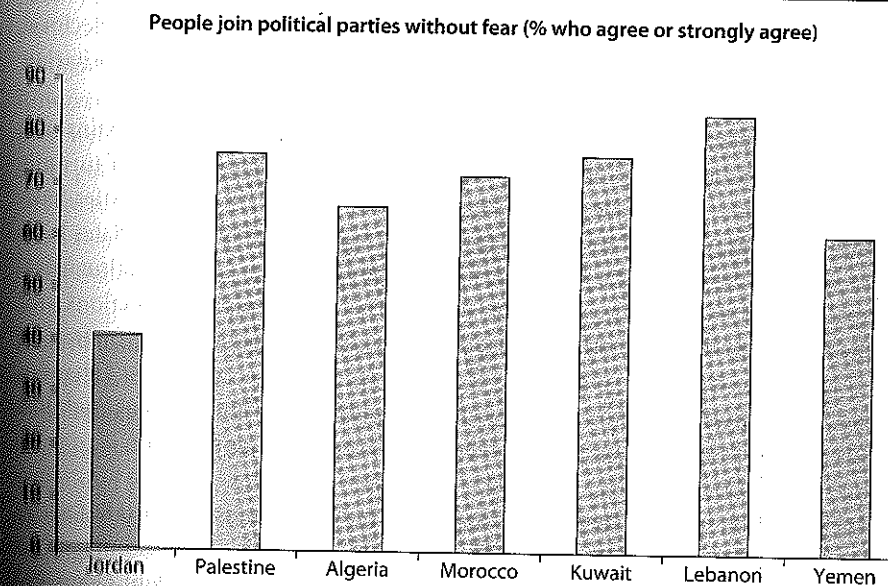
One might suspect that the low levels of trust in political parties are driven by a culture of fear that permeates political life in the Arab world more generally.⁸ Yet, public opinion data from the Arab Barometer do not support this supposition. In fact, the vast majority of citizens across the region believe that citizens can join political parties without fear. In only one country—Jordan—did the majority of citizens feel they could not join political parties without fear (Figure 5.5).

What Do Citizens Gain from Parties and Elections? If parties remain ineffectual, then why do citizens continue to participate in the electoral process in such impressive numbers? Citizens turn out for multifaceted reasons; in the context of the Arab world, several factors appear to matter. According to Marsha Pripstein-Posusney, “Even carefully controlled multi-party elections can provide a limited forum for public debate about society’s future and limited opportunities for mobilization and freedom of expression, and an opposition presence in parliament provides a platform for regime critics to promote their views.”⁹

In a study that systematically examines citizens’ reasons for participating in elections, Ellen Lust-Okar finds that in Jordan citizens are more likely to participate electorally if they feel they can derive *wasta*, or benefits, from candidates. Party identification and policy issues matter less in the voting behavior of Jordanian voters than

FIGURE 5.5

FEELING OF SAFETY IN POLITICAL PARTY MEMBERSHIP IN SELECTED COUNTRIES IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA REGION



Source: Arab Barometer Project, 2006. Mark Tessler and Amaney Jamal, principal investigators. www.arabbarometer.org.

the possibility of receiving *wasta*. Access to state resources thus becomes the primary motivation for participation in elections. Lust-Okar notes, "The distribution of state resources trumps by far any role of elections as arenas for contest over the executive or critical policies."¹⁰ Thus citizens do not necessarily possess democratic aspirations or policy preferences when they vote; instead, they hope to leverage more benefits from existing regimes. This is a finding that also holds in Egypt. Nihad Gohar argues that "Egyptians are much more likely to appeal to members of parliament or government ministers. Members of the elite, particularly prominent business elites, do not hesitate to use the channels of direct contact with decision makers, whether individually or collectively through their respective organizations, to serve their interests. Indeed, the functions that Egyptian parliamentarians perform reflect an unwritten social agreement. Many describe the Egyptian parliament as the 'service parliament.'"¹¹

Several other reasons have been advanced to explain why citizens participate actively in the electoral process. First, citizens who care about tribal loyalties are more likely to turn out and vote according to the tribe's preference. A second reason holds that citizens who have greater levels of political confidence in existing regimes will be more likely to participate in electoral behavior. This supposition emerges through two mechanisms. First, proregime segments of society feel secure enough to participate; and, second, because elections favor proregime actors and policies, it only makes sense that those who support the regime will continue to engage the electoral process.¹²

Elections: Who Votes and Why? Additional Explanations

Given the overall environment of electoral politics in the Arab world, it is important to understand who participates and why. Several hypotheses explaining electoral behavior are derived from both democratic Western experiences and authoritarian experiences.

Arab citizens participate in a plethora of activities. In fact, voting remains one of the most common forms of political participation. The highest levels of turnout across the region were in Palestine during the 2006 election. Although parties have little influence in parliament, electoral campaigns are lively affairs. Candidates hold rallies, deliver speeches, distribute goods, post flyers, and visit local constituencies. Campaign tents are cast across various street corners for campaign functions and for the distribution of mementos and souvenirs. Citizens, too, take great interest in campaigns. One-quarter to one-third of the citizens in Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, and Yemen have attended a campaign event. Citizens mobilize friends and family to turn out. Thus, Arab elections remain serious affairs.

Level of Education. In Western democratic settings one of the most important factors in electoral participation is education. Those with higher levels of education tend to turn out to vote. In the Arab world, although education is an important factor for following the news, it is not a significant factor when it comes to voting. Those who are more highly educated are no more likely to vote than those without an education.

This implies that the electoral arena is not structured by higher levels of information or perhaps a commitment to political engagement, factors often linked to higher education. Voting may be just as pertinent to individuals who are not as engaged. This lends credence to the argument that elections are important to people who are not as engaged in the political process and may in fact be seeking benefits and services.

Level of Community Activity. In the Arab world those citizens who are more likely to be involved in civil society activity are more likely to participate in electoral behavior. Thus, activity and commitment to civic involvement are directly linked to electoral behavior.

Citizens who have more confidence in existing political institutions are more likely to vote. This supports existing research, which indicates that those citizens who are disillusioned with existing regimes are less likely to participate. *Wasta* also matters for other types of political behavior, such as protest behavior and petition signing, which indicates that people might be more likely to participate in these activities if there are direct benefits linked to such political behavior. And although individual considerations remain a driving impetus, one must not forget that the overall authoritarian political environment does not lend itself to policy influence and shifts. This reality can make individuals accept the fact that they are looking after their own interests if they cannot have a larger transformative impact on the political institutional order.

Gender. Interest in politics is also gendered. Men more often than women report that they are likely to follow politics in several Arab states. This carries over to the formal political sphere as well. Men are more likely to report that they resort to *wastas* than women by a margin of almost 10 percent. The electoral gap between men and women, however, is less pronounced. In the last set of elections in the Arab world prior to 2006, men were more likely to turn out—but only by a 4 percentage point difference. That is, 48 percent of men reported voting compared to 44 percent of women.

Across all countries, however, men are more likely to participate in demonstrations than women. This pattern is also duplicated for petition signing. That is, men more than women are more likely to engage in protest behavior.

Tribal Affiliation. Another segment of Arab societies that is often privileged by existing electoral institutions comprises those citizens who live in tribal or rural areas. Most monarchical leaders derive the base of their support from tribal segments and rural inhabitants. The Jordanian Hashemite monarchy, for example, derives a significant amount of support from the Jordanian tribes that are located in smaller towns outside of urban Amman. To continue to keep electoral support for the monarchy strong among these segments, the regime has through institutional manipulation allowed for more electoral representation (via the number of seats per district) in these rural and tribal strongholds. This pattern is also found in Morocco and other one-party states where regimes have strong support in various locales.¹³

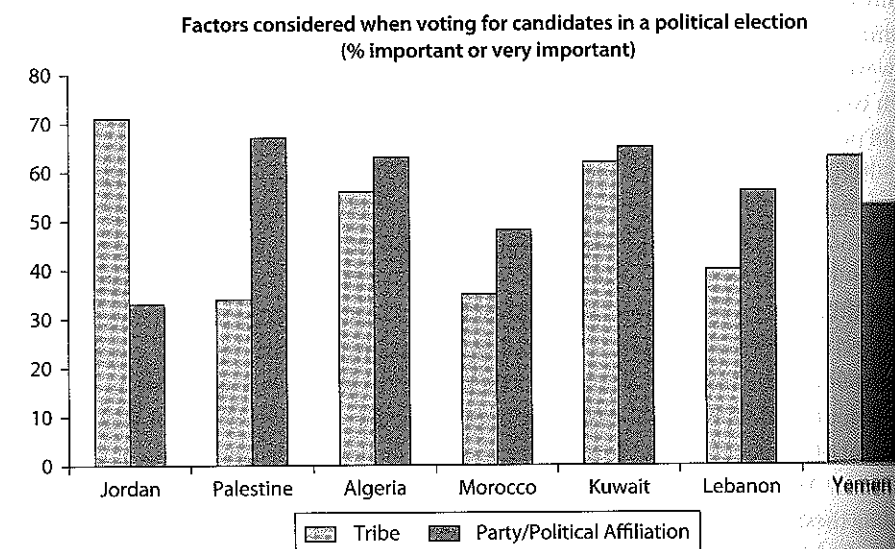
One of the major suppositions that emerges from studies of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is that tribal loyalties still dominate the electoral terrain, and in fact, there appears to be support for this perspective. Certain majorities clearly cite tribal allegiances as a reason for the way they allocate their votes (Figure 5.6). Jordanians and Yemenis prize the importance of tribal ties more than linkages to political parties when allocating their votes. And Kuwaitis and Algerians rank the importance of tribal loyalties quite high. Some might argue that tribal loyalties remain a major impediment to developing a political party system based on political interests rather than kinship ties, but it is also legitimate to argue that as long as political parties cannot deliver on political platforms—because of ineffective legislatures—tribal ties will remain dominant in many electoral systems, especially since tribal networks serve as a key pathway to redistributive services.

Participation in Opposition Movements: The Rise of Islamists and the Dissolution of Arab Secular Parties

One recent, compelling phenomenon has emerged in the Arab world: secular political parties are on the decline. The major opposition movements and parties across the region today are Islamist parties and actors. Support for Islamism in the Arab world

FIGURE 5.6

FACTORS CONSIDERED BY VOTERS IN SELECTED ARAB COUNTRIES WHEN VOTING FOR CANDIDATES



Source: Arab Barometer Project, 2006. Mark Tessler and Amaney Jamal, principal investigators, www.arabbarometer.org.

is believed to be anywhere between 25 and 50 percent among Arab publics.¹⁴ Secular opposition parties seem to have lost the sway and influence they possessed in the 1960s and 1970s. Several factors explain this pattern of oppositional relations.

First, in the post-cold war order, the fall of communism resulted in a direct hit to left-leaning groups that located their doctrines in communism, socialism, and pan-Arabism. Second, as leftist opposition parties shrank, many of their former leaders moved into nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the civil society sector.¹⁵ These former oppositional elites became the backbone of opposition politics through NGO activity. Following the fall of the Soviet Union, the liberalization patterns in the Arab world witnessed a decrease in restrictions on civil society activity that resulted in an increase in groups working for human rights, women's rights, and democracy. These NGOs are often funded from abroad; therefore, they most often lack strong constituencies to support them at home even though they have foreign support. Further, the reputations of some of these groups suffer because they have links to Western partners abroad. Skepticism toward such efforts is heightened during times of political crisis when the United States is heavily involved in the region, as during the war in Iraq.

Third, the popularity of Islamism makes it difficult for secular movements to find their audience. Islamism is attractive because it is an all-encompassing doctrine that advocates justice, the reduction of socio-economic disparities, meritocracy, and anti-corruption. Thus, Islamists have been able to monopolize opposition discourse to the extent that only secular ideologues find secular messages appealing. Fourth, secular parties have historically been elitist and not very inclusionary in their own organizational structure. Amr Hamzawy and Martina Ottaway: "The weakness of organizations and outreach activities by secular parties has allowed constituencies that were once secular, such as industrial workers in Egypt or urban intellectuals in Morocco, to drift toward Islamist movements or to seek the protection of government." They also add, "Secular parties are more inclined to take constituencies for granted and engage instead in intellectual discussions."¹⁶ These factors, coupled with Islamist popularity, make it difficult for secular parties to compete for followers.

This becomes a serious issue when one considers the viable avenues to political participation. Most secular activity today is located within civil society, while electoral politics has largely become a domain for Islamist and proregime sectors. In fact, when secular parties do enter the electoral fray, they find themselves aligned with regimes as a means of counterbalancing the influence of Islamists.¹⁷

Islamist opposition movements remain the most active and influential opposition movements across the region. Scholars and policymakers have spent considerable time examining the sources that structure support for Islamic political parties. Worries abound among members of the policy establishment about what the rise of Islamism means for diplomatic relations with the West and the future of democracy in the region; however, not all forms of Islamism should be linked with authoritarian, illiberal policies.

Islamism today is a multifaceted ideology. Some interpretations of Islamic law are rigid and allow for few civil and political rights; other interpretations are more expansive and allow for a multitude of rights and perspectives to be represented within an Islamic framework. Islamist supporters often conflate Islamism with democracy.

Muslim Brotherhood

Since the inception of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) by Hasan al-Banna in 1928, Islamist movements have directly challenged Western dominance in the Arab world.¹⁸ At their core, Islamist movements aimed to restore dignity to the Arab world after what they saw as the embarrassing trampling of it by the West. Very much invested in the discourse of self-determination, they also championed the Palestinian cause. Not only was Israel an unacceptable presence in the region, they maintained, but its existence should be a constant source of shame for Muslims everywhere.

Growth of the Muslim Brotherhood. The MB saw itself as the indigenous and authentic response to the social, economic, and political ills plaguing Arab society. Its desire to control the destiny of the Arab world found popular support across the region. The MB was appalled by the Western discourse that treated the Arab world as inferior, uncivilized, and deserving of Western forms of control. By embracing Islam, the Arab world could not only reduce the influence of the West but further develop and prosper in ways hindered by the Western presence. "Their goal," wrote Yvonne Haddad, "was to initiate involvement in the unfolding history of the world, taking control of the lives of their constituency and participating in shaping the future."¹⁹

The MB has been characterized as "the world's oldest, largest, and most influential Islamist organization."²⁰ Founded in 1928 in Egypt, the MB was a different type of reforming organization, with a focus on Islamic ideology and activism based in large part on grassroots mobilization.²¹ Early on, the state took issue with the activities of the organization; in 1948, during the time of Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt, the organization was dissolved after an MB member, Abdul Munim Abdul Rauf, attempted to assassinate Nasser.²² The problems posed to the state did not stop with the dissolution, however; when Egyptian prime minister Mahmud Fahmi Nokrashi ordered the dissolution of the organization, Nokrashi was assassinated by members in retaliation.

The relationship of the MB and the Egyptian state has been tenuous, as indicated by state-led crackdowns on the group. Although relegalized for a short period of time following its dissolution, the MB was again banned in 1954. In 1964 Nasser granted amnesty to members of the MB (to potentially help diminish the support for the Arab socialist party), but further assassination attempts on Nasser prompted the state to make mass arrests of MB members, and many top leaders of the MB were killed at the order of the state. The organization has been officially banned since 1954 and has been operating as an illegal organization; still, it has been tolerated to varying degrees throughout its history in Egypt. For example, although many members

were tortured and killed under Nasser, when Anwar al-Sadat came to power following Nasser's death, he released all MB prisoners.

The MB's commitment to Islam, provision of social services, and renunciation of violence over the past few decades have led to increased support for it within the general population. This tactical shift has been demonstrated by the participation of the MB in elections, first in 1984, and the rhetoric of members largely denouncing violence.²³ Evidence of the Egyptian population's support for the organization was made clear in the November 2005 legislative elections.

Electoral Politics and the Muslim Brotherhood. The MB first participated in Egyptian elections in 1984. Forming an alliance with the Wafd Party, members of the organization were able to campaign for seats in the Egyptian parliament, ultimately earning 59 out of 454 possible seats for the MB-Wafd alliance; however, the Egyptian Supreme Court determined that the elections were unconstitutional because independent candidates should not have been allowed to participate. New parliamentary elections were held again in 1987; the MB again partnered with political parties, this time the Labour Party and the Liberal Party, resulting in sixty seats for the alliance (thirty-seven of which were given to the MB). The results of these elections were an indication of the popularity of the MB among the general population. By the 1990s, as Harnisch and Mecham state, "the Muslim Brotherhood publicly asserted a belief in the civic and religious value of democracy and demanded its full implementation into the Egyptian political system. These public statements had the effect of signaling to both their constituency and to the regime that the Brotherhood would prefer to engage the regime through the electoral process rather than through violence or illegal protest."²⁴ In other words, by participating in legitimate elections, the MB was attempting to move away from the perception that it was a violent organization and instead compete with the state electorally.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the MB began to issue statements demonstrating some degree of commitment to democracy and democratic practices. The MB did boycott the 1990 parliamentary elections, citing protest over a law passed by the National Democratic Party (NDP) that only individuals (not parties) could participate in elections. Seemingly because of the widespread popularity that the MB enjoys at the polls, the Egyptian state severely represses the activity of the organization as elections draw closer. In 1995, for example, thousands of Islamists were arrested by the state, including fifty-one MB members planning on running for parliament; as a result of these arrests, the NDP ended up winning 93.6 percent of the seats in the Egyptian parliament.²⁵ Again, in 2000 and 2005 members of the MB were arrested prior to elections. In 2000, however, MB members still managed to win seventeen parliamentary seats.

In the November 2005 legislative elections in Egypt, the MB (despite still officially being a banned organization) won 20 percent of the assembly or eighty-eight seats, an especially significant percentage considering the state-initiated election fraud and voter intimidation. The results of these elections demonstrate the "credible opposition force" of the organization.²⁶ In the aftermath of the elections, the regime

arrested key MB members, crippled its financing, and changed the constitution to curb the MB's influence.²⁷ In 2007 Egypt amended its constitution, skewing future representation in favor of registered parties and against independents, the only candidates the outlawed MB can field. When local council elections, initially due for 2006, were finally held in 2009, the state disqualified most MB candidates.²⁸

The Egyptian state "continues to regard the movement as a significant threat to the continuation of its control in the public sphere."²⁹ As such, the MB remains banned as a political organization. While the NDP still wins the municipal elections, polls have become increasingly competitive.³⁰ Furthermore, despite electoral victories (or perhaps because of them), the Egyptian government continues to repress members of the organization to "prevent the Brotherhood from gaining further political traction."³¹ In the aftermath of the 2005 elections, for example, the Egyptian government postponed elections for two years; in 2008, when elections were planned, the Egyptian state arrested numerous MB members, claiming the arrests were due to "belonging to a banned organization."³² In addition, in 2007 a constitutional referendum made unconstitutional "any political activity based on religion" that "ensured that Brotherhood supporters could be easily arrested and tried under terrorism statutes . . . [reducing] judicial oversight of the electoral process."³³ The arrests do not seem to have been consistent. As of April 2010, the MB Web site cites examples of the Egyptian state arresting and then releasing MB members.³⁴ Despite the fact that the MB has become the main opposition party in Egypt, there is debate over whether the organization should continue to engage in the electoral process.³⁵

A general overview of the relationship between the MB and the Egyptian state has been outlined here. The MB exists elsewhere as well, and further analysis in other environments may yield interesting information. The MB has branches in Bahrain, Syria, Israel, Jordan, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Algeria, Sudan, Somalia, Tunisia, Libya, and the United States.

Islamism vis-à-vis the West

Islamist movements have little faith or trust in the West, especially the United States. They point to a history of British colonialism, which culminated in the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement that divided the region into numerous states without regard for elite and citizen opinions. That the post-World War I Western powers sanctioned these divisions is considered another layer of Western disregard for Muslim heritage and society. Criticism of U.S. support for the Israeli state, a centerpiece in Islamist platforms, also garners support from nationalist supporters. Further, U.S. support for oppressive and authoritarian regimes, coupled with the U.S. occupation of Iraq, has bolstered the credibility and legitimacy of Islamist movements across the region.

U.S. Influence. With the end of the cold war, the United States emerged as the most influential player in the Arab world. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Gulf

crisis, and the economic challenges facing the region, pan-Arab nationalism as well as socialism and Nasserism have lost their appeal. Now the most influential discourse in the Arab world is the Islamist discourse. Coupled with the consolidation of Islamism, however, is the notion that democracy and liberal market reforms are the ways to move the Arab world forward on its developmental trajectory. Indeed, an examination of the United Nations Human Development Reports yields a stark reminder of the triumphalism linked to both democracy and liberal capitalism. These reports uncritically adopt these paradigms as the root of political and economic development in the region.

The victory of Western democracy and economic liberalism poses a unique challenge in the context of the Arab world, where Islamism reigns among the populace. Islamism is staunchly opposed to the penetrating influence of the United States, especially if the presence mirrors colonial domination. The challenge for Islamists and the United States is to deal with each other in ways that foster shared interests. However, so long as the region remains politically divided and the United States continues to support authoritarian regimes and their lack of democratic practices, involves itself in regional conflicts, and continues to do little to ensure Palestinian statehood, the United States will continue to be seen by the Islamists, at least, as an opponent and not a strategic ally.

Islamists believe that "Arab nations and peoples have continued to be subservient to foreign domination, which Islamists describe as a continuing predatory relationship."³⁶ Hence, one of the most basic popular Islamist stances in most countries in the Arab world is the skepticism about regime ties to the United States. Islamists continue to reject "perceived U.S. schemes to bring the Muslim world under its cultural hegemony and to empower Israel over the Arabs and Muslims."³⁷ This is the most popular position of Islamist movements.

The continued Israeli occupation and the U.S. incursion into Iraq remain points that galvanize much anger among the Arab masses and play into Islamist mobilization strategies. According to Graham Fuller, because the Arab world is operating in a negative international environment, these factors continue to bolster support for Islamism across the region.³⁸

Courts and Other State Institutions

The vast majority of Arab citizens are also likely to use state institutions such as courts to resolve conflicts with others. This is an important measure of political efficacy as well as faith that government institutions can deliver and protect individual interests.

During a survey conducted by the Arab Barometer project, citizens were asked: "If you were to have a dispute with another citizen, would you try to resolve it in a court or another government institution?" In their responses, 70 percent of citizens in the seven Arab countries surveyed said yes. In fact, 86 percent of Jordanian citizens reported that they would use their state institutions to resolve disputes. At the other

end of the continuum, Algerians stated they were unlikely to resort to governmental channels for dispute resolution. Jordan has invested significant efforts to enhance the efficiency and transparency of public offices, and it appears that such investments have paid off. The civil war in Algeria perhaps explains the lower levels willing to use governmental institutions there to resolve conflicts.

In four of the seven states—Jordan, Palestine, Algeria, and Morocco—women more than men report that they are likely to use state institutions like courts to resolve their problems. This is important for two reasons: First, it indicates that women have gained the necessary levels of efficacy to resort to state institutions. Second, it indicates that women are showing a willingness to resolve disputes outside the traditional patriarchal familial channels, which sometimes may disadvantage their standing in marital and inheritance disputes. In Lebanon and Yemen, there were no notable differences between men and women in their use of state institutions, but in Kuwait men more than women were willing to approach the government.

On average, education does not matter in shaping people's willingness to use state institutions. Those who are less educated are just as likely to report using state institutions as those who are more educated. Similarly, employment patterns do not influence the use of state institutions to resolve conflicts.

Democratization and the Civil Society Debate in the Arab World

Civil society remains important for bottom-up approaches to democracy. In addition to contesting ruling regimes, civil society is useful for enhancing democratization through various direct and indirect mechanisms. Social scientists offer four different kinds of propositions to explain the relationship between associational life and democracy.

The first claim is that civic organizations serve as agents of democratic socialization, and they increase members' support for democratic institutions and generate such values as moderation and tolerance, which are important for deliberation. Larry Diamond posits that members who participate in civic organizations are more likely to learn about the importance of tolerance, pluralism, and respect for the law. They also learn about their potential political roles in society and that they have a right to be represented in their governments.³⁹ In *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville attributes the success of U.S. democracy to the country's rich associational life. Associations serve as "schools for civic virtue," he wrote. Habits of association foster patterns of civility important for successful democracies.⁴⁰

A second claim is that associational life can effectively increase the levels of social capital among members; that is, trust and norms of reciprocity increase in organizations and thus increase the likelihood of cooperative ventures among members of society as a whole. In *Making Democracy Work*, Robert Putnam argues that membership in horizontal voluntary associations enhances social capital (interpersonal trust) necessary for cooperative ventures in society as a whole, which in turn leads

people to "stand up to city hall" or engage in other forms of behavior that provide an incentive for better government performance. Putnam, for instance, finds that political institutions in northern Italy are more accountable and more efficient than political institutions in southern Italy. The success of local governance in northern Italy, he claims, is highly correlated with associational activity that cuts across social cleavages and interests, bolstering the levels of pluralism, tolerance, and especially social trust and reciprocity in northern Italy. Putnam correlates the density of horizontal voluntary associations with strong and effective local government: "strong society; strong state."⁴¹

In democratic societies this theory works well for the reinforcement of democratic rule. In nondemocratic societies, however, it is not clear how social capital can enhance the democratic governance of a regime. As social capital in democratic settings may create opportunities for citizens to collectively seek the help of democratic institutions, so too can the same logic apply in nondemocratic regions where citizens can seek local public officials through any available avenue, whether it is formal, directly through the state, or informal, through clientelistic channels. As associational life in northern Italy promotes civic engagement in ways that are important for the efficiency of northern Italy's local governance, so too can associational life in southern Italy promote civic engagement in ways that sustain the inefficiency of local governance there.⁴²

A third claim is that associations foster democracy by mobilizing ordinary citizens into the political process. In the pluralist tradition of political science, policy results from competition among organized groups in the public arena; thus, associations are critical for representation of a diversity of interests in the public sphere.⁴³

Yet associations in nondemocratic regions can attempt to link citizens to states; however, this depends on the available avenues to do so. If associations directly seek government channels but find government offices apathetic to their concerns, they may develop ideas and attitudes about participation that do not conform to the anticipated generation of attitudes in democratic states. Having been shunned from government offices, these members may distance themselves from seeking government help. If, in contrast, the association has strong connections to government through clientelistic channels, members may learn that to derive benefits, resources, and responses from government they need to seek informal channels to represent their interests. In these cases, associations can very well reinforce clientelistic tendencies. The attitudes and behavior of associational members may exhibit their support for clientelistic forms of participation as well.

A fourth claim is that civic organizations that have substantial memberships can place the necessary constraints on authoritarian governing structures. Civic organizations can serve as key sites for citizen mobilization and expression. Associations can serve as counterweights to centralized governing apparatuses by mobilizing sections of society to oppose authoritarian tendencies.⁴⁴ This concept has been at the

crux of much of the literature on mobilization, opposition-regime relations, social movements, and revolutions.

This formulation accounts for much of the work explaining civil society successes in bringing about democratic outcomes. The ability of civic organizations to serve this role as monitor depends on the context in which the organizations operate. Many states place severe restrictions on the freedom of association for fear of the plausible monitoring role associations can play. In democratic settings, freedom of association guarantees that a variety of interests and views enters mainstream public life.

Associations can play important roles in linking their members to activity that is supportive of broader democratic outcomes and participation. In nondemocratic settings, like many states in the Arab World, the ability of associations to function freely often depends on the program and the association. Where associations might be seen as disrupting the status quo, they can face repercussions that restrict their operation, if they are not disbanded altogether. The fact that associations supportive of the nondemocratic regime in power enjoy rights and privileges that are not guaranteed to associations in the opposition raises the issue as to what type of civic engagement these progovernment associations espouse. Those that are supportive of the current nondemocratic regime may promote values that are not critical of the nondemocratic policies of the regime or they can reinforce clientelistic behavior, both of which are at odds with the findings that associational life can promote democratic citizenship and outcomes.

Civil Society

There is rich history of civil society in the Middle East. Although the Arab region has been marked by authoritarianism, there nevertheless has been a vibrant existence of civil society. In fact, during the colonial period, the middle class and professional sectors galvanized civil society activity as a means of mobilizing toward independence.⁴⁵ These associations were vital in training and producing the national leaders of the Arab world.

Civil society in the Arab world includes a variety of associations: professional associations, charitable societies, business groups, trade unions, private societies, social clubs, sporting clubs, youth centers, medical clinics, and literacy and empowerment centers. These associations comprise both secular and religious organizations, mosques and mosque-based networks of activity. In fact, in many states secular and religious associations compete with each other. In other states, like Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, and Jordan, Islamic organizations have been extremely well organized. They offer effective services and avenues for delivery. They are capable of mobilizing their constituents, catering to their needs, and understanding their frustrations.⁴⁶

In the aftermath of World War II, civil society activity became a direct casualty of Arab populist regimes. Civil society activity, not directly linked to the goals of regime

Sudan, Yemen, Algeria, Mauritania, and Somalia—and in some monarchies like Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, and several Gulf states. These regimes established social contracts with their citizens. According to Saad Eddin Ibrahim, under these new populist regimes “explicit” or “implicit” social contracts were orchestrated between centralized states and their citizens. States attempted to advance socioeconomically, create government jobs, advocate social justice, achieve independence from external influences, and work for the liberation of Palestine in return for citizens’ support of these populist strategies, or at least their acquiescence.⁴⁷

As such, civil society activity was seriously limited and constrained. A plethora of laws and decrees was passed to limit civil society activity, and the dominant political parties co-opted and annexed organizations to consolidate their rule. In the 1960s and 1970s the organizations of modern civil society suffered both from internal state control and international isolation. Yet the populist social contract would come to an end with the 1990 Gulf crisis and the hegemonic influence of the United States in the region. Wars and conquests left several Arab states lacking legitimacy and domestic support. These levels of legitimacy were once vital to keeping the social contract alive.

Within this new environment of reduced legitimacy, civil society has gradually been playing a new role in the Arab states. Several civil society organizations have sprung up in the MENA region. According to Ibrahim, the number of civic associations is estimated to have grown from 20,000 in the mid-1960s to about 70,000 in the late 1980s. One-third of these civic associations were located in Egypt alone. Civil society organizations since the 1990s have begun to play a stronger role in political development and contestation.⁴⁸

As International Monetary Fund structural adjustment policies began to be implemented in the late 1980s, regimes allowed for greater political freedoms. This also enabled greater civil society activity. An important component of this civic boom is that international NGOs have played a more prominent role in the Arab world.⁴⁹ The 1980s and 1990s also witnessed states coming under the pressure of international monetary organizations and donor countries to structurally adjust their economies, resulting in increasing inequalities and growing poverty levels across the region. As the material grievances of citizens increased, so did the urgency of addressing these realities. Thus, charitable civil society organizations began to grow in number as well. In many instances, regimes promoted the growth of civic associations to help with the worsening economic conditions. After the economic reforms of this period, for example, the Moroccan state recognized that resources often used to appease the public were in gradual decline. Allowing the emergence of civic associations, the regime rationalized, would place more of the financial burden of demands on civil society actors. The regime needed a partner to meet the economic woes of the populace—and what better way to do this than to expand the number of state partners (opposition or not) within the civic sphere?⁵⁰

During these economic transformations, one of the major segments of civil society that has suffered has been organized labor (labor associations are discussed

in greater detail later in this section on civil society). While economic liberalization policies favored privatization at the expense of labor and led to higher levels of unemployment, organized labor lost much of the power that it possessed during the years when Arab states could afford to hold on to overexpanded bureaucracies. The leaders of organized labor unions have become less influential in recent years. Although trade unions protested the ways in which economic adjustment affected their members, in the end the forces of economic liberalization won out. Arab labor unions today are quite weak and ineffective and certainly do not possess the legitimacy and polarity they once enjoyed.

Islamists also found this void quite lucrative for their own mobilization strategies and altruistic agendas. Many of the new civic associations that sprung up to address growing inequalities were dominated by Islamist actors and championed by the MB across the MENA region. Hizballah also played a key role in mobilizing the associational terrain to address growing economic disparities across Lebanon.

Charitable societies in the Arab world play a key role in the distribution of *zakat* (alms), educational supplies, basic food items, and clothing. For many women who are still unable to access urban centers for education, civil society associations serve as key sites of empowerment, skills enhancement, literacy, and the opportunity to socialize and integrate in local communities outside the realm of the household. Arguably, these venues remain crucial for the empowerment of women.

Nihad Gohar maintains that in a place like Egypt religious organizations enjoy a particularly high degree of trust. Such trust is useful to religious civil society because civil organizations can tap into resources from local donors as well. This pattern of religious participation is also replicated in many other Arab states. There is a strong commitment to charitable and religious activity across the board (see Table 5.1, below).

The 1980s and 1990s also witnessed the growth of professional civic associations. This was a direct result of the growing levels of education across the region. These associations include lawyers' societies, medical associations, and other professional groupings. In the absence of a free media and fully representative parliaments, the sector of professional associations provided a forum for open political engagement and discussion.⁵¹

An overall examination of civil society activity in the Arab world raises a set of questions important for understanding Arab politics more generally. First, does active participation in civil society lead to efforts to promote forms of participation useful to democratization? Conversely, how might active participation within the confines of authoritarianism further consolidate regime capabilities to monopolize the civic terrain?

Unlike liberal democratic societies, civic associations in the MENA region do not enjoy complete autonomy in the public sphere. Thus, civil society actors are often co-opted by their states, manipulated to perform government functions, and restricted from performing increasingly antiregime activities. Oppositional civil society does exist in the Arab world. Although oppositional civil society does not enjoy complete freedom, civil society has played a major role in launching powerful

attacks against regimes. Today, Arab civil societies enjoy more space and freedoms to effectively criticize regimes.

Post-Cold War Changes in Civil Society in Arab Countries. International organizations also constitute a significant sector of civil society, especially since the 1990s. The new associations that emerged in the post-cold war era almost exclusively focused on democracy promotion, with resources directed at human rights, women's rights, and civil society in ways to induce bottom-up approaches to democratization.⁵²

Although this period has witnessed significant growth in Islamist civil society, it is important to note that during the civil society democratization nexus and boom both European and U.S. grant-making institutions made deliberate attempts to limit the monies sent to religious organizational vehicles. Two interrelated strategies guide these policies. First, donors, especially Europeans, are far more comfortable supporting secular associations that do not have a religious bent. Second, geopolitical considerations remain a driving factor.

Some political Islamic as well as secular movements employ violence and terrorism as a means of accomplishing their political agendas. Their hostile anti-American and anti-Israeli stances alarm foreign donors. Thus, when it comes to donor priorities, secular associations or those that are more friendly toward regimes are seen as "safer" than civil society organizations that are considered to be in the opposition because most of the opposition today is dominated by anti-U.S. groups. By 1990, 34 percent of all civic associations were Islamic, and in some areas Islamic associations reached over 50 percent.⁵³ Islamic associations, unlike many secular associations, were and still are able to escape government co-optation because of their ability to draw on *zakat* and other charitable giving.

James J. Zogby in 2002 conducted a country survey of community life in several Arab states. His team asked respondents whether they were very active, somewhat active, or not active at all in five different types of non-work-related activities comprising cultural activities, charity work, religious practices, politics and current events, and sports. They found the most commonly pursued activities to be religious practice and charity work. Across nine states, politics and sports ranked last. In fact, as shown in Table 5.1, rates for religious participation and charitable activities are impressive.⁵⁴

Examples of Civil Society Activities in the Arab World

Arab states have consistently attempted to minimize the influence of civil society through a variety of techniques that include clientelism, co-optation, alliance building, funding restrictions, and limits on the autonomy of these organizations.

Morocco. The Moroccan government has played a key role in augmenting the number of civil associations to satisfy international pressure for greater liberalization. In the

TABLE 5.1

**Percentage of Population Engaged in Religious
Activities or Charitable Work in Selected Arab Countries**

	<i>Involvement in Religious Activities</i>	<i>Participation in Charitable Work</i>
Lebanon	78	78
Jordan	76	68
Kuwait	83	80
Saudi Arabia	61	65
UAE	97	92
Morocco	88	85
Egypt	81	61

Source: James J. Zogby, *What Arabs Think: Values, Beliefs, and Concerns* (Washington, D.C.: Zogby International, 2002).

early 1980s, most organizations were the creations of persons close to the Moroccan authorities. Although these associations claimed to be apolitical, they actually were supported by the regime and were used as vehicles for personal ambitions.⁵⁵ The Moroccan state realized that the civic sphere was a sector that should not be left for manipulation and penetration by the opposition. To further "clientelize" civil society, it began sponsoring, promoting, and building a proregime civic sector. Many newer regional associations like Ribat al Fath, Fes-Saiss, Bou Regrag, Souss-Casablanca, Angad al Maghreb Acarqui, Hawd Assafi, Doukkal, Ahmed al Hansali, Illigh, AnnahdaNador, and al-Mouhit promote governmental agendas, serve as sites to socialize members into sympathy with regime programs, and function as recruitment venues for proregime loyalists.⁵⁶ Bahgat Korany wrote that the regime "put at their head its faithful representatives and cronies and supplied them with infrastructure and financial support. The state generosity toward some associations led others to sarcastically label them NGGOs (nongovernmental governmental NGOs)."⁵⁷ Moroccans' associational activities were limited to sociocultural activities, sports, arts, and recreation.

Associations of a more oppositional nature are subjected to numerous inquiries, legal harassment, and monetary restrictions. Yet opposition voices continue their attempt to thwart regime penetration. Similar patterns of state-society relations exist in Jordan, Egypt, Palestine, and Algeria.⁵⁸

Jordan. In Jordan, the regime has prevented the operation of civic associations that possess overt political objectives. Under Voluntary Associations Law Number 33, the Jordanian regime has the right to enter the offices of any NGO to review its records. As Sherry Lowrance has pointed out, this law "prohibit[ed] any NGO from trying to achieve 'political goals.'" The law has been used against NGOs that oppose regime policy.⁵⁹ The Jordanian government more recently has preferred to place complicated administrative restrictions on civil society instead of resorting to violence and physical intimidation.⁶⁰

Censorship of organizations' publications, withdrawal of access to other types of media, reorganization of NGOs' governing bodies, and the writing of association constitutions are all common practices for the regime. Other techniques, including arrest, blacklisting, and the closing of the organization, are also feasible options exercised on the most unruly associations.

Despite an extensive program of political liberation that allowed parliamentary elections and the operation of political parties, the monarchy's implementation of a system of administrative and bureaucratic incentives polarizes the civic space within the kingdom. The monarchy requires all social development societies to be members of the General Union of Voluntary Societies (GUVS), an umbrella organization administered by the state, the chief purpose of which is to monitor and bind associational activity to the regime. After members obtain operating permits from the GUVS, the monarchy bestows a small stipend on members and restricts them from receiving outside funding. Thus, these associations find themselves under the control of government. The regime's heavy-handed involvement in civic affairs restricts organizational programs and activities.⁶¹

Jordanian social groups are by law prohibited from political activity; in practice, however, the monarchy allows them to exist if they support the government. Aside from according them legitimacy, the monarchy's approval also grants them access to financial resources and the mostly government-controlled media. The government closely monitors these supposedly neutral associations for any missteps, no matter how minor.

Since the outlawing of political parties in 1956, various professional groups and unions have arisen to fill the void. Union membership includes doctors, engineers, lawyers, dentists, pharmacists, journalists, writers, geologists, and agricultural engineers.⁶² Despite strict laws regulating which activities a social association might participate in, these professional unions were able to become important political entities. During martial law, they continued to hold democratic elections and occasionally attempted to put together broader, nongovernmental councils to address the pressing political issues of the day.⁶³

These moments of social advocacy often proved fatal. The government disbanded the Professional Grouping association, a group formed of labor and professional union representatives in response to the 1967 defeat by Israel, despite the association's attempts to stay in constant contact with the government regarding political issues. Although the king attended the first meeting of the group's founding organization, the National Grouping, he eventually disbanded it when its activity became too disturbing.⁶⁴ As long as the organization conveniently mobilized public outrage in support of the monarchy, the regime permitted it a degree of political activity. The union continued to function after 1971, but it could not engage in any coordinated professional or trade union activity.⁶⁵

Women's social associations faced similar obstacles. In the early 1980s leaders of these associations had their passports confiscated and were consequently unable to gain employment. The Interior Ministry closed the Women's Union in Jordan (WUJ)

in response to its support of Palestinian rights. Although the high court ruled in favor of the union, the WUJ did not have the resources to implement the decision once the union was dissolved. Subsequent to the union's demise, the government formed the General Federation of Jordanian Women (GFJW) to replace WUJ.⁶⁶ Unlike the WUJ, the GFJW—a puppet association for the regime—had no real program.

The government also encouraged the development of charitable societies to address issues surrounding poverty, children, disability, health, and the elderly.⁶⁷ These types of associations, considered suitable for women, are not politically threatening. While the government considered this gendered form of civic participation safe, it resisted when women began to make demands on issues of equal rights, accountability for honor killings, and full economic integration.⁶⁸

This constant government intervention into the associations' business inevitably polarized civic life. Groups that wished to survive and receive invaluable government resources chose to support the monarchy. Small social associations opposed to the regime's actions on any one issue were easily influenced or disbanded. As a result, opposition groups were forced to unite to gain any significant amount of sway over the regime. For organizations like the National Grouping and the General Secretariat of Patriotic and Popular Forces in Jordan (formed after the invasion of Lebanon), the combination of political views under one umbrella organization often caused irresolvable conflicts between members that spelled an early death for the nascent associations.⁶⁹

Egypt. In Egypt there are a surprising number of voluntary associations, NGOs, charities, parties, and syndicates, especially considering their close regulation by the authorities.⁷⁰ This number is remarkable given the regime's use of wide-ranging, catchall decrees that allow it to intervene in the management or financial dimensions of these organizations as well as prohibit or even merge associations at will. In 1996 more than 25,000 civil society organizations existed in Egypt, including cooperative organizations, youth and sporting clubs, professional associations, and fourteen political parties.⁷¹ The durability of Egyptian civil life is perhaps due to the long-standing prominence of social associations in Egypt's political system. For decades, while Britain ruled the country, these associations played key service and welfare roles. Under Nasser's and Sadat's governments, tighter restrictions stifled the efficacy of civic associations.

During the 1980s and 1990s, civil society organizations enjoyed greater freedoms in Egypt and many other Middle Eastern countries.⁷² The government licensed hundreds of new publications and allowed professional syndicates a higher level of involvement in shaping political life as the number of political parties increased and NGOs expanded.⁷³ This was especially true of business and professional groups, which were able to influence the direction of economic reform. After a period of political liberalization, however, the regime increasingly limited opportunities for the dispersal of power beyond the president.⁷⁴

Different associational strains—Islamic, Coptic, advocacy, and research NGOs—dominated the space newly open for social and political activity. Islamic and

Coptic organizations often work through social aid organizations intended to provide basic services like health care and education to their respective communities. Advocacy groups, like human rights and election watch organizations, are usually more explicitly political and more likely to criticize the regime directly.⁷⁵ Autonomous research organizations and think tanks, like the Ibn Khaldoun Center for Development Studies, founded in 1988, also played a key role in the expansion of Egyptian civil society.⁷⁶ The center served predominantly as a research center to educate, raise social awareness, and promote serious discussion of various social issues.

Nonprofit charitable associations and private voluntary organizations come under the stifling authority of the Ministry of Social Affairs. A law enacted after the 1952 revolution to control associational life established state supervision over associations, foundations, and professional groups. These are given access to the "massive resources" of the state but must, in exchange, face the bureaucratic impediments under which state-sponsored institutions operate.⁷⁷ The government does not so strongly interfere with nonprofit limited-liability firms created under the Companies Law of Egypt, but these NGOs must deal with severe budgetary constraints. In addition, nongovernmental periodicals face restrictions. A license is needed to publish, and with it comes the scrutiny and tedium of numerous official oversights.⁷⁸

Individuals and organizations that try not to express explicit allegiance with either side are often labeled regardless of any preference for neutrality. The regime sees most criticism as *de facto* opposition and treats it accordingly. The arrests of Saad Eddin Ibrahim, chairman of the Ibn Khaldoun Center, and his two assistants in June 2000 provide a telling example. Shortly after the arrests, the government shut down the center, alleging that Ibrahim had accepted foreign funds without government permission. It is widely believed that the regime's actions against the Ibn Khaldoun Center were a broader warning to Egyptian civil society groups to refrain from their struggle for human rights and democracy.⁷⁹ In a statement to the state security prosecutors, Ibrahim emphasized that his arrest came in response to the center's research on issues such as election fraud, women's rights, and the mistreatment of the Copts, a Christian minority.⁸⁰

In the 2000 elections, the Egyptian state took steps to sequester professional syndicates that were once "considered . . . secular, Westernized, and supportive of the government" but have become dominated, through internal election processes, by members of the MB.⁸¹ In an attempt to deprive the MB of twenty of its most dynamic young candidates in the approaching parliamentary elections, security forces arrested them.⁸² The group, which was made up mostly of lawyers, university professors, and other professionals, was accused of membership in an illegal organization and dictating the activities of professional organizations.⁸³ In this way, the regime not only uses its resources to control the MB when it finds it convenient to do so but also hides behind the issue of Islamic radicalism while it limits other types of associational life. This pattern has continued with the 2005 and 2010 elections as well.⁸⁴

In 2002 the People's Assembly in Egypt passed a new law regulating civic associations. This law, which replaced Law 32 of 1964, bans political activity and the receipt

of foreign funding without government approval, grants the Ministry of Social Affairs the powers to dissolve NGOs, and eliminates legal loopholes that allowed human rights groups to avoid NGO restrictions by registering as law firms or civic groups.⁸⁵ In addition, the law greatly restricts the formation and activities of labor unions and prohibits strikes, making the government-backed Egyptian Trade Union Federation the only legal labor federation.⁸⁶

Although it is true that intimidation is a viable tool, the Egyptian government has other means readily available:

As Egypt's activists—whether promoting human rights, women's rights, minority rights, sexual freedom, democratization, or Islamist ideas—pursue their goals and aims, they are constantly confronted by a morass of legal bureaucratic ambiguity. In particular, the multilayered government regulation that emanates from ever-growing and mutating bureaucratic bodies keeps those who are pushing the political envelope unstable and insecure. The legal and bureaucratic ambiguity of the Egyptian state, many lawyers believe, is intentional, since it allows the regime flexibility and multiple strategies to its critics, whether they are NGOs, civil companies, media publications, or individual activists.⁸⁷

This maze of legal regulations surrounds Egypt's civil society, allowing the state's direct and self-interested interference and the stifling of the civil society project more broadly.

Examples of Civil Society in Non-Arab Middle Eastern States

Turkey. Civil society in Turkey has enjoyed a relatively long history, but activity has fluctuated widely because of disruptive political transitions throughout the twentieth century. The fact that there have been three coups since 1950 has had a major impact on the activity of civil society in the Turkish state. Today Turkish civil society is widely considered not very functional, owing in large part to government enforcement of censorship laws.⁸⁸

Turkish civil society "has developed strongly within a system where the army acts as a guarantor of the secular Turkish state."⁸⁹ Thus, most formal political activity must guarantee the secular nature of the state. The military oversees electoral competition and other formal and legal manifestations in order to ensure that secularism remains the key identifying characteristic of the Turkish nation. The Justice and Development Party (AKP), considered an Islamic party, was able to come to power in Turkey in 2001 precisely because the previous governmental elites were confident that the army would prevent the new government from changing the nature of the Turkish state.⁹⁰

Tracing the development of civil society back to the Ottoman Empire, scholars believe that the liberal model of society introduced during the nineteenth century influenced the idea of civil society in Turkey.⁹¹ On the basis of Turkey being a non-Western, never-colonized state as well as inheriting a bureaucracy and having been influenced by Western legal norms, the notion of civil society was introduced in Turkey relatively early. After the Young Turk revolution in 1908, termed the "Second Constitutional Period," there was an unprecedented amount of activity of nonstate groups; between 1908 and 1918, twelve political parties and thirty-seven political and social organizations were founded. This organizational activity continued through the Allied occupation of Ottoman Turkey during World War I, but it diminished in 1923 when the Republic of Turkey was established. As Turkey transitioned once again to more democratic politics in 1946, associational activity of organizations began once again.

The 1960 coup, which included the development of a new constitution, gave increased rights (including a guarantee of free speech and free association), which again allowed the number of civic associations, interest groups, and political parties to increase in number. Yet another coup in 1980, however, had a negative impact on civil society institutions; the government engaged in massive arrests of the population and arrested 30,000 people the day following the coup. Since this time, though, civil society seems to have regained some ground, and as of 1996, there were 54,987 active NGOs in Turkey. Despite government censorship and limitations (as well as numerous interruptions to civil society activity), Binnaz Toprak claims that civic engagement of the society has been a major influence on Turkish politics: "In each case . . . formal democracy resumed after brief periods of military rule, not because the Turkish military is the guardian of democratic politics . . . but because the generals found it difficult to rule for long periods, given civil opposition to their rule."⁹²

Some identified obstacles include the "overpowering bureaucracy" of the Turkish state, leaving little space for actors to act free of state interference. Duncan and Doby attribute this in part to the prevalence of the Kemalist ideology, which places the value of the state above its citizens. In addition, especially problematic in Turkey, which has defined itself as a secular state, the Islamist movement in the past twenty years has begun to grow within the space given to civil society and is among the "most organized" of civil society organizations. Toprak further claims that "the issue of secularism is increasingly polarizing the society. . . . [The] trend toward polarization has become the major concern of people committed to the strengthening of civil society and the consolidation of participatory democracy."⁹³ Finally, the Kurdish issue has also been cited as a potential problem for the workings of civil society.

Iran. Although Mohammad Khatami, the president of Iran from 1997 to 2005, voiced support for increasing the space for civil society and increasing the rights of Iranian civilians, the more conservative segments of the government largely blocked Khatami's reforms and civil society activity was largely repressed.⁹⁴ President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who assumed the office in 2005, has been widely criticized for his human

rights record. Although civil society seemed relatively strong in the wake of the 2009 elections (during which there was much opposition activity), the mobilization of the Iranian activists was met with a major crackdown by the Iranian state, which imprisoned and interrogated thousands. Still, by Middle East standards, civil society in Iran is considered highly developed.⁹⁵

Historically, the power of the Iranian state was relatively limited, which provided the space for the development of many necessary aspects of civil society. During the twentieth century, the environment showed a "willingness" to establish civil society organizations and associations.⁹⁶

Iranian civil society is a case of a religious-based society, which raises interesting and complex questions on the agenda of democratization.⁹⁷ As Niblock points out, "Strong civil associations in this sphere . . . strengthen the overall sphere, buttressing the power of society relative to that of the state."⁹⁸ The case of Iran is instructive. It was religious civil organization, allied to the bazaar, that provided the dynamic behind the Iranian revolution. Through this alliance Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi was overthrown and replaced initially by a liberal parliamentary regime. This Islamic-based revolution can be seen as one of the most striking examples in the late twentieth century of civil society bringing about radical political change.

Political change in Iran was, in this respect, unlike change in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, Latin America, and southern Africa. In those places political change was more dependent on a combination of economic failure, regime loss of self-confidence, and external pressure. In Iran the central moving force was, without doubt, civil society. The initial multiparty democratic structures that were put in place immediately after the revolution did not last long, although they reemerged in a rather different form in the 1990s. It is, however, debatable whether this was due to the inherent nature of the Islamist forces that gained power or to the international and regional responses to the revolution. Among the regional responses was the initiation of the Iran-Iraq War.⁹⁹

The debate over Iranian civil society became especially important during the election campaigns of Mohammad Khatami; in his campaigns, he voiced support for numerous liberalization projects within Iran, including "expanding and strengthening civil society." During his campaigns, the idea of civil society took on the "character of a political slogan" within Iran. The promulgation of these ideas had an immediate impact on the civil society discourse in Iran, with reactions ranging widely from those who accepted these goals to those who rejected them completely.

Once elected, Khatami during his first three years in office seemed to increase the freedom of expression within Iran, but by the end of the third year, the freedom of the press was largely curtailed by the Iranian state. Civil society was also curtailed dramatically following the election of President Ahmadinejad; when he came into power, he refused to renew many of the NGO licenses that had been granted under former president Khatami.¹⁰⁰ This is apparent in the widespread unrest following the 2009 presidential elections, in which massive protests occurred citing election

fraud. In the aftermath of these protests, thousands were rounded up, interrogated, imprisoned, and even killed. Access to the Internet and other outlets to express what was going on was shut down by the state. Thus, as Kazemi notes, "the [Iranian] state has succeeded in limiting, and at times severely restricting, the full operation of civil society in many critical areas."¹⁰¹

In Iran, "civil societies have substantial civil association, but in specific areas where the state permits such activity."¹⁰² Iranian civil society in "organization is more modern, in so far as it involves political parties and associations based on economic, professional and social interests . . . these organizations must all operate within the framework of the ideology of the Islamic revolution."¹⁰³ "Debates in parliament, and the elections to parliament, have been marked by a seriousness of discussion and vitality of debate that have been absent from many other parliaments of the region. Yet the candidature of all those who seek to contest parliamentary seats has to be approved by the Guardian Council. Associations such as women's groups have been very successful in confronting the government on a wide range of issues, but such action can be effectively pursued only within the context of Islamic law."¹⁰⁴

Despite rhetoric and activity, civil society in Iran has in large part been subject to the "repression, co-optation, and instrumentalization" of the Iranian state.¹⁰⁵ The concentration of power in the hands of the state, along with a lack of a public sphere (or a public sphere dominated by the state), has inhibited the ability of civil society to be more active. This has been reiterated by other scholars, like Kazemi, who claim that the "dominance" of the state over civil society has restricted the activity of civil society.¹⁰⁶ State control is also often manifested by physical violence. State censorship of the media is a major impediment for civil society in Iran. Additionally, for civil society organizations to exist in Iran, the organs and components of civil society and civil society organizations must gain the approval of state authorities.

Israel. By and large, Israel is characterized as having two civil societies: one made up of the Jewish population and the other of Arab citizens. Although international influence and rhetoric have strengthened civil society during the past few decades, for a significant period of time the Israeli state monitored and limited the activities of civil society organizations, and recent limitations on civil society have curtailed the work of civil organizations as well. Still, civil society in Israel is generally described as having been vibrant and rather strong.

In the pre-state period, the Jewish community living in Palestine established civil organizations. The existence of two civil societies within Israel was established relatively early on: by Jewish settlers in the nineteenth century and by the Arab population that had settled there previously.¹⁰⁷ Once the state of Israel was established, however, both the state and civil society organizations were characterized as being attached to the political parties. At this time, civil organizations—especially the Arab organizations—operated with relatively little autonomy. For the first two decades after the Israeli state was founded, the Arab population within it was subject to military rule and was not allowed

to establish its own NGOs. This changed following the June 1967 War when the Arab population renewed connections with the Palestinians in occupied territories; nevertheless, until 1990 there were not more than 180 civil organizations established by the Palestinian Arab minority.¹⁰⁸

By 1999 there were 656 new organizations established by the Arab population. The establishment of civil organizations by the Arab population is perceived to be in part a result of the "strong process of politicization and 'Palestinization' that Arab citizens of Israel have been going through since the 1980s." Still, the civil society of Jewish members is larger than that made up of Arab citizens. This, Doron argues, is an example of civil society having evolved along "religio-national lines." The proliferation of civil society over the past few decades has been attributed to the increasing influence of Western and U.S. political culture within Israel throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s, which advanced the role of civil society organizations in Israel. Some political developments in the 1990s also had a positive impact on civil society, including the adoption of the Basic Laws, "Human Dignity and Freedom," and "Freedom of Occupation."¹⁰⁹

State intervention in civil society activity has been a major obstacle for Israeli civil society, whether that is placing restrictions on the activity of Arab civil organizations or generally being watchful of what NGOs more generally are doing within the state. A 2010 Human Rights Watch report states that the "increasing harshness" of attacks on civil society and "intolerance of dissent" in Israel is becoming worrisome. On January 15, 2010, for example, a group sixteen activists protesting the new settlements in Jerusalem were arrested.¹¹⁰

Labor Associations in the Arab World

The relationship between labor associations and the Arab states has varied dramatically over time as well as across states. In some Arab countries, labor unions have had an impact on domestic political processes; in other countries, labor and trade unions either barely function or do not exist at all.¹¹¹

Labor unions in the Arab world historically have been subject to significant state interference (and they still are, to some extent), but legal reforms of labor relations in the 1990s introduced a more "contractual dimension sanctifying collective bargaining instead of state regulation." This, in many cases, represented a fundamental shift in the relationship between the state and labor associations, but does not necessarily signify the existence of strong or autonomous labor unions in the Arab world; obstacles to the development of strong labor associations remain ever-present owing to "structural, political, and institutional" factors present in many Arab states.¹¹² Overall, labor unions have been characterized as "not particularly strong," although in some cases they have had an effect on the domestic political process. Still, effectiveness in changing government policies in regard to labor has "been met with mixed results."¹¹³ Labor associations in the Arab world have been weak, scholars argue, because of four factors: rapid population growth, a rapidly growing labor force in the face of high unemployment, the majority of workers being unskilled or

semiskilled laborers, and the mobility of wages. El-Mikawy and Posusney argue that these represent a "bad starting point for unionization."¹¹⁴

While the growing strength of NGOs seems to represent the growth of a stronger society, at least in an organizational sense, it is still somewhat unclear how or whether this can strengthen labor unions in the Arab world. Globalization may have a negative impact in the Arab world on labor unions and provide more reason for the business class to support state control of union activity; indeed, "pressed for more competitive operating conditions, business could perceive unions that would ask for more wages and more management-sharing as a threat."¹¹⁵

The relationship between the Arab state and labor associations—membership in labor groups is traditionally considered part of civil society activity—has evolved significantly over time and has evolved differently within different states. In Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Egypt, labor unions have had an impact on domestic political processes, but in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Oman labor and trade unions either hardly function or do not exist at all. A comparison of Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco provides a sense of the differences in the Arab world across states in regard to labor associations.

Egypt. Egypt has one of the highest rates of unionization in the Arab world—approximately 25 percent—but also has very high unemployment rates, which keeps many outside of the unions. Still, among Arab states, Egypt has the "most vibrant labor activity."¹¹⁶ This does not mean, though, that labor activity in Egypt is not restricted by the state. In the 1950s, although engaging in political liberalization, Nasser in some ways attempted to control civil society activity. Under Nasser, all labor unions were organized under a single union, the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF), which was completely controlled by the Egyptian state. While the ETUF has historically expressed its interests (for example, the ETUF supported subsidies on things like bread and sugar; when cut by the government in 1977, riots occurred), it still is largely managed by the state. El-Mikawy and Posusney argue that in Egypt the executive branch has historically had significant control over the affairs of labor unions; although deemed unconstitutional in 1993, Law 35 in 1976 essentially prohibited the organization of unions outside the ETUF. Similarly, the Egyptian government also influences the union leadership selection process.¹¹⁷

Still, relations between labor unions and the state appear to have improved over time. In the 1970s, the ETUF opposed privatization, including the sale of public sector companies (such as the United Wholesale Textile Trading Company) to private companies. This opposition had lessened by 1994, however, with even the president of the ETUF endorsing privatization. Over time, a growing number of strikes have been initiated by the labor union, and there have been fewer reports of government violence in response to those strikes.¹¹⁸

Jordan. Jordan, compared with Egypt, has lower levels of unionization, with about 10 percent of the working population in a union. Labor associations in Jordan have largely been controlled by the state. Created in 1975, the Jordanian Ministry of Labor

required that all unions register with the government; in addition, the Jordanian intelligence services also closely monitored labor activity. A Jordanian law gives the executive branch the ability to "determine the organizational structure of unions"; this, accordingly, gives little autonomy to labor organizations in Jordan. Additionally, the Ministry of Labor can determine which industries can have a union, as well as the number of unions within that industry. Since the mid-1980s, business associations in Jordan (such as the Union of Farmers, Bankers Association, Amman Chamber of Industry, and Amman Chamber of Commerce) have managed to play a role in "lobbying the government and pushing for economic liberalization."¹¹⁹

Jordanian labor unions have been in the midst of several political struggles. In 1970 the Federation of Trade Unions (FTUJ) became involved in the Jordanian civil war, which led the government to pursue a course of action that severely undermined the organization. The FTUJ called for reconciliation with the Palestinian resistance and staged repeated demonstrations in hopes of winning fair wage compensation and safer working conditions. These activities, rightly understood as political, could have wreaked havoc with the Jordanian status quo. In response, the government first dissolved the acting executive committee of the FTUJ, replacing it with members who were more sympathetic to the regime. The Jordanian monarchy swiftly amended the organization's constitution to allow for greater government access to union activities. When these new tactics did not accomplish their goal, the government adopted more direct means. The regime would convince potential candidates not to run for office and would imprison activists or dismiss them from their jobs. By the mid-1980s the government had gained control of most unions and intimidated most citizens.¹²⁰

Morocco. As in Jordan, approximately 10 percent of the working population in Morocco is unionized. As in Jordan and Egypt, labor associations have been monitored closely by the government and by Moroccan intelligence services. And, as in Egypt, the government has involved itself in the selection of union leadership, and union protests and strikes have been the subject of police intimidation. In 1994 the International Labor Association "expressed concern that freedom to associate was not being respected in Morocco." In contrast with Egypt, where privatization was ultimately endorsed, union leaders in Morocco have resisted privatization.¹²¹

Other Labor Activities. In the Arab states, progress has been made in the adoption of necessary changes in national labor legislation (Table 5.2) and in the "application of ratified Conventions in Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. . . . In Bahrain, the Constitution was amended and a new law adopted to allow the establishment of free trade unions. . . . New legislation relating to freedom of association was adopted in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates . . . as the Labour Code has been revised in Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. . . . Women's associations have been established in Oman, the Syrian Arab Republic and the United Arab Emirates."¹²²

TABLE 5.2

Ratifications of Fundamental International Labor Organization Conventions by Arab Countries, as of February 1, 2006

Countries	Freedom of association and collective bargaining		Elimination of forced and compulsory labor		Elimination of discrimination in respect to employment and occupation		Abolition of child labor	
	C.87	C.98	C.29	C.105	C.100	C.111	C.138	C.182
ARAB STATES								
Bahrain			■	■		■		■
Iraq		■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Jordan		■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Kuwait	■		■	■		■	■	■
Lebanon		■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Oman			■	■			■	■
Qatar			■			■		■
Saudi Arabia			■	■	■	■		■
Syrian Arab Republic	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
United Arab Emirates			■	■	■	■	■	■
Yemen	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
TOTAL RATIFICATIONS	3	5	11	10	7	10	8	11

No. 87 Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention, 1948

No. 98 Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949

No. 29 Forced Labor Convention, 1930

No. 105 Abolition of Forced Labor Convention, 1957

No. 111 Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958

No. 138 Minimum Age Convention, 1973

No. 182 Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention, 1999

No. 100 Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951

Source: Report of the Director-General, *Decent Work in Asia: Reporting on Results 2001–05* (Geneva: International Labor Organization, 2006), 98.

New women's committees have been established in trade union organizations in Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Yemen. In addition, progress has been made in amending labor laws to enable the establishment of workers' organizations in Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia.¹²³

Public Activities

Arab citizens also show a willingness to protest and sign petitions. Twenty-eight percent of Arab citizens report participating in more than one demonstration, and 29 percent of citizens report having signed more than one petition. Still, majorities of



Egyptians protest in support of the Gaza Strip outside the Journalists' Syndicate building in Cairo on December 29, 2008.

people across the Arab states report never having protested, and another 71 percent state that they have never signed a petition. The Kuwaitis and Yemenis show the most willingness to sign petitions, with roughly 40 percent in each country reporting that they have signed more than one petition. Jordanians are the least likely among the Arabs to have signed a petition, with only 13 percent saying that they have signed more than one petition.

The Lebanese show the largest propensity to demonstrate, with 45 percent reporting that they have participated in one demonstration or more, while the Jordanians report the

least amount of protest. Only 10 percent indicate that they have participated in one protest or more.

Better-educated citizens are more likely to have participated in protests and in petition signing, and those who hold jobs are also more likely to participate in these types of activities. Further, data from the Arab Barometer indicate that the youth populations are more likely to engage in protest behavior than older cohorts.

Civil Society and Arab Exceptionalism

Given this dynamic civic presence, some would argue that the Arab world should have witnessed more democracy by now. In fact, some scholars argue, even if the Arab world achieved remarkable levels of civic growth, its potential to become a member state of the democratic order remains questionable at best. Why? Because there is something inherently exceptional and antithetical to democracy in the region: the Arab political culture. It is this political culture, with its legacy of Islam, tribalism, nomadism, patrimonialism, and strong kinship bonds, that bodes ill for democracy. In fact, these factors, it is posited, will continue to negate the democratizing influences of civil society. Let's examine these arguments in more detail.

Bryan Turner explores the ways in which primary (or primordial) groups like tribes, clans, and families impede democratic progress.¹²⁴ Turner is pessimistic about political, social, and economic modernization playing an important role in Arab societal developments, especially because he believes that these "primary loyalties [in Arab societies] corrode the foundation of urban citizenship."¹²⁵ Turner clearly adopts the classic liberal perspective that civil society requires "the existence of independent voluntary associations and institutions that link the anomic individual to the abstract state."¹²⁶

When applying this definition of civil society—one that values "independent" voluntary associations and reifies the "individual" over the community—to the Arab world, one realizes that the concept has serious limitations. First, civil society is not autonomous. Many civil society organizations in Arab countries are extensions of the state. Second, individuals in the Arab world, by virtue of their primordial ties, are less atomistic than their counterparts in the Western world. Thus, according to Turner's definition, Arab civil society does not constitute "real" civil society the way it is conceived of in its classic liberal formation.

Mustapha Kamel al-Sayyid, a leading expert on civil society in Egypt, disagrees with Turner. He argues that neotraditional institutions that combine both primordial ties and a modern formal organization would coexist easily in a commonly acceptable definition of civil society. He further believes that both religious and nonreligious sectors contribute to civil society activities. Nazih Ayubi concurs with al-Sayyid. He states, "It is not true, as modernization theorists claim, that political integration and state-building can only take place through the eradication of 'traditional' solidarities and intermediary linkages."¹²⁷ In fact, Ayubi believes that these cleavages can be useful state integration devices, which in his opinion can potentially enhance civil society activity and prevent marginalization and isolation.

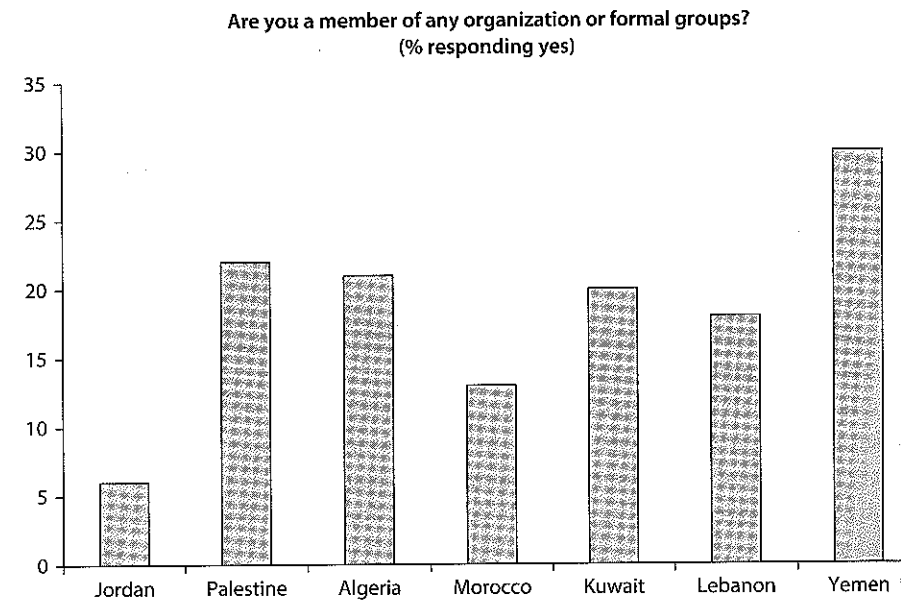
Civil society organizations remain key sites for citizen participation (Figure 5.7). Some of the highest levels of participation are witnessed in Yemen, Palestine, Algeria, and Kuwait. In Yemen, participation is highly linked to "Qat chews," which bring together people frequently to engage in a traditional practice of chewing Qat.¹²⁸ Palestinian and Algerian civic participation is related to the histories of occupation and civil war. Finally, the Kuwaiti ethos of associationalism is heavily influenced by the *dilywanieh* culture that reigns large in the small kingdom.

Although civil society activity serves as an important outlet for intellectual growth, civic and political engagement, deliberation, associationalism, and mobilization, civil society remains deliberately manipulated and constricted by existing regimes. Civic associations find themselves having to navigate a web of government regulations and restrictions. They have to negotiate their principles against the overwhelming needs of resources to keep their programs alive. They have to navigate a civic terrain divided by clientelistic perquisites and benefits. They risk becoming folded into the domains of the regime, but also risk marginalization if they are isolated from the larger political society. Civic associations also look for international collaboration and linkages. Yet, the geopolitics dominating Middle Eastern life, where accepting U.S. funding is often perceived as collusion with U.S. security interests in the region, has reduced the funding options available to civic leaders. Despite these challenges, however, the civic terrain in the Arab world continues to be vibrant and dynamic, attracting significant segments of the population.

The question of Arab political participation is part of the democratization debate. In Arab countries, one question is whether various methods of formal and informal participation bode well for democratization trajectories across the region. Yet, it is also

FIGURE 5.7

PARTICIPATION IN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN SELECTED MIDDLE EASTERN AND NORTH AFRICAN COUNTRIES



Source: Arab Barometer Project, 2006. Mark Tessler and Amaney Jamal, principal investigators. www.arabbarometer.org.

important to emphasize that whether civil society associations are effective in promoting accountability and democracy, civil society associations remain extremely important for a variety of reasons. First, where states are increasingly reducing the social contract between states and societies, civil society organizations have filled an enormous gap. Although civil society networks may reinforce loyalty to regimes and often become targets of co-optation strategies, they nevertheless continue to offer much-needed services and goods to constituents. Second, civil society organizations remain effective outlets of political society, even when they are not directly contesting the state. In Arab countries where political parties are still weak and do not attract large constituencies, civil society organizations fill the gap. In civil society organizations, citizens meet, debate, engage, and discuss local and national political developments. For many citizens across the developing world, associational life and activity are the only forms of active political or community involvement. Outside these associations and organizations, citizens possess very few channels for political recourse and may remain marginalized from the elite-dominated political world. And, third, civil society continues to offer otherwise marginalized segments of society spaces to meet and interact. For many young women, participation in a local civic association or sports club remains the only way to get out of the house and develop skills and capacities that are not found at home.

Everyday Participation and Informal Networks

Civil society and electoral politics are the major formal avenues of political participation across the region. Other informal networks and pathways to participation are quite dynamic in the region as well. These informal institutions include everyday family life, kinship networks, and tribalism. They include people who have also deliberately left the world of politics either as a means of protesting the inefficacy of politics or as a way of pronouncing their apathetic ties to the state.¹²⁹

The reality behind the notion of informal politics is that although the Arab state is quite present in the formal political sphere, it is simultaneously absent from the everyday realities of ordinary citizens. Diane Singerman in her groundbreaking work shows how the urban poor in Cairo use informal institutions and social networks. It is these forms of participation, she maintains, that are essential to understanding the participation of the urban poor and lower-income classes in many parts of the Arab world.¹³⁰ Thus, towns, villages, communities, and neighborhoods function independently of the state. Several collectivities in the Arab world are self-sustaining without the help or intervention of the state.

The absence of the state in the everyday lives of citizens is due to several factors. Primarily, states across the region have struggled to provide basic goods and services to their population at large.¹³¹ Not only do states lack legitimacy, but most Arab states do not rely on taxation to sustain government spending. Rentier wealth and foreign aid have allowed states to remain immune from societal demands. Because states do not rely on taxing their own citizens, they have been able to keep a healthy distance between their own interests and those of their citizens. Hence, states can afford to ignore major segments of their populations.

Not only are states absent from the lives of millions of citizens who reside in the urban slums of Arab capitals, but it is also true that political parties (with the exception of Islamist groups) and civil society organizations do little to access these impoverished segments of the population.¹³² In fact, Ayubi argues that these citizens embrace the politics of Islam not out of conviction but rather necessity.

The unemployment crisis has further exacerbated the gulf between states and societies. With unemployment hitting well over 30 percent in actual numbers in several states in the region, societies are looking for ways to sustain themselves without the aid or networks of the states. Women, children, and young men will seek to support themselves in informal economic activity; whether working out of one's home or trying to access the black market, citizens continue to search for new opportunities.

In this environment of deliberate neglect, networks that make sense to people continue to serve as viable replacements, indeed substitutes, for effective state institutions. In the absence of an effective state to represent the interests of all its citizens, people find comfort in existing informal networks. Tribes, clans, kin ties, and patriarchal networks all remain quite important in everyday political, social, and economic life. Some will argue that the political culture of the region allows these "regressive" institutions

to endure. Yet it is clear that societies will embrace the effective roles in familial networks for such issues as redistribution of wealth, enforcement of norms, arbitration of disputes, and the provision of employment opportunities where states continue to disappoint. Thus, informal networks in the context of the Arab world, especially those located in familial ties, will remain a dominant feature of Arab forms of political participation so long as states remain ineffectual and absent from the lives of citizens.

In many ways, then, these informal networks serve the interests of authoritarian rulers. If political communities develop apart from the state, it creates the necessary distancing between states and societies that serves to protect the existing regime from societal demands. Alongside the informal sector, however, there are direct regime strategies to induce political participation in line with regime preferences. State corporatism is one such project. Many regimes, especially in the late 1960s and 1970s, directed political participation through state-controlled professional syndicates, labor unions, and political parties. By creating spaces where political activity was legitimated, regimes attempted to micromanage the content and form of such political participation. In return, proregime segments received perquisites and benefits. However, as the resource base of several regimes dwindled and Islamist elements penetrated these associational vehicles, the corporatist model became far less salient than it was during the height of the populist Arab social contract of the 1960s and 1970s.¹³³ Yet, some Gulf states that can afford corporatist arrangements continue with the practice.

Ethnic and familial ties also remain effective channels of political mobilization. In places that are fragmented by many divisions, like Lebanon and Iraq, political participation normally occurs through loyalty to religious or ethnic ties.¹³⁴ The regulation of politics to local leaders of various groups finds its roots in the decentralized nature of the Ottoman Empire. It was during this period that local leaders like *ulema*, *shaykhs*, *za'uma*, and *ra'usa* acted as middlemen between the Ottoman rulers and the citizenry. They collected taxes, served as arbitrators, and implemented laws originating in Istanbul. This created, according to Alhamad, "self-contained . . . localities in terms of providing residents with support networks for religious, professional, and other needs."¹³⁵ These informal networks manifested themselves in urban settings, and they offered solidarity, assistance, and protections from the state. Soon mosques came to play a similar role, and the informal networks of mosques would serve as a key source of mobilization behind Islamists' success. Alhamad continues: "Indeed, Islam-based networks played an integral part in the everyday lives of people, holding Middle Eastern urban society together by providing spiritual guidance, accepted norms of behavior, and ways of conducting private and commercial transactions."¹³⁶

Alhamad captures this situation well when she argues:

The fact that these modes and vehicles are based on familiar structures and mutual trust provides a layer of comfort and a sense of protection from the claws of the state. Moreover, the effectiveness of these modes in exacting results—as wide-ranging as these might be—also reinforces this appeal. . . .

At the same time, however, this underworld of participation perpetuates a short-term and individualistic vision of society. Promoting ties of patronage, distorting incentives, eluding the rule of law, and evading accountability, these networks do not measure up to the good governance criteria for sustainable political and economic development.¹³⁷

Despite rapid changes in the region in the last few decades, informal networks remain the most popular and obvious forms of political participation. From mosques, urban networks, and familial, ethnic, and religious ties, the terrain of informal participatory channels structures everyday political interactions and behaviors. The social ties and levels of trust these networks generate are the essence of their continued success and popularity. In the absence of effective states to represent citizen interests and where, on average, the rule of law remains weak, informal networks remain the most familiar, reliable, and effective outlets for exercising one's voice. Yet, relying on these informal pathways further distances citizens from the states and from the possibilities of holding authoritarian regimes accountable.

Revolutionizing Political Participation: New Channels of Activity

New forms of technology across the Arab world have been decisive in affecting protest behavior, collective mobilization, and new forms of formal and informal e-networks important for political and social ties.

The Internet and even text messaging have been important ways to network individuals and provide information. However, the impact is less than one may first expect. Although Internet use has become more widespread, it is by no means universally available. The percentage of the population with access to the Internet ranges from 1 percent in Iraq and Yemen to nearly 50 percent in Israel (Table 5.3). In most of the MENA region, however, not even one-third of the population has Internet access, and those who do are concentrated in urban areas.

The Internet and text messaging also have major problems as they work to establish credibility and legitimacy. It is difficult either to ascertain the source of information—and, indeed, even to distinguish regime-propagated misinformation from legitimate alternative information—or to avoid the reach of the state entirely. An intricate dance is going on between ruling elites who attempt to firewall information sources and young citizens who hone their abilities to break down the walls. The government may find these media more difficult to control than other challenges in the past, but certainly not impossible.

Role of Technology in Political Engagement and Participation

The Arab state is characterized by having a monopoly on information that is shared within the state. Therefore, the question of how modern technology influences politics in the Middle East is a particularly interesting one considering the general consensus

TABLE 5.3

Internet Use in the Middle East, June 2008

Countries	Total population (2008 est.) ^a	Internet use				Middle East region (% of users)
		Users (Dec. 2000) ^b	Users (latest data) ^b	Penetration among population (%)	Increase in users, 2000–08 (%) ^c	
Bahrain	718,306	40,000	250,000	34.8	525.0	0.6
Iran	65,875,223	250,000	23,000,000	34.9	9,100.0	54.8
Iraq	28,221,181	12,500	54,000	0.2	332.0	0.1
Israel	7,112,359	1,270,000	3,700,000	52.0	191.3	8.8
Jordan	6,198,677	127,300	1,126,700	18.2	785.1	2.7
Kuwait	2,596,799	150,000	900,000	34.7	500.0	2.1
Lebanon	3,971,941	300,000	950,000	23.9	216.7	2.3
Oman	3,311,640	90,000	300,000	9.1	233.3	0.7
Qatar	928,635	30,000	351,000	37.8	1,070.0	0.8
Saudi Arabia	28,161,417	200,000	6,200,000	22.0	3,000.0	14.8
Syria	19,747,586	30,000	2,132,000	10.8	7,006.7	5.1
United Arab Emirates	4,621,399	735,000	2,300,000	49.8	212.9	5.5
West Bank	2,611,904	35,000	355,000	13.6	915.7	0.8
Yemen	23,013,376	15,000	320,000	1.4	2,033.3	0.8
Total—Middle East	197,090,443	3,284,800	41,939,200	21.3	1,176.8	100.0

a. U.S. Census Bureau data.

b. The most recent usage information comes mainly from the data published by Nielsen NetRatings, International Telecommunication Union (ITU), and other reliable sources.

c. For growth comparison purposes, usage data published by ITU for the year 2000 were used.

Source: Internet World Stats: Usage and Population Statistics, Middle East, 2010.

on modern technology, that it increases information sharing and the broadcasting of individual opinion. Some scholars argue that Internet use and other modern technologies (examples of “horizontal communications”) will, as Augustus Richard Norton claims, eventually produce the “slow retreat of authoritarianism in the Muslim world.”¹³⁸

Other scholars are not so optimistic. While technology, they claim, does enable the “sharing of political ideas and opinions beyond face-to-face networks,” important for obvious reasons, Middle Eastern governments still have significant control over the introduction of technology and, once it is introduced, the technology itself. As Wheeler suggests, in many states, authoritarianism wins out, and information is generally not shared or open despite the existence of modern technology.¹³⁹ Marcus F. Franda notes

that leaders were initially very cautious in introducing modern technologies within their states for the very reason of enabling political dissent; there is “widespread and long-standing fear in MENA government circles that loss of control over basic information networks might result in revolutionary political change.”¹⁴⁰ To this day, MENA states still have significant control over the information that reaches their citizens by regulating media, satellite television, and the Internet; still, this is not to say that modern technology cannot increase political participation or enable political protest.

Role of the Internet in the Arab World

The Internet in the Arab state, while potentially enabling political participation and providing a medium to express dissatisfaction with the authoritarian regimes under which people in the Arab world live, is still relatively limited in its use and is also subjected to significant censorship and monitoring by the state. The top four countries in the Arab world for Internet use are the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain.¹⁴¹ The highest Internet penetration levels—they exceed the world average of 21.9 percent—are found in these wealthy Gulf states: 49.8 percent in the UAE, 37.8 percent in Qatar, 34.8 percent in Kuwait, and 34.7 percent in Bahrain. In the Arab world overall, Internet penetration still remains at about half of the world average, 11.1 percent. Although this number continues to grow, for the time being the strong majority of people in MENA states do not have access to the Internet.¹⁴²

Those who do have access do not necessarily have unlimited and unconditional access. Ever since the Internet was introduced in these countries, the regimes in charge have attempted to find ways to control what people could and could not view on the Internet. These fears were twofold: first, the fear in MENA states of “political subversion” and, second, the fears of religious and conservative segments of the population that Internet access would “undermine ‘traditional’ values.” To limit Internet access, different states have taken different approaches; in Saudi Arabia, for example, the regime “opted for a high-cost, high-tech solution, while Iraq under Saddam Hussein surrounded Internet use with barely-penetrable bureaucracy.”¹⁴³

Regimes’ responses to dissidents expressing unfavorable opinions about the state on the Internet have demonstrated the seriousness with which the state takes the Internet as a medium of spreading opinions. The Egyptian state, for example, has arrested bloggers expressing negative opinions of the regime. As Internet use in Egypt has increased nearly 1,000 percent in the past seven years, these types of problems are likely to grow more frequent. Moreover, the freedom of expression that is often found in other countries via the Internet is not always present in Middle Eastern states; because people are aware that the state controls much of the content on the Internet and monitors Internet activity, people will often self-censor. Numerous states—including Oman, Jordan, Syria, Tunisia, the UAE, Yemen, Bahrain, Jordan, Libya, and Morocco—have been found engaging in Internet censorship. Still, despite government censorship and monitoring of Internet activity of its citizens, as Wheeler argues, “individual citizens

manage to work around the state, constructing a wide range of interests, meanings, and practices, which often challenge norms." While Wheeler suggests that this may not on its own impact the transformation of authoritarian regimes to more democratic ones, this engagement is still important, as it is "linking communities of people who are increasingly voicing opinions, making demands."¹⁴⁴

One interesting use of the Internet in regard to political protest in the Middle East involved the role that the Internet networking site Twitter played in recent Iranian election protests. The aftermath of the Iranian election of 2009 sparked widespread protests, the likes of which have not been seen since the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Iran's prodemocracy movement has made good use of the tools of new media—Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, and the like—to convey its message. Twitter, which goes out over two networks (the Internet and SMS) and can be received by both computers and cell phones via text, was a medium through which people voiced dissent as well as kept the rest of the world tuned in to what was going on when Iran expelled all foreign reporters from the state as well as severely restricted Internet access. Because Twitter is easy to use and hard for the state to control, it is "practically ideal for a mass protest movement." Indeed, while other media outlets like newspapers "were full of blank space where censors had whited-out news stories, Twitter was delivering information from street level, in real time." Because totalitarian governments rule by force and control of information, these tweets became important in disseminating information on what was happening both within and outside of Iran.¹⁴⁵

Still, Internet use in most Arab countries remains somewhat limited. Other technologies, such as satellite television, may have an even broader impact on raising political awareness and participation.

Role of Satellite Television in the Middle East

Some scholars contend that satellite TV could have a greater impact than the Internet for spreading information within the Arab world; people with an Internet connection remain the minority in all but a few countries, but satellite TV is available in the majority of countries in the Arab world. Because of literacy levels and regulation costs, satellite TV is much more readily available. In 2002, 70–90 percent of households in Algeria, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia had satellite TV, 40–50 percent in Jordan and Syria, and 30 percent or more in Morocco and Tunisia. The most popular channel in the Arab world is al-Jazeera, with approximately 40 million viewers.

This is not to say that satellite TV is not subject to state censorship as well. When al-Jazeera has at times refused to tone down its programs to the satisfaction of Arab states, it has been banned. In 2003, for example, after the Saudi government viewed a documentary as insulting to the regime, staff working at the channel were not issued visas to cover the pilgrimage. Al-Jazeera has also been banned for periods of time in Kuwait and Jordan, with those states closing the al-Jazeera offices within their countries. Naomi Sakr argues that because "institutions to underpin broadcasting and

journalistic independence are lacking," satellite TV, while increasing political global awareness throughout the Arab world, still may not have a radical impact on the nature of the Arab states themselves.¹⁴⁶

Conclusion

That the Middle East is still authoritarian should not by default signify a lack of involvement among the region's populations. As this chapter illustrates, the type and form of political participation fluctuate from individual to individual. Citizens will employ a variety of modes to better represent themselves and their societies. From the urban poor to the elite, from those who are illiterate to those who carry degrees of higher education, men and women, young and the old, those loyal to tribes and those embedded in tight families, those who frequent the mosque and those who embrace secularism, and those who support their states to those in the opposition—political participation for each of these segments takes on an intimate and meaningful form of activity. Citizens in the Middle East have been able to adapt to their current political environments, utilize existing pathways, and create or resurrect modalities of participation that allow them in some consequential way to represent their interests and the interests of their communities and help them chart a better future for themselves and their children.

SUGGESTED READINGS

- Clark, J. A. *Islam, Charity, and Activism: Middle-Class Networks and Social Welfare in Egypt, Jordan, and Yemen*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004.
- Jamal, A. A. *Barriers to Democracy: The Other Side of Social Capital in Palestine and the Arab World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.
- Lust-Okar, E. and Zerhouni, S., eds. *Political Participation in the Middle East*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2008.
- Wiktorowicz, Q. *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004.
- Schwedler, Jillian. *Faith in Moderation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Singerman, Diane. *Avenues of Participation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.