

Prospects for Political Parties Assistance Project in the Middle East and North Africa



A Desk Study Presented to the Board of
Directors of the Netherlands Institute for
Multiparty Democracy

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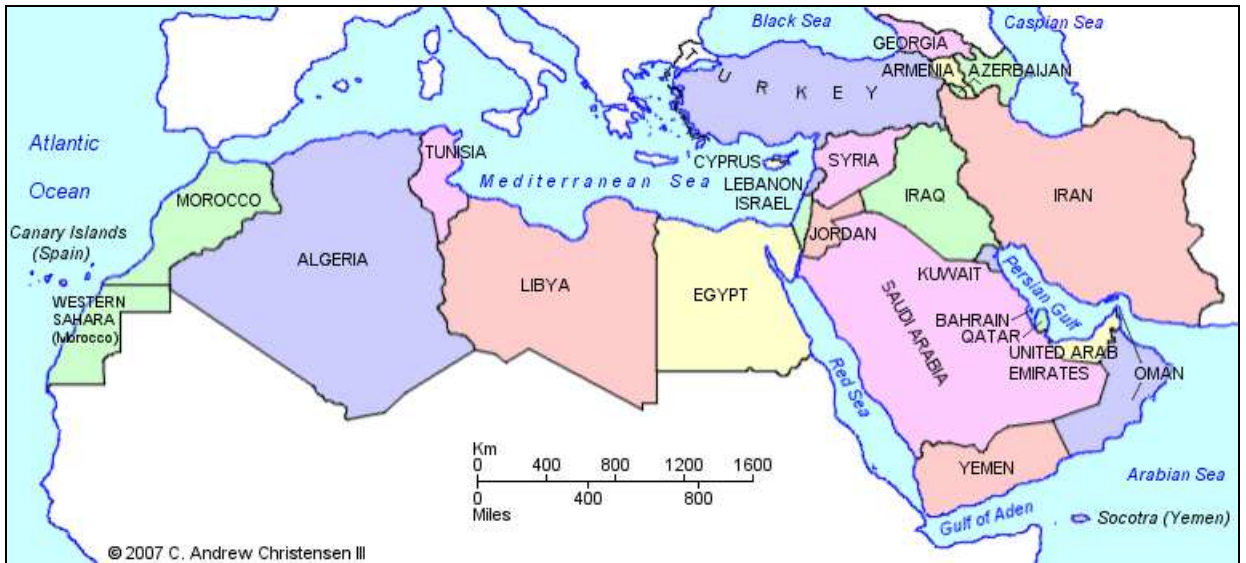
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1. Object and Scope of the Study:

Map of MENA Region



Map of the Arab World



In this study, North Africa (henceforth NA) will be defined as the region extending from Morocco in the west to Libya to the east. Although Egypt lies on the same coastal line as the North African countries, its historical ties with the Asian countries to its east and its political and cultural weight in that region can hardly be exaggerated. Egypt's pivotal role in the Arab-Israeli conflict, its championship of the cause of Pan-Arabism; a cause that prevailed only in the eastern part of the Arab world and its rivalries with Saudi Arabia at times and with Iraq at others are all reasons to include it within the Middle East.

For this reason, two maps are portrayed above. The first shows "our" defined and internationally accepted definition of the MENA region while the second defines what is normally taken as the Arab World, i.e. MENA minus Turkey and Iran. According to Arab officials, however the Arab world should include the entire member states of the Arab League, i.e. Sudan, Mauritania, and even Somalia and Djibouti.

But what is the Middle East (henceforth: ME)? What constitutes its boundaries?

Though the term is a political invention of the British that defined "near", "middle" and "far" East in terms of their distance from the colonial center, its eastern boundaries have at times been stretched to include Pakistan and Afghanistan, while at others have been narrowed down to Iran. The fact that Egypt and the Asian part of the Arab world share many historical and cultural ties provides sufficient reasons to include them in one bloc. In the meantime, the interconnectedness of Iranian politics with the "Arab East", the spread of the Kurdish nation across Iran, Turkey, Iraq and Syria, the shared vital water resources and international water passages, alongside many other factors requires including Turkey and Iran within the Middle East.

However, common traits and ties between countries in the Middle East or North Africa do not necessarily translate into friendly relationships among neighbors, nor do they hide the huge differences between the various countries, as will become evident in this study, just as a common space called Western Europe developed despite (or perhaps, because of) a history of bloody wars and rivalries and despite the huge differences between a France which preserved its national boundaries for long centuries on the one hand, and Belgium or Norway that only came to existence as states during the nineteenth and early twentieth century respectively.

Similarly, we find well-preserved national entities like Egypt and Morocco in MENA whose boundaries have been more or less well-defined even when they were parts or seats of larger empires, while a country like Jordan only saw the light in the 1920s to buffer the rising tensions between Jews and Arabs in Palestine under the British mandate, and Libya was formally formed from three separate regions only after WWII.

A glance at table -1- shows that the current demographic and socio-economic disparities are no less stark.

Out of a total population of 427.95 millions for MENA, three countries: Egypt, Turkey and Iran i.e. sixteen percent of the nineteen MENA countries, account for around forty five percent of its total population. Seven other countries, with populations above

ten millions and less than thirty five (Morocco, Algeria, Iraq, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Tunisia) account for almost forty percent, while we are left with nine countries whose total population is a mere twenty five millions; i.e. less than one third of Egypt's. The latter group, mainly tiny emirates numerically constitute forty seven percent of the MENA countries but host around eight percent of the region's population. In a nutshell, the demographic spectrum ranges from Egypt's 80.3 millions to Qatar's 220 thousand citizens.

To the author's knowledge, no other region in the contemporary history of the world has seen as many historical, socio-economic and demographic disparities, as well as bloody conflicts that the Middle East is witnessing today as the eighteenth-nineteenth century Europe or late nineteenth century Balkan and Central Europe conflicts: groups identifying themselves in terms of confessions fighting others who belong to other confession. The spillover effects of European integration (even with East-Central Europe during the cold war) seem a distant dream for MENA.

The average per capita gross national income for MENA situates the region as a whole within the middle-income group. Only sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia fall below MENA, while Europe, America, East Asia, The South Pacific, Central Asia and Latin America enjoy higher per capita incomes and better welfare.

Although a very legitimate concern should address how the MENA countries have managed (or mismanaged) the huge flux of oil revenues for the past thirty-five years since the 1973 oil price hikes, this study is more concerned with looking at how the windfall spoils have been translated in terms of each country's welfare.

Table -2- reveals that Qatar, a country whose population is around two percent of Egypt's enjoys a per capita income that is around fifteen times higher than the average of the entire MENA, thirty times that of Egypt and more than forty times the poorest country in the region: Yemen.

Out of 207 countries ranked by the World Bank according to their per capita income, MENA has the widest disparities within any single group, with member states ranging from the fifth highest rank in the world (Qatar) to Yemen whose rank is 165.

More important, however, is how this financial wealth is translated into material and humanitarian benefits for the citizens of a particular country. The **human development index** does not only include the per capita income of the country or region, but also introduces indicators pertaining to education (literacy, school enrollment...), health (hospital beds per population, doctors per population...) and gender equality (percentage of women in various positions, in education...).

Therefore, a comparison between the ranking of a given country according to both indicators should be a good measure of how states use their resources and how their citizens benefit from these resources, that is, one would expect that the wealthier a country is in terms of material income, the healthier, more educated and better equipped with modern facilities its citizens are. Unfortunately, this is only a theoretical statement since governments do not always use their countries' wealth in an optimum way, and since human development standards accumulate over time. Thus, a legacy of women's movement in, say, Turkey or Egypt cannot be bought by newly acquired wealth. And Universities that had been established in Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and Syria since the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries may not match the newly established institutions in the Gulf region in terms of modern and expensive equipment,

but expensive equipment cannot instantaneously make up for decades, or even centuries, of educational gaps between the various societies of the region.

Table – 1-

Basic Social and Freedom Indicators in MENA

Country	Population*	Human Development Rank	Political Rights	Civil Rights	Freedom	Freedom Of Press Index	Corruption Index	Gender Empowerment Index
Algeria	32.9	102	6	5	NF	128	99	
Bahrain	0.46	31	5	5	PF	158	47	66
Egypt	80.3	116	6	5	NF	128	105	75
Iran	71	78	6	6	NF			
Iraq	29.8		6	6	NF			
Jordan	6.1	90	5	4	PF	128	53	
Kuwait	1.1	29	4	4	PF	116	60	
Lebanon	3.9	78	5	4	PF	126	99	
Libya	5.7	52	7	7	NF	190	131	
Morocco	33.2	123	5	4	PF	127	72	
Oman	2.55	53	6	5	NF	155	53	60
Palestinian Territory	4.02	106	5	5	NF	184	107	
Qatar	0.22	34	6	5	NF	128	32	
Saudi Arabia	22.0	55	7	6	NF	172	79	78
Syria	19.3	105	7	6	NF	189	138	
Tunisia	10.2	95	7	5	NF	177	61	
Turkey	73.9	76	3	3	PF			
UAE	1.1	31	6	5	NF	141	34	
Yemen	22.2	138	5	5	PF	174	131	78

* Includes only citizens

Notes:

Population figures are extracted from the **World Bank** latest annual reports.

The latest Human Development Ranking includes 177 countries (except for the Palestinian territories which pertains to 2005 and comprised 159 countries.) This indicator is adopted and calculated by the **UNDP**.

The latest Gender Empowerment Ranking includes only 78 countries.

Freedom Index, adopted and calculated by **The Freedom House**, follows a scale of 1 to 7, from free to not free in an ascending order; NF: Not Free, PF: Partly Free. The index and ranking comprises 194 countries. The same applies to Freedom of Press.

The latest Corruption index comprises 180 countries and is calculated by **Transparency International**.

That is why the fabulous financial wealth that has flowed to the oil exporting countries over the past four decades, while enabling these countries to make huge strides in improving the standards of welfare of their citizens, could not bridge the gap between them and the countries that have a history of political and cultural development, such as Lebanon, Morocco, Syria, Egypt, Turkey and Iran in terms of gender empowerment or levels of civic, if not political, freedoms. Both sets of factors explain why there is a difference between the rank of a country in terms of national income on the one hand and its more important human development rank on the other

A stark example can be seen by comparing the rank of Qatar, the highest MENA country in terms of per capita GNI and the fifth on a world scale, with its thirty fourth position in terms of human development indicators. By contrast, Iran, with a history of social mobility and political dynamism occupies a meager 110th rank in terms of per capita GNI, yet is seventy eighth in terms of human development ranking.

In what follows, we will try to explore the impact (if any) of the above-mentioned factors on the development/underdevelopment of democratic surges in the various parts of MENA and their impact of the state of political parties or organizations.

Although the study would try to draw on the experience of the entire region as defined above, for practical reasons ***we are constrained to concentrate on seven case studies; namely: Morocco, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan and Yemen.***

2. State of Liberties in MENA

In terms of historical formation and consolidation, demographic and socio-economic indicators, the MENA countries present a very diverse regional grouping. The sad and unsurprising fact, however, is that **all of the nineteen countries of the region share a dismal record and ranking in terms of human rights and democratic practices.**

Although aggregated figures can be somewhat deceptive - since figures vary greatly from country to country - the aggregated World Bank chart shows that generally speaking little progress has been made in terms of the Rule of Law and Voice and Accountability between 1998 and 2006.¹ If we look at the charts per country, a more varied image emerges. Saudi Arabia, Syria and Libya show extremely low percentile scores on voice and accountability (all well below 10% on a scale of 1-100%), whereas some smaller Gulf State occupy a slightly higher position.

The democracy index provided by the *Economist* labels Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Yemen, and the Gulf States as “Authoritarian Regimes” as all of them score less than 4.0 points in a range from 0 to 10. Only Iraq and Lebanon are considered “Hybrid Regimes”. Over the past two decades some countries went further than others in the field of liberalizing their political life. Following the 1991 Gulf War, Kuwait carried out a policy that resulted in a relatively vibrant political and civil society

¹ The Rule of Law measures the extent to which agents have faith in and abide by the rules of society, in particular the quality of contract enforcement, the police and the courts as well as the likelihood of crime and violence. Voice and Accountability measures the extent to which a country’s citizens are able to participate in selecting their government, as well as freedom of expression, freedom of association and free media.

and culminated in the landmark achievement of the establishment of female voting. However, political parties remain extremely curtailed in Kuwait.

**Table -2-
Income and Welfare Indicators in MENA**

Country	Population*	World Ranking Per Capita GNI	Per capita GNI \$ US	Human Development Rank
Algeria	32.9	108	3620	102
Bahrain	0.46	47	19350	31
Egypt	80.3	144	1580	116
Iran	71	110	3740	78
Iraq	29.8		Low Middle Income	
Jordan	6.1	121	2850	90
Kuwait	1.1	29	31640	29
Lebanon	3.9	87	5770	78
Libya	5.7	72	7010	52
Morocco	33.2	134	2250	123
Oman	2.55	61	11120	53
Palestinian Territory	4.02	148	1239	106
Qatar	0.22	5	[40,000]	34
Saudi Arabia	22.0	54	15440	55
Syria	19.3	138	1760	105
Tunisia	10.2	117	3200	95
Turkey	73.9	77	8020	76
UAE	1.1		[More than 20,000]	31
Yemen	22.2	165	870	138
MENA	427.95		2794	

Notes:

- Sources are the World Bank and the UNDP.

- Per capita GNI are for 2007. GNI reflects citizens' welfare better than GDP figures because the former includes the net resources left in a given country after transfers of incomes and earnings from and into the country.
- The World Bank's estimates for Iraq, Qatar and the UAE only locate them within the low middle income group for the first and high income group for the latter two.

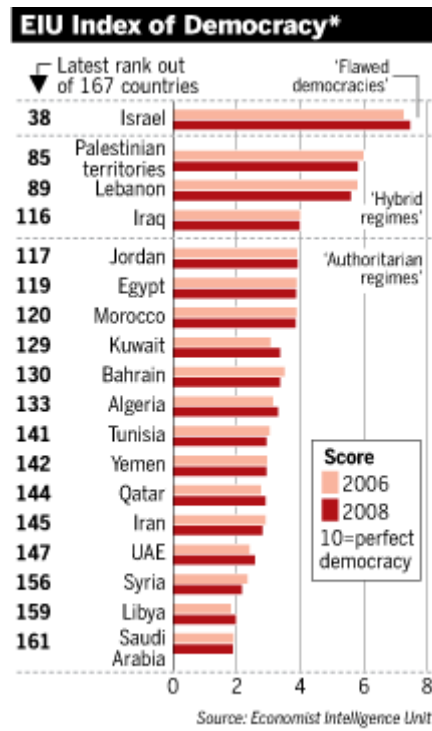
**Table -3-
Aggregated Governance Indicators for MENA**

Governance Indicator	Year	Percentile Rank (0-100)	Governance Score (-2.5 to +2.5)
<u>Voice and Accountability</u>	2006	26.2	-0.80
	2002	26.3	-0.81
	1998	27.9	-0.75
<u>Political Stability</u>	2006	34.8	-0.53
	2002	36.4	-0.43
	1998	36.9	-0.43
<u>Government Effectiveness</u>	2006	46.5	-0.16
	2002	46.7	-0.17
	1998	46.7	-0.18
<u>Regulatory Quality</u>	2006	44.5	-0.18
	2002	44.1	-0.23
	1998	39.1	-0.41
<u>Rule of Law</u>	2006	49.7	-0.04
	2002	51.1	0.00
	1998	52.3	+0.03
<u>Control of Corruption</u>	2006	51.1	-0.03
	2002	55.0	+0.05
	1998	52.7	-0.01

Bahrain is currently liberalizing politically, as can also be detected from improving country governance indicators provided by the World Bank. Bahrain comes closest to a Parliamentary Monarchy with a Parliament that has been functioning for a considerable period of time.

Egypt and Jordan are examples of adaptive regimes that lived up to international economic standards and preconditions that were set out by the IMF and World Bank without losing their grip on power. Tunisia presents an example of a state that liberalized economically but had a deteriorating political atmosphere. The Tunisian regime was able to institutionally adapt to international criteria for economic liberalization policies, yet at the same time President Bin Ali (who after a constitutional

amendment can run for an unlimited number of presidential terms) has cracked down on personal and political freedoms, which led to a sharp decline of human rights in the past decade.



To nuance this general overview it can be noted that the level of independence of political and civil society does vary from one state to another. For instance, as opposed to Egypt, political and civil society is much more independent and free in Morocco. At the same time, both Egypt and Morocco leave more room for opposition than Tunisia, which formally fits in the semi-authoritarian profile.

However, whether we are talking about an affluent or a poor MENA society, whether it is populous or sparsely populated or whether it lies low or high in terms of human development ranking, **none of the MENA states is characterized as “Free”**, as is clear from table one. **Worse: twelve are designated “Not free” and only seven are “Partly free”**.

The **Freedom House’s** ranking of 194 countries disaggregates liberties into two big categories: civil and political, grading individual countries from 1 to 7 from best to worst. In the domain of civil rights, one MENA country: Libya has a grade of seven, four countries have a grade of six, nine countries are graded five, four countries have a grade of four, and only Turkey is graded three, still considered “partly free” by the Freedom House standards. The picture is much worse when we turn to the other category: political rights. Four countries are graded seven, seven are graded six, six countries are graded five, only Kuwait is graded four, and Turkey has the grade of three.

Other indicators of freedom in the region are no less bleak. Out of the same 194 countries regularly surveyed by the Freedom House, Libya occupies the rank of 190 in terms of the freedom of press index, Syria’s ranking is 189, and the “freest”: Kuwait has a ranking of 116.

And although the gender empowerment index only covers 78 countries, it is quite revealing that the five MENA countries included in this survey occupy ranks ranging from 60 in Oman to 78 in Yemen and Saudi Arabia; i.e. all of them are in the lowest ranks. In fact, of all the indicators listed in table 2, only **the corruption index** shows significant divergences between the MENA states, where out of 180 countries surveyed by **Transparency International**, Syria, the most corrupt is ranked 138, while Qatar, the least corrupt is ranked 32.

So at a first glance there seems to be no correlation between the demographic, socio-economic indicators or the historical realities of any particular MENA country on

the one hand, and the degree of their democratic progress or the scope of civil and political liberties enjoyed by their population on the other. Qatar, the least populous of the region's countries and the most prosperous both in terms of per capita income and human development index is classified as not free, while the poorest MENA country: Yemen is partly free. Morocco, which enjoys a per capita GNI that is around one and half times higher than Egypt, is partly free while the latter is not free. An attempt to explain these seeming anomalies would be provided below.

3. The Eternal Quest for Explanation

We must keep in mind that all the above indices, important as they may be, are static. Even if they accurately measure the actual state of democratization (or the lack of it) in particular countries, they ***do not (and cannot) portray the dynamics of the various MENA societies***, especially when we are trying to measure long-term changes in the scale of civil and political liberties or of government accountability and transparency.

Hence, the prevalent tendency among many scholars and activists to view MENA as hopelessly locked in a succession of authoritarian regimes since times immemorial. And the privileged "explanation" which has been in the air for decades, and gained additional strength after 9/11 and thanks to such prominent experts as Bernard Lewis, invokes culture; and mainly Islam, as the legitimizing and perpetuating force of despotism. But let us look at the not quite stereotypical record of some Moslem countries and compare it with other so-called emerging democracies.

Although Indonesia, the largest Moslem country, and Malaysia, with a majority Moslem population, are far from presenting models for mature democratic states, they have nevertheless embarked on the path to democratization no later than Latin America. In the MENA region, the political systems of Turkey and Lebanon are based on multiparty democratic institutions, albeit suffering from several interruptions: two military coups in the former and a protracted civil war in the latter.

Therefore a rigorous scrutiny of the impact of Islam (or any other religious or secular doctrine, for that matter) should draw serious lessons from a series of failed 1950s-1960s theorizations, which popularized the "necessary" relationship between Catholicism on the one hand and the preponderance of authoritarian regimes in Spain, Portugal, Latin America and the Philippines. Other theories tried to establish similar relationships between Orthodox Christianity and despotism in Russia and Eastern Europe, or between Confucianism and underdevelopment when most East Asian countries were even worse off than Egypt, Iraq and Syria in terms of human development indicators and in terms of human development and democracy indicators until the mid-1960s.

The point is that cultural norms are much more adaptive and flexible to changing socio-economic circumstances than many of us would like to believe. One need not to declare his/her total rupture with Islam, Christianity or Judaism in order to present a

more enlightened, or fundamentalist interpretation of the belief system that s/he thinks embodies the absolute truth.

Even among today's authoritarian MENA states, we should keep in mind that they have very divergent past experiences with parliamentary and multiparty rule. Without claiming to present a systematic typology, let's remember that Egypt had a constitution as early as 1865 and established a representative council during the 1880's; i.e. when it was still part of the despotic Ottoman empire. Until the 1952 revolution, parties competed in periodically held elections. And despite the powers vested in the monarch, the latter had to ask the winning party to form the government. Iraq was also a constitutional monarchy during the period 1921-1958. Candidates to the Iraqi (and Lebanese) parliaments could either run as individuals or as members of electoral lists.

Syria, Morocco and Iran present very mixed pictures.

Iran (Persia until 1925) **was the first country not only in MENA, but in the non-Western world where a popular revolt in 1906; the "Mashrouta Revolution" forced the Shah to cede power to an elected parliament.** A complex interaction of geostrategic and socio-economic factors, however, led to a reversal of the reformist process, especially since the early 1950s, when free elections brought the nationalist Dr. Mosaddegh to power. The tragic overthrow of the nationalists and the role of the US and the UK intelligence services in plotting the military coup are well-documented. Between then and the triumph of the Islamic revolution in 1979, **the Savak**, the notorious secret service of the Shah, had the upper hand in running the everyday domestic political life in Iran.

Syria's experiment with multiparty democracy was much briefer and turbulent than Egypt or Iraq. Between 1946 when it gained independence from France and 1958 when it merged with Egypt in a short-lived union called The United Arab Republic, it adopted a hybrid version of the French fourth republic's system: a parliamentary republic. However, during these twelve years, three military coups proved that this system was a farce.

Perhaps Morocco represents a unique and an interesting case as it is the only MENA country whose political system has been anchored around a (formal) recognition of **multiparty competition and who preserved that system uninterrupted since its independence in 1956, unlike its Algerian and Tunisian neighbors who, while acknowledging the role of political parties, established a one-party rule after their independence.**

At the other side of the spectrum are those MENA countries that had no past experience with democracy or political parties. The obvious cases here are Saudi Arabia and the other five Gulf Emirates, as well as Yemen and Libya. Where, under the impact of pan-Arabist and Marxist ideas in the 1960s some local organizations were formed notably in Oman, Bahrain and Kuwait, they were outlawed, confined to exile or forced to carry their activities under other banners (in Kuwait and for a brief period in Bahrain).

Thus while the widespread stereotype of an undifferentiated MENA, Muslim or Arab world that has always been under the rule tyrannical monolithic regimes and whose societies had not exercised the pluralism of competing views and ideologies draws on many supporting arguments from several decades of authoritarianism in the

region, close scrutiny shows that it is seriously flawed. This is not to say that the *ancien regimes* in Iran, Egypt, Iraq and Syria were democratic or uncorrupt. But in terms of the conventional indices that measure liberties such as the independence of the judiciary, freedom of the press, holding of periodic elections, the formation of political parties and associations among others, they were comparable to dozens of today's "democracies" such as Thailand, several Central Asian and ex-Soviet republics and many African countries. Furthermore, these systems survived longer than Germany's Weimar Republic, and their subjugation to authoritarian regimes has certainly lasted less than the duration of Chinese and Soviet authoritarianism.

The above remarks can form the ***basis to answer several crucial questions that are regularly raised by policy advisors and policymakers, as well as scholars and democracy assistance groups. The examples cited above, as well as many other historical cases demonstrate that the political process in any given country is never a linear progression from authoritarianism to democracy, via semi-authoritarianism. Hence, unless one is describing abstract and very long-term universal processes, such concepts as Huntington's "waves of democracy" or Fukuyama's "history being driven by humanity's search for democracy" suffer from a lack of empirically founded evidence.***

Thus, the endeavor to enhance the political processes leading to the rise of a multiparty democracy and the rule of law, would raise the important questions of how and why have the modest achievements of the first half of the twentieth century been reversed in many MENA countries? How and why had some of them (especially Egypt and recently Iraq) formally acknowledged the failure of authoritarianism? How and why could those countries that had not progressed from authoritarianism (most notably Saudi Arabia, Libya and several Persian Gulf Emirates) resist the pressures for change? And, how and why had a third group with no past democratic past (Jordan, Algeria, and Yemen; e.g.) take varying steps towards legitimating multiplicity and pluralism?

The present study has no claim to provide the "final" and "full" answers (if there is such a thing as a final and full answer in politico-historical processes) to these highly complex and controversial questions. Its modest aim is, rather, to highlight some pertinent elements that have contributed to the existing political structure(s) in MENA, pending a more profound discussion and contribution from other experts and activists. A reasonably satisfactory approach to these issues should help us in drawing some scenarios for the likely (or potential) steps that the various MENA countries could take towards enhancing (or arresting, for that matter) the progress to democracy.

During the period 1952-1967, the Arab World and the MENA in general underwent colossal changes that laid the grounds for today's socio-political structures. The entire region witnessed a wave of nationalist revolutions/military coups that was ushered by Egypt's Free Officers' overthrow of the monarchy (1952-1953). With the exception of Iran, whose nationalistic ambitions were carried through the ballot boxes and a military coup, instigated and encouraged by US CIA agents, suppressed the people's aspirations (for a while), Iraq, Syria and Yemen followed suit with "Free Officers" launching their respective coups/revolutions. Algeria and Tunisia, on the other hand, established their one-party regimes after gaining independence from France.

Table three may give an indication of the huge turbulence in the region during the 1950s and 1960s. Of a total of 50 successful coups in the period 1935-1987, sixty eight percent took place from 1951 to 1970 and seventy seven of the failed coups took place during the same period.

But the table also shows that military coups took place before (and after) the 1950s and 1960s, though much less frequently. So what distinguishes the 1950s and 1960s?

Iran's last dynasty, the Pahlavi, came to power when the commander of the armed forces, Reza Shah launched a coup and declared himself as a Shah in the mid 1920s. The first military coup in the Arab world took place in 1937 in Iraq, and since its independence from France in 1946 until 1970, Syria was the hotbed for the most frequent coups. It should be noticed, however, that all these aforementioned coups did not (and could not) attempt at drastically changing the status quo. Military officers expressed their dissatisfaction with the existing cabinet or the way public affairs had been run by launching coups that did not question the basics of the incumbent regimes, whether in 1937 Iraq or in 1960 Turkey.

**Table -3-
Coups D'état in the MENA Region*
1935- 1990**

Period	Successful Coups	Foiled Coups	Total
1935-1940	2	-	2
1941-1950	4	2	6
1951-1960	14	6	20
1961-1970	20	18	38
1971-1980	6	4	10
1981-1990	5	1	6
Total	51	31	82

- The data in this table include Sudan and Mauritania. These two countries are not included in this study.

The 1950s-1960s revolutions went much further. They abolished the monarchies; launched radical land reform acts that ended the socio-economic power of the big landed aristocracy, nationalized the major sources of wealth generation and institutionalized a centralized polity revolving around the state, a "leading party" or a populist "leader".

Without digging hard to understand how and why these transformations were carried and why the general populace responded so positively to them, democracy assistance efforts would be doomed to failure.

Whatever views one hold towards these changes in the MENA region, the sheer number of hundreds of thousands pouring into the streets to celebrate the coups is

testimony to the fact that ordinary people never felt that the “old” democracy really expressed their wishes or aspirations, nor defended their interests.

The hundreds of thousands of semi-serfs in Egypt, Iran and Iraq were looking for emancipation from the tutelage of landlords. Whether right or wrong, the old regimes were largely seen as weak, corrupt and puppets of the British, American or French imperialist powers. The humiliating defeat of seven Arab armies by a non-regular Jewish army which led to the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 (or the “Nakba”, the disaster, in the Arabic discourse) sent shock waves all over the MENA region and seemed to provide an irrefutable argument for the corruption, weakness and collaboration of the Arab regimes with the imperialists.

The above may explain the general acquiescence to, if not welcome, of the military changes in the region. In the eyes of the general populace, sovereignty and statehood have historically been associated with a highly centralized government running most of the essential affairs from the capital and the central ministries. From that time on and with the exception of a few dissident voices, the ***idea that strength meant a highly centralized state with formidable armed forces*** was rarely put to question

Any serious grass root democratic movement in MENA and certainly any democracy assistance group should reflect on, and critically assess the pre-revolutionary parliamentary practices and structures.

Parliaments were imposed on societies that had been predominantly agrarian, illiterate and extremely poor. The agrarian structures were reminiscent of those of medieval Europe, where landlords manipulated the “voices” of their tenants as they were squeezing them economically. The parliamentary systems were thus seen as geared to perpetuate the dominance of a small coterie of corrupt elites. Moreover the existing political structures were so sclerotic that they shunned attempts by the rising post WWII urban middle classes: professional groups and government bureaucrats and officers, let alone the working classes, to participate in political life thus providing a fertile soil for revolt.

But how and why could the military achieve in the 1950s-1960s what they had not been able to do during the 1930s or 1940s?

Three to four decades of “parliamentary rule” in Egypt, Iraq and Syria ended up with consecrating the archaic types of ownership and terms of power. Iran’s experience of a popular vote was tragically reversed by a bloody coup supported by the western “democracy” camp. In the meantime, the post-WWII atmosphere of the rising liberation movements through out the “third world”, and the stunning victories of the Soviet Union in the war and its ability to transform itself from a backward country to the second superpower within four decades, all seemed to provide the people in MENA, as elsewhere, with a different model to achieve the same goals that the region was looking for: modernization, building strong states, overcoming poverty and eradicating illiteracy.

But even if one agrees that the overthrow of the ancien regimes was ***desirable*** by large sections of the MENA people, a more important question arises: what made these ***desired changes feasible?*** Past military coups tried to force certain “reforms” on the existing regimes with varying degrees of success. But the 1950s and 1960s revolts declared no less than the abolition of the existing ones.

Besides, and perhaps a major facilitator of the political upheaval in the region, **a little noticed economic “revolution” laid the ground for the transformation of the present MENA structures.** This happened when the oil cartel that used to control the oil production and exportation of the Middle East had to change its terms of agreement with the oil producing countries and to pay around fifty percent of the export revenues to the host governments, instead of a few cents or shillings per ton of exported oil. In relative terms, this huge increase in revenues was the basis for the rise of **today’s rentier states.**

4. The Leviathan State: Withering Democracy?

Although much has been written on the rentier states in the MENA region and elsewhere over the past four decades, the full implications and consequences of rentierism for the configuration of MENA’s political systems have not been studied thoroughly yet.

Rent, in its broadest sense is defined as **a source of wealth that is external to the economy; revenues that are derived from sectors which do not require the employment of a significant number of the local workforce and are dependent on external factors.** In the case of MENA, such sources of revenue include oil exports, foreign aid to governments and revenues derived from being located in a strategic region, for example: fees paid to Egypt for passage through the Suez Canal.

Once one thinks of the windfall profits of speculators or giant corporations engaged in mineral production in many parts of the world, it becomes clear that rent comprises a fraction of the revenues of practically any given country. And many of these countries are prosperous, democratic and stable.

But a **rentier economy or a rentier state defines a qualitatively different category to which most of the MENA countries belong.** For in this case, a prominent scholar delineates four characteristics which must be present in order for a state to be classified as rentier. First, the rentier economy must be one whose revenue derives predominantly (more than 40 percent) from oil and other foreign sources and whose expenditure constitutes a substantial share of the GDP. Second, the origin of the rent must be external to the economy. Third, in the rentier state only a few are engaged in the generation of rent (wealth), while the majority is involved in its distribution and consumption. A rentier economy is thus an economy where the creation of wealth is centered on a small fraction of the population. Finally, **the government must be the principal recipient of the external rent in the economy.**

According to these criteria, MENA represents a textbook case of rentierism.

But how and why has this phenomenon impacted the political development of the region?

If we go back to our table listing the failed and successful coups in the region, it should be evident that whatever the motives of the coup leaders had been, be they opportunists, megalomaniacs or sheer patriots, **one thing they could not have overcome before the early 1950s; i.e. before the rise of the financial power of the state; namely, confronting the big landed aristocracy and establishing their own power.**

First, The political atmosphere of the cold war and the particularly strategic position which the Middle East occupied in the East-West division ensured constant flows of aid and easy credits from the two superpowers (as well as France, the UK and others) to their major allies in the region.

But most important was the “munasafa” (half-sharing of profits) agreements between the host countries and the oil consortium in 1952 which ushered in **the relative liberation of the state from the need to extract its revenues from the domestic economy in exchange for giving concessions to the big landlords, merchants and other private actors**, from whom it had usually derived its revenues in the form of taxes.

Thus, what had been hitherto **desirable** became now **feasible**. And it is here that we can see how the political processes in MENA became far from conducive to democratization.

The conventionally accepted definition of democracy as a system that distributes power and regulates the differences among various contending groups within a given society in a peaceful way and within a framework of rules that are accepted by a majority of the country’s population, requires that there exist institutions that arbitrate in a more or less fair way the competition among these groups. In a democracy, these institutions: the judiciary, police and the public media, among others, are expected to be financed by the taxpayer and hence have an interest in sustaining stability and prosperity in the country by keeping a balance among the various sections of society. *And it is the taxation mechanism that guarantees the accountability of the state institutions before the citizens who provide the latter with the resources that allow them to function properly; a mechanism that is encapsulated by the famous American motto: No Taxation without Representation.*

The above allows us to contextualize the **post 1950s revolutionary changes in MENA**; for while they were made possible by the flow of substantial wealth into the governments’ coffers, ***the revolutionary regimes exacerbated and had an interest in perpetuating the rentier structures.***

Most MENA States found themselves with a relatively plenty supply of foreign currency from the oil revenues, (and/or foreign aid and Suez Canal fees) which took a further sharp turn upwards since the early 1970s. Alleviating the misery of the populations seemed an easy task for the ruling regimes. Secure state jobs were guaranteed to all applicants. This was facilitated by the fact that, unlike manufacturing or agriculture, creating jobs in the civil, military and paramilitary services required no substantial additional inputs. States handed lavish subsidies to brokers, contractors, and mediators who supplied the requirements of their grandiose spending schemes.

This appearance of affluence in the GCC countries and the big strides in the standards of living in the other oil-exporting countries (Libya, Algeria, Iraq and Iran) camouflaged the **chronic inefficiency** of these regimes. Although this study is not expected to draw attention to the economic repercussions of the rise of rentierism in MENA, it may be useful to draw attention to such revealing labels as “**the resource curse**”, “**the paradox of plenty**” or the “**Dutch syndrome**” that have been applied to the MENA countries in search for an explanation for their resistance to modernization, and the persistence of underdevelopment in the region.

In this context, two questions are frequently raised:

1. Out of the nineteen MENA countries, only eight are major oil exporters. If the rentierism thesis is valid, why haven't the eleven other countries diverge from the above characterization?

The answer to this question is that prosperity, due to rentierism or not, has its regional spillover effects. But as was mentioned above, the qualitative difference here lies in the fact that rentier states have more freedom at dispersing and allocating wealth due to the sense that the revenues from natural resources are not deducted from the citizens' incomes. Being relatively free from pressures by the public, a rentier's state decision ***to allocate its resources to buy-off the loyalty of poorer countries or to improve the educational, health or living standards in general is widely seen as largesse and not a duty.*** The aid that non rentier states receive is itself a form of rent that shields them from accountability.

Hence, the substantial amounts of **'strategic' rent** that flowed to **non-major oil producers like Syria and Egypt** from the major oil exporters: Saudi Arabia, the Gulf Emirates, Iraq and Libya in the form of grants in exchange for political services. Between 1973 and 1979, official Arab assistance to Syria rose from 8.9 percent to 16.1 percent of its GNP. Egypt's comparative ratios between 1973 and 1978 were 7.4 and 9.9 percent respectively. Stemming out popular protest against non-support of "Arab brethren facing Israeli aggression", mediating between the two conflicting parties in the Iran-Iraq war, inciting and then defusing attempts at attacking oil-producing interests during the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990) are just some examples of the ways that non-major oil producers like Syria and Egypt managed to divert some of the financial wealth of the oil boom to their coffers.

Within this atmosphere that was aptly called "The Arab cold War", resource-poor countries like Jordan, Morocco, Bahrain and Oman stood much to gain in the form of US financial support, while Egypt, Syria and South Yemen lined to receive free or nearly free military equipment and other benefits from the USSR. Non-rentier, but rent-originating incomes provided indispensable resources to Yemen, Lebanon, Morocco, Turkey and many others in the form of labor remittances, tourism and investments. Over the last quarter century or so, labor remittances have accounted for more than one-fifth of the GDP of Jordan, Lebanon and Yemen.

The above might provide a response to the first question raised above. On the one hand, the entire region has been affected/ inflicted by the rentier syndrome on the one hand, but the degree of "infliction" by any single country or region depended, and still depends on the relative weight that dependence on rentier economies affects the overall functioning of the impacted region.

2. A second question that has been raised challenges the validity of the rentierism thesis over the long-term. Acknowledging the initial dependence of MENA's societies on state handouts, many affluent private individuals, families or groups have developed into autonomous actors that should have a stake in lifting state restrictions and promoting democracy. Eventually, these private actors would push for their voices and concerns to be heard, and for some kind of representation in the political processes of their countries. According to this objection, the rentier state cannot stay omnipotent all the time.

Indeed, one can argue that the modest steps towards liberalization in many MENA regions since the 1990s may be attributed at least partly to this process

when the relative weight of private actors vis-à-vis the state increased and therefore enabled the former to demand some concessions. Consultative bodies, not quite toothless, have been established in some Gulf Emirates, and even in Saudi Arabia, tightly controlled municipal elections were held (see bloc).

However, while the changing power relations between private and state actors in Egypt or Morocco may be at the root of the liberalization steps in both countries, one must be very cautious when trying to extrapolate these trends into the future or even to use them as the sole explanation for the very modest steps towards liberalization in the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) countries. For it is precisely upon this line of reasoning that many scholars pinned their hopes that economic liberalization that began sweeping the world since the 1980s would be automatically associated with political liberalization or would eventually lead to it.

The unfortunate fact, however, is that despite the rise of multi-billion private conglomerates in many MENA major oil-exporting countries, the states remained the ***largest single purchaser of the products and services of their respective private sectors, as is clearly demonstrated by the statistics on the percentage of public expenditure to the total expenditure*** in most of the MENA countries. The question,

Reform in a Sclerotic Kingdom

Saudi Arabia is the only country in the world that is named after its ruling family, and one of the few who do not have a written constitution on the grounds that the Koran is its constitution.

Between February and April 2005, Saudi Arabia held nationwide municipal elections; the first elections ever in the country's history.

The elections, however, involved just half the members of the municipal councils, with only men allowed to vote or stand as candidates.

Senior Saudi officials were quoted that this had been a "first step" in a process of gradual democratization, and that women would be allowed to vote in 2009.

Well into 2009, the Saudi authorities seem to have steered away from these modest steps. In 2008, the Saudi Gazette quoted "informed sources" that the vote might be postponed for two years.

Last year the National Society for Human Rights called on the government to issue a new electoral law clarifying rules on candidacy and voting without any discrimination between men and women.

The legislative in Saudi Arabic is composed of a one hundred and fifty male members *Shura* Council, **all appointed by the King.**

Since the death of its founder, King Abdul Aziz Al Saud in 1953, the Kingdom has been ruled by a succession of his sons, Saud, Faisal, Khaled, Fahad and currently Abdullah.

Alongside the incumbent king who is eighty-six years old, the main pillars of the regime are his brother crown prince Sultan, minister of defense since 1963 and in his eighties, his other brother prince Nayef and his nephew prince Saud al Faisal, respectively ministers of Interior and foreign affairs since 1975.

then, is to what extent would the private sector have a stake in transparent and non corrupt practices on the one hand, and in leveling the grounds for political and economic competition on the other when its fortunes and social power is dependent on its closeness to the state agencies and or personal connections? Another question follows directly from the preceding one: does the generally accepted statement that the middle classes are always and everywhere progressive, liberal and pro-democracy hold true in the case of rentier states in general and in MENA in particular?

With the states competing for the scarce domestic entrepreneurial capacities and skilled and qualified workers, private initiative turned to cater for state needs. States offered higher profits for contractors, supplied their clients with cheap (and more often than not free) credits from state banks, and sometimes even offered employees salaries for non-existent tasks. Hence the contradictory interests of private capitalists in pushing for more freedom of action and having more say on running the state on the one hand, and perpetuating the practices of opacity and corruption in an unaccountable state on the other. Moreover, as the MENA social and economic structures got more diversified since the 1970s oil-price hikes, the so-called middle classes became no less diversified in their inner structures, worldviews, norms and values and political orientations.

The Iranian bazaar, the Hamidiyyah and Khan al Khalili suqs in Damascus and Cairo respectively, provide stark cases of middle classes that are geared towards the demand of their respective domestic clients, even as they import much of their inputs and export much of their products. These are more autonomous towards their respective states and, as historical experience has shown, more hostile to the latter which they perceive as favoring their own cronies. And it would be too simplistic to assume that it is the pro-western policies of the ruling regimes that enrage this important section of the MENA private business world. The crucial role played by the Iranian bazaar in the anti-Shah revolution has been widely interpreted as a stance to the Shah's pro-west policies. Yet, only three years after the fall of the Shah, the Syrian suqs of Hama, Aleppo and Damascus provided the fuel for revolt against the "pro-Soviet" Syrian regime which was brutally crushed.

What conclusions can be drawn from the above as far as the prospects for democracy in MENA are concerned?

Diverse origins, diverse activities, diverse relationships with state agencies and diverse relationships with the outside world make it difficult to generalize about how the "middle class" reacts to calls for democracy in any particular MENA country. If we accept that there is such a category as the "middle class", then it might be worthwhile noting a seemingly paradoxical phenomenon **regarding its worldviews, namely that the sections that originate from provincial towns or those whose activities are more geared towards regional and/or local markets are conservative and traditional, yet are more prone to embrace non-conformist political ideologies or goals, while the more "globalized" sections might look more liberal and adaptive of "western" values, yet more defensive of corruption, opaque practices and apprehensive of pluralistic and competitive democracy.** The sad fact is that western (and even local) observers have more often than not confused pro-western "cosmopolitan" practices with genuine democratic aspirations that might not (and actually do not) conform with what they would like to see: the establishment of a pro-western regime that adopts fully liberal economic, political, social and ethical measures.

To sum up: With the rise of rentierism from the 1950s, and more sharply from the 1970s, the relationship between states and societies in most MENA states underwent a tidal change. The state was liberated from the need to tax the population and thus looked like a patron handing out largesse to its subjects rather than conceding their rights to them. Populist strategies managed to create jobs for millions of people in the civil, military and paramilitary services.

The new, rentier “social contract” was based on buying people’s acquiescence, if not support, in exchange for services, salaries and handouts. Autonomous organizations, be they political parties, trade unions or gender, youth, or professional associations were faced with an existentialist dilemma as ordinary people began weighing the material losses (in addition to brutal harassment, naturally) if they opt to take independent stances, and not necessarily oppositional ones, vis-à-vis their governments against the benefits which may not add up to more than being left alone without harassment if they keep silent. However, as we shall see in the next sections, the general picture just drawn does not preclude the fact that even at the height of prosperity of the MENA countries, there were and are always opposition movements. The general trend until recently was that these movements could not draw large masses in the open. A major exception in this respect was the Iranian oil workers strikes that brought the Shah’s regime to its knees in 1979. But that courageous strike took place when the Shah’s regime was already crumbling.

A crucial byproduct of the transformation of most MENA countries into rentierism has been the diminishing autonomy of state institutions vis-à-vis the political leaders. And where such institutions, like Egypt’s judiciary or Iraq’s professional armed forces preserved some independence, the political rulers created parallel institutions like exceptional courts, or paramilitary militias.

Whether the country under discussion is ruled by a political party or not, this state of affairs compounded the sense of despair among the populace of engaging in peaceful political activities, because of the widespread perception that these regimes have perfected the coercion machinery and geared it towards preserving their firm grip on power.

The past fifteen years or so, however, have witnessed palpable shifts in the region. And it is to this context that we should turn to look at the landscape of political parties (and other autonomous organizations) in today’s MENA, to explain how and why autonomous popular movements have been on the rise and seek possible means to assist them.

5. MENA’s Democracy: What’s in the Name?

As the first decade of the twenty first century draws to a close, eight of the nineteen MENA countries are hereditary monarchies. These are: Morocco, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman and the United Arab Emirates. In none of these monarchies are the rulers mere symbols of sovereignty, for they wield huge legislative, judicial and executive powers. Yet, apart from the form of the system, one cannot lump all these countries under one category as far as the state of liberties, the

scope of freedoms of association, expression and opposition and the roles and powers of elected bodies are concerned.

For lack of a more precise analytical classification, we will follow the conventionally accepted description of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, Libya and Syria as “authoritarian” regimes; a description that has been used by Marina Ottaway and other scholars. This description is quite revealing as some MENA monarchies are not considered authoritarian while two republican regimes are included in this category. Of the eleven MENA republics, the Libyan system does not even recognize the concept of elections and for all intents and purposes has sanctified the leader of its 1969 military coup as the sole arbiter and ruler of the country. Syria, on the other hand, is still ruled by one dynasty drawing formal legitimacy for its regime from an arbitrarily written constitution that gives the Ba’th Party, which came to power in 1963 through a military coup, “the leading role” in running the state and society. When President Hafez al Assad passed away in 2000, a hastily convened “People’s Assembly” amended the constitution to lower the minimum required age of the president from forty to thirty-four, to fit the age of his successor son.

Hereditary Republics

Perhaps the most discussed story in today’s Egypt is whether Mr. **Jamal Mubarak**, the son of Egypt’s incumbent president, is being groomed to succeed his 83 years old father.

Mr. Mubarak Jr. is the vice president of the ruling National Democratic Party led by his father.

Because of Egypt’s relative respect for its own institutions, no one would have taken the idea of hereditary politics in republican Egypt seriously until the late 1990s.

2000: **Bashar al Assad** succeeded his deceased father as president of Syria. His brother-in-law, General Asif Shawkat, is the head of the all powerful General Intelligence Service. Maher al Assad, Bashar’s brother is member of the Central Committee of the ruling Ba’th Party, while Bashar’s maternal uncles: the Madhloums, are in charge of the Republican Guards.

Before that, **Uday** and **Qussay**, the two sons of Saddam Hussein wielded huge powers in Iraq and the latter was seen as the inevitable successor to his father were Iraq was not to witness the earthquake change of 2003.

In the “new” democratic Iraq, **Qubad al Talbani**, son of Iraq’s president Jalal al Talbani, is representative of the Kurdish Regional Government in the US. Massoud al Barzani is the president of the autonomous Kurdistan region. The prime minister of the region is **Necheervan al Barzani**, his nephew and the head of the intelligence services in Kurdistan is **Masrouf al Barzani**, Massoud’s elder son.

Today, **Saiful Islam al Qaddafi**, **al Sa’idi al Qaddafi** and **Qaddaf al Dam al Qaddafi**, son and two brothers of the Libyan autocratic leader respectively, enjoy incontestable powers although they have no official posts. Saiful Islam heads the Libyan TV services and chairs al Qaddafi “non-governmental” Institution.

Ahmed Ali Abdullah Salih, son of the Yemeni president leads the Presidential Guards, the most powerful military units. The President’s half brother, Ali Muhsin al Ahmar, leads the first armored brigade in the army and is commander of the northwestern military sector. His nephew, Mohamed Abdullah Salih nicknamed Yahia, is the head of the Central Security Agency, another nephew Ammar Mohamed Abdullah Salih is the deputy head of the National Security Apparatus, his maternal uncle Abdul Wahab leads the southern military sector. Abdullah Salih’s in laws from his three marriages occupy various important posts: Yemen’s ambassador to the US, governors of various provinces, mayor of the capital and director of the general economic establishment which monopolized the import of several basic goods to Yemen.

“Semi-authoritarian” regimes include Iran, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Jordan, Kuwait, Bahrain and Yemen. These countries present an interesting case where

the voter encounters much of the familiar democratic formalities, yet is quite certain that the net outcome of any electoral process is predetermined. Competing groups may experience changes in their relative weight in the parliament, but the core group who has the ultimate say in the decision and policy making process remains unchanged.

This characterization, however, should be qualified as the space of choice for the voters vary to a large extent in these countries. Parliamentary elections in Kuwait and Iran are far from facades. There are serious differences between the competing groups running for election and the voters are not coerced to vote any particular group. However, ultimate power in both countries, especially Iran, lies with an unelected ruler: the Supreme Guide of the Revolution in the case of Iran and the Emir in the case of Kuwait.

The distinction between “authoritarian” and “semi-authoritarian” regimes, however, is not fictitious. In the latter group and despite the various forms of harassment, there is often a relative freedom of press and association and political and civil actors have a relative freedom as regards their actions and statements. These states have multiparty systems, regular elections and more characteristics of a democratic system. At the same time, however, in all these countries political parties face serious limitations and restrictions and cannot operate freely.

The deficiency of the authoritarian/semi authoritarian dichotomy is evident when we consider the remaining four MENA countries: Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq and the Palestinian Territories. According to the conventional criteria, Turkey is the closest to a democratic system. However, when one considers the influential role of the military in its political process, its oppression of the Kurdish people and denying them their basic rights or the harsh laws against the freedom of expression, such characterization should be qualified. Indeed one may be even tempted to compare Turkey’s policies of disqualifying any ‘non-secular” individual or political group from office with Iran’s policies of disqualifying any individual or political group that it deems “non-Islamic”. And while the Turkish constitution states that the country’s sovereignty is derived from the people (article 6.1), article 4 declares the immovability of the founding principles of the republic and bans any proposals for their modification, thus imposing limits on the right of the people to choose their political system.

As for Iraq, Lebanon and The Palestinian Territories, the picture seems highly nuanced and it may be too early to fit them within a definite category. Lacking the basic structure of an independent state, Palestine is understandably incomparable with the rest of the region. Iraq and Lebanon, on the other hand, can be dealt with as post-conflict countries. The formal political structures and institutions in both countries are democratic: freedom of press, association and formation of political parties, separation of powers, subjugating the armed forces to civilian rule, periodical elections that are relatively free, etc... However, the fact that in both countries the state has not yet monopolized the use of legal coercion and the existence of armed militias warrants a reserved judgment pending the final settlement of their domestic conflicts.

the Islamic Republic of Iran was adopted by a referendum on October 24, 1979 and went into force on December 3rd. It was amended on July 28, 1989.

The preamble of the constitution ascribes the failure of the “anti-despotic movement for constitutional government” between 1906 and 1911 and the anti-colonialist movement for the nationalization of petroleum in 1952-1953 to the lack of religious commitment of the leaders of these movements.

Hence, the “central axis” of Iran’s system is

Secularism in Turkish Constitutions

Secularism in Turkey was introduced with the Turkish Constitution of 1924 and later the Ataturk's Reforms set the administrative and political requirements to create a modern, democratic, secular state. After thirteen years of its introduction, laïcité was explicitly stated in the second article of the Turkish constitution on February 5, 1937. The current Turkish constitution neither recognizes an official religion nor promotes any. Turkey's "laïcité" does not call for a strict separation of religion and the state, but describes the state's stance as one of "active neutrality."

The current Constitution of Turkey was ratified in 1982 by popular referendum during the military junta of 1980-1983.

It is the fourth constitution of the Republic of Turkey: The first Turkish Constitution was the Constitution of 1921, followed by the Constitution of 1924 and the Constitution of 1961. It was last amended in 2004 and is currently being reviewed.

The Constitution asserts that Turkey is a secular (2.1) and democratic (2.1), republic (1.1) that derives its sovereignty (6.1) from the people. The sovereignty rests with the Turkish Nation, who delegates its exercise to an elected unicameral parliament, the Turkish Grand National Assembly.

Article 4 declares the immovability the founding principles of the Republic defined in the first three Articles and bans any proposals for their modification. The preamble also invokes the

6. The Dilemma of Political Parties

Can one take the percentage of turnout in legislative elections as an indicator of the confidence the electorate in their political system? Empirical data do not support such a hypothesis, since a low turnout in the advanced democracies has been generally associated with the voters' sense of confidence that no critical issues are at stake and hence their relative indifference to the outcome of elections.

Yet any observer would agree that a fair electoral competition between say, the Moslem Brothers and the ruling National Democratic Party in Egypt has the potential to produce a tidal change in Egypt and the entire region. Nevertheless, the general trend has been a low turnout of voters even when there was evidence that manipulative methods had been used to pressure them to go to the ballots. There were (and will be) important exceptions, to be sure. Despite perilous security conditions, an impressive percentage of voters in Iraq's and Lebanon's 2005 parliamentary elections turned out. The same applies to the Palestinian elections of 2006 which brought Hamas to power.

The above stands against any "culturalist" approach which claims that certain cultures, i.e. non-western, are not conducive to democracy. What distinguishes the three cases of high turnout mentioned above?

1. The voters felt that the elections had the potential to change the landscape of their respective societies; the choice between a free sovereign or a Syrian dominated Lebanon which was designed to be a battleground with Israel on behalf of the Syrian regime; the choice between a corrupt Palestinian authority which had not delivered on its promises to bring peace and create an independent state and a movement that was seen as more resolute and less corrupt; and in the case of Iraq it was simply a choice of going to the votes and experiencing the right to choose a government in a country where three generations had never had any dream of going to ballots.
2. In all the above-mentioned cases, the voters "rightly" realized that their votes could make a difference. Whatever one (rightly) says about manipulation, buying-off votes or coercion, the fact is that these three elections did produce qualitative changes (for better or worse) in the political landscapes of these three countries.

Then, as most MENA voters do not show up for electoral rallies or, worse to vote, should this be interpreted as having no faith in their "self-styled" representatives, or in the electoral systems that they are asked to join?

The shifting voting patterns between Iraq's 2005 parliamentary elections and January 2009 provincial elections, as well as the changing attitude of many Lebanese towards the ruling groups represent a clear contrast to Egypt, Jordan or Yemen where a minimum percentage of "loyal" voters is guaranteed by the ruling parties that assures their continuing grip on power.

Appendix -1- of this study may partially explain this paradoxical situation where all the evidence point to rising autonomous protest movements throughout MENA, while political parties are not capable of taking the initiative in mobilizing, organizing or orienting these movements. On April 6, 2008, Egypt witnessed for the first time in more than half a century a partly successful strike in which more than a hundred thousand people took part. In less than a year since then, almost 1500 strikes and sit-ins have taken place many of them forcing the authorities to positively respond to the protesters' demands. An interesting indicator is a poll conducted in Iraq in June 2005, two years after the fall of Saddam's regime and when the turnout for the elections was surprisingly high. In this poll, 49.84 percent, almost half the respondents, indicated that they do not trust political parties at all, 11.77 percent did not quite trust them, 16.93 percent had some confidence in them and only 6.3 percent had full confidence in parties. The same

poll showed that 78.02 percent did not support any particular party or movement and 90.3 percent said that they had not been contacted or approached by any political movement. Another study, conducted in Morocco whose political system since its independence has been based on multiparty democracy, showed that only eight percent of Moroccans see political parties as serving any purpose. Another survey was conducted in Lebanon in 1995. Although political parties in this country had been formed decades before the rise of the modern country itself and while parties form part and parcel of Lebanon's political system, 62 percent of adult Lebanese rejected the concept of political parties, 69 percent said that parties exacerbate social, humanitarian and environmental problems and "were deeply suspicious" of their ability to provide solutions to these problems, while 51 percent expressed serious doubts about the parties' capability to present propose, commit or implement a formula that would consolidate democracy or solidarity in Lebanon.

In thirteen of the nineteen states, non-elected and "automatically" elected heads of states hold considerable and unchallenged power. A natural question on the mind of any potential voter is the obvious: "why do I bother?"

Actually what many observers fail to appreciate about genuine movements is that by asking them to "prove" their sincere engagement in the political process they are requiring them to abide by the rules drawn by the same authoritarian regimes that they are promising their electorate to democratically change/overthrow. So why should citizen X vote for a party that s/he already knows is going to abide by the rules of a system that s/he does not trust?

While much has been written on the rentier state in general and in MENA in particular, very little if any, has been applied to the way it has penetrated MENA societies including its opposition parties and organizations, thus corrupting the public awareness of both pro and anti-regimes' groups.

In the above sections, we touched upon the concept of strategic rent which contributed to the corruption of Syrian and Lebanese states. But how is it that the PLO, the Palestine Liberation Organization (recognized by more than one hundred countries as the sole representative of the Palestinian people) has been anecdotally labeled "the richest liberation movement on earth"?

By the mid 1970s, practically each member of any Palestinian organization was entitled to a monthly salary. As the Lebanese civil war broke out in 1975, paying salaries to members of the various contending factions (right and left) became a norm. By the mid-1970s, hundred of billions began to pour into the coffers of "revolutionary" (Libya and Iraq) as well as "reactionary" regimes (mainly, Saudi Arabia). Baghdad, for example, became the Mecca of such a plethora ranging from several PLO factions, Lebanese, Yemenite and Tunisian pan-Arab organizations to Jean-Marie Le Pen, the extreme-right French leader. Saudi finance went so far as to aid US President Ronald Reagan in fighting the left-wing insurgency in Salvador and the Nicaraguan revolution not to mention the fantastic campaign to recruit Islamist fighters from all over the world to fight the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and its communist regime. It was this that turned the Jihadists (or 'freedom-fighters' as the US propaganda labeled them then) into a formidable international network.

Ordinary people in MENA began to acquiesce to the idea of external, non-accountable flow of money into the coffers of their own "parties". But just as the rise of

rentierism disrupted the relationship between state and society in MENA, generous financial flows into the coffers of political organizations disrupted the connections of these organizations with their constituencies, or profoundly transformed that relationship.

With the pouring of billions of dollars, paying a US \$ one million did not present a heavy cost for the paying government, but it meant that an organization had the ability to pay US \$ 100 to a thousand recruits, while keeping US \$ 900 thousands in the leaders' coffers. And what applied to the Palestinian fighters went quite well with the Kurdish Peshmerga (partisan fighters), the Lebanese fighters and the Iraqi religious and secular opponents of dictatorship in exile. And as "militancy" was refashioned as a job, it became very hard to bring back all those qualified Algerian, Iranian, Iraqi, Palestinian and Kurdish engineers, doctors and qualified personnel turned political activists into their "ordinary" professional life again.

Given the above, it may be necessary to review our image of the political party in MENA. The fact that many MENA regimes (The Palestinian Authority, Syria and Egypt notably) are facing legitimacy crises, the dwindling ability of governments to bribe or buy off the silence of the people and the mounting social problems facing increasing sections of the population present glimpses of hope for the rise of a new generation of political activists.

Besides the availability of huge resources for the Arab regimes, the regional and international context played a major role in the funding of many political organizations in MENA. The multifaceted rivalries within the region cut much deeper than dividing the regimes between left and right, or conservative and progressive, especially since the 1980s when Iraq and Iran were interlocked in their brutal eight-year war. Internationally, the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s was the period of heightened cold war between the US and the USSR. Thus, MENA political organizations, and especially in the Middle East, were viewed by regional or international players as proxies or potential proxies in managing their conflicts.

The major winner in this cold war was the Islamist political movements in the region. With the exception of Egypt's Moslem Brothers, these movements, it should be recalled, represented a new phenomenon that began to show up only in the mid-1970s, and were initially perceived with much suspicion by large segments of the region's population.

Egypt's Moslem Brothers were coming out of their underground life with the tacit support of President Anwar el Sadat who managed to use them against his main opponents at the time; the leftists and the pro-Nasser groups. Much of the senior echelons of the Moslem Brothers managed to preserve and rebuild their organization despite being victims of Nasser's brutal harassment by fleeing to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Emirates who nurtured them. Saudi Arabia immediately plunged in to pour funds into the movement. The US, naturally, was pleased to see the crack on the left undertaken by a movement that it did not have to fund itself.

And as the Lebanese civil war was looming in the air, Musa al Sadr, a Shi'ite cleric announced the founding of Amal, which was first called "The Movement of the Deprived" (*Harakat al Mahroumeen*), *an indicator that an explicitly religious label was still unwelcome*. Two years later, Iraqis began to hear of al Da'wa Party, when a

massive group of pilgrims to the Shi'ite holy shrines shouted anti-regime slogans, leading to a bloody attack on them and the execution of their leaders.

However, the two events that ushered in the consecration of Islamists as the major political forces in MENA were the Islamic revolution in Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan on 1979. In order to combat both, the US and its MENA allies, mainly Saudi Arabia, the Gulf Emirates and Egypt, threw all their weight behind the Sunni Jihadists.

For thousands of MENA youth, Jihad became synonymous with heroism, standing against the oppression of their ruling regimes, and a gainful job.

But patronage went further than recruiting militants with paid salaries. As many MENA states began to retreat from their earlier interventionist economic policies, the Islamists, benefiting from their vast informal networks of supporters, stepped in to establish businesses and find jobs for thousands of unemployed youth. This role is of particular importance in a region where formal employment institutions are almost absent, the labor market is highly personalized and employers depend on mouth word and personal ties to find job-seekers. In addition, extensive networks of clinics, schools, and social centers provided essential services for large segments of the Islamists' respective societies.

As such, the Islamist movements in countries like Lebanon, Egypt and Palestine developed into mini-states having their economy, armed forces and social welfare programs.

6. Is Democracy a Priority?

Projecting an image of omnipotence is essential for the Islamist movements in order to create a sense of total loyalty among their rank and file and sympathizers. This image in turn emboldens the members who challenge the ruling regimes with a conviction that their movement has the will and capability to strike back when they are attacked. In fact, the various services provided: employment, health care, schooling and social services contribute to the same purpose of empowering ordinary people as they partially free them from being hostages to the state. For example, the Yemeni Reform Assembly (YRA), a powerful Islamist party, provides hundreds of jobs to its followers in such diverse places as private societies, mosques, shops, bookshops and cassette stores specialized in religious production. When one of the members leaves abroad, the YRA takes care of the financial needs of his family; all this thanks to a powerful network that the YRA has knitted with many businessmen allowing it to carve their Zakat (a compulsory percentage of wealth that Moslems must pay for charity).

Under these circumstances, it is very hard for an Islamist movement to fully embrace democracy as a program or a goal, let alone applying democratic procedures in running its own affairs. This semi-militaristic structure is further enhanced by the fact that in most MENA countries, dictatorial practices are often equated with strength and stability, while democratic practices are seen as divisive, weakening and destabilizing. The pervasive feeling that the region faces hostile enemies; namely Israel and the US, allows any regime or movement that stands up to them (whether actually or just through

sloganeering) to be forgiven for its dictatorial practices. This is how the Syrian regime managed to suffocate the buds of democratic movements in the beginning of this decade under the pretext of confronting Ariel Sharon's attacks on the second Intifada and the US invasion of Iraq. The same goes for Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Post-Saddam Iraq provided a powerful argument for antidemocratic regimes and movements on the supposed association between democracy on the one hand and instability and weakness on the other. However, Kuwait's democracy presents a less extreme case. Although Kuwait was the first of the Gulf Emirates to gain independence from Britain in 1961; i.e. a decade ahead of Bahrain, Qatar, Oman and the seven emirates that would form the UAE, it now lags behind most of them as many constraints are imposed on the media, foreign investment or openness to the outside world. A chronic animosity characterizes the relationship between the Parliament, dominated by a Sunni Islamist majority, and the government, leading to periodic suspension of Parliament or accepting the Cabinet's resignation. Such ongoing tensions have forced the Emirs to dissolve the National Assembly six times and accept the resignation of the cabinets six times since the inception of representative politics in the early 1960s, the most recent of which was in March 2009 to the point that some parliamentarians and public figures have called on the Emir to exercise his prerogative and suspend the parliament indefinitely.

Linked to the above, but perhaps a much more **powerful argument that has been on the rise over the past decade and seems to be gaining popularity is the one that contrasts liberal democracy with welfare**. When one digs deep into this argument, it may not seem quite novel, for following WWII the grand theoretical debate on whether some liberties should be sacrificed in order to "mobilize" a country's resources to provide social and economic freedom to society, or whether legal and political liberties were sacred and cannot be sacrificed under any pretext; that debate took a practical and policy-oriented twist when many "third world" countries opted for the former choice and seemed to produce better results in alleviating poverty and raising the standards of living of their societies.

Today's argument, however, is no longer between socialism and capitalism. Rather, it draws upon two entirely different models, both of which are based on free market. The first is the opulent United Arab Emirates which many in MENA look at not only as an Eldorado, but also as a model that they wish their countries would adopt: a totally free market state offering its citizens various forms of welfare and a relative freedom of expression. The fact that there are no representative bodies in the UAE, no political parties are allowed, gender discrimination is sanctified and non-citizen residents suffer from gross injustices are only seen as details in an otherwise ideal model.

The UAE may be an attractive model for ordinary people suffering from all forms of deprivation and lack of the basic needs. The very specific nature of that experience may escape the attention of those ordinary people who are interested in seeing an affluent MENA society providing a decent living to all of its citizens. However, the other **model that has been attracting the attention of many in the region, including scholars and policymakers is Malaysia**. According to the advocates of this model, Malaysia **is a Moslem country that has joined the club of the rich while preserving its Islamic and national values**. Despite adopting a democratic system, a strong ruling

party has been in power since its independence, only recently losing its two third, but not absolute majority in parliament. A strong ruler, Dr. Mahatir Mohamed, stood up to and challenged the US and western economic and political pressures and took a hostile position towards Israel. Thanks to that, according to the advocates, Malaysia is a prosperous, stable, democratic country which, above all, is proud of its Islamic identity.

Discussing the appeal of the above two models should be illuminating to democrats and democracy aid groups in MENA. A first positive conclusion from this discussion is that no significant section in any society in MENA is willing to forego a minimum of liberties or basic freedoms under the pretext of welfare, development or building a strong state. Whatever misgivings one has against the UAE or Malaysia, it cannot be denied that a minimum level of liberties and freedoms is guaranteed in both countries. No significant section today, including the communists, talks about depriving the people of their political rights in exchange for economic or social rights, as the discussion during the era of the Soviet Union used to rage. Even as the Syrian leadership was trying to “market” the “Chinese path” in the beginning of this century, a path that should supposedly begin by launching growth and prosperity while keeping the sclerotic structures of the one-party rule intact, it did not make that choice public for fear of negative popular protests.

However, a second conclusion to be drawn is that wide sections in MENA societies (if not the majority), while yearning for their voices to be heard and represented, do take seriously the following two issues when judging a political system: first, ensuring a minimum of social justice; second, providing for the basic needs of the population; and third, defending what people see as their national heritage and values and standing up to those who are perceived as attacking them.

7. Democracy vs. Secularism?

If the above holds true, then we might gain a clue on why many Islamist movements in MENA, having successfully passed the test of “standing up to the enemies” be they foreigners or local rulers, are now less vulnerable to accusations of compromising with the “west” when and if they declare their adoption of a democratic agenda of some sort. An undeniable fact is that many Islamist movements have been shyly moving to adopt some measures that are compatible with democracy. The best example in this regard is The Center Party “Hizb al Wasat” in Egypt which was formed by ex-Islamist militants, and the Moroccan Justice and Piety Party, as well as the surprise decision by Hamas to engage in the electoral process in the Palestinian territories and Hizbollah’s active participation in Lebanese elections.

Several reasons can be given for this shift. The first is the weakening of some Islamist movement after a prolonged confrontation with the ruling regimes (Egypt, Algeria and Syria’ e.g.) which leads many cadres to question the validity of taking a confrontational line and to opt for joining the political process. A second reason is the international and regional pressure, especially when the country or the movement is dependent on material and political support from the regional or international actors. This is the case of some Iraqi Islamist parties and Hamas when it decided to run for elections in 2006. But a third, and ***may be the most decisive and effective cause***, is

when there is a public outcry against the atrocities committed by an Islamist movement (such as the Jihadists attacks on the tourism sector in Egypt) or when the movement reaches the conviction that the majority of the people do not approve of radical goals or confrontational tactics. The Turkish experience is indicative here, and the explicit attempts at emulating it by the Moroccan and other Islamists in MENA reveals that there is a rising tendency among many people that peaceful electoral politics is the preferred strategy. Ordinarily, however, all three factors play a role in forcing a change of thought within some movements (religious or otherwise, for radical left-wing movements went into such a path decades before). A significant, but may be unnoticed, case in point was a January 2009 fine arts exhibition being inaugurated by none other than the firebrand Sadrist movement in Iraq, which only until a few months before had been attacking artists, intellectuals and professionals.

And it is here that **authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes bear a huge responsibility for the persistence of non-democratic oppositional movement**, especially the Islamists, as the former pursue various means to keep these movements from making significant gains in the electoral processes. The abolition by the military in Algeria of the municipal elections in 1992, when the FIS (Front for Islamic Salvation) won the majority plunged the country in a prolonged civil war that cost the lives of around one hundred thousand Algerians. The Egyptian government is known to conduct periodic waves of arrests of the Moslem Brothers before each election. Yet other MENA governments use more subtle methods to thwart the rise of opposition movements. Morocco, Bahrain and Jordan manipulated the laws on election or political party formation in order to curtail the influence of opponents. Jordan's 'reform' raised the minimum number of applicants for the establishment of a party from fifty to five hundred who must come from at least five provinces. The result was that only seventeen parties were licensed instead of the previously licensed thirty six organizations.

Heavy-handed policies and practices by MENA regimes provide a powerful argument for those who see the electoral process as futile. For while many Shi'a and Sunni Islamist movements in MENA are engaged in vibrant discussions on the compatibility of Islam with modern democratic practices, the separation of the realm of religion and the realm of politics as well as on other crucial issues such as women's role in public life and the role and rights of non-Moslems, one has to keep in mind that the "modernists" within these movements are still in a fragile position. Continuous harassment and persecution of these movements by the incumbent MENA regimes only leads to stifling the position of those who denounce civic politics and call for violent anti-regime practices

And the international community has a great role to play here. Europe's Islamophobia during the early 1990s was behind France's support of Algeria's junta in its bloody suppression of the popularly elected Islamists who did not raise an anti-western agenda at the time. In the eyes of many all over the Moslem world, this stance was a flagrant admission by the west that democracy was only a means by which the westerners tried to bring their allies into power. Once others i.e. the Islamists, won, the west was more than willing to turn its back to its proclaimed goals and to support tyranny.

Moreover, since the early 1980s, MENA despotic regimes from Saddam Hussein in Iraq to Algeria's FLN have successfully played on domestic and the west's fear of the

rise of Islamist politics by projecting themselves as the only viable secular alternative in a highly polarized public sphere. The truth is that most MENA regimes have deliberately and brutally crushed their secular opponents in order to create a political vacuum, thus presenting the enlightened voters with the following: either vote for us or you will fall under Islamist rule!

Despite brutal harassment and ideological campaigns, Islamist politics will most probably survive in MENA for the foreseeable future. However, its form and content and its relative strength are likely to undergo profound changes that will vary from one country to another.

Does that mean that secular politics is dead in MENA? The truth is that the region's experience with secular politics has been disastrous. For much of their modern history many MENA countries have been under the tyranny of a one secular party rule: The Arab Socialist Union in Egypt, the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party in Syria since 1963, a rival faction of the Ba'th Party in Iraq between 1968 and 2003, the Socialist Party in South Yemen from its independence in 1967 until its merger with Yemen in 1990, the FLN in Algeria, not to mention Qaddafi's secular rule of Libya and the tyrannical Shah regime in Iran.

It is but normal that in the minds of the public secularism would be associated with tyranny, the free reign of the intelligence services, torture chambers, wars, isolation from the outside world and forced homogenization of the population that entailed the brutal suppression of the Kurds and the Berber, among others.

The secular parties today have a long way to go before (and if) they can recover from their deep crises. Many secular parties in MENA rightly point out to the fact that they have opposed the one party secular regime. But, the Syrian communists, as well as several pan-Arabist organizations are still part of the Ba'th dominated "National Progressive Front", a façade of rubber stamp pluralism that reminisces of the East European fronts under communism. The same goes for large sections of the Egyptian and Algerian communists.

But whether the secular, non-ruling parties in MENA have sided with, or opposed the secular regimes, their structural crisis lies in the fact that they basically share similar principles with the discredited regimes. True, most if not all of them, declare their adherence to a pluralist, multiparty democratic system. Yet, once many of them are exposed to the litmus test, they fail their declared principles. Some revealing cases are the siding with the Algerian military junta after it nullified the election results of 1992 in which the Islamist won a majority, or supporting Saddam Hussein when he invaded Kuwait in 1990 under the pretext that Iraq was facing an imperialist conspiracy and that the progressive parties had to side with it. Moreover, the organizational structures of many secular (as well as Islamist) parties in MENA are far from democratic. With the exception of Morocco, very few political parties in MENA hold periodic congresses, provide strict mechanisms for the accountability of their leaders, put obstacles before hereditary leadership, or limit the terms for leaders. And practically no political organization in MENA presents its financial accounts to its members, Hence the calls on the aging President Mubarak of Egypt to clear the way for the younger generations, or opposing the succession of his son to the presidency lack credibility because these same phenomena are shared by the many of these parties.

In many respects, the secular parties do not seem to differ from the Islamists: both glorify a strong state defined not in terms of efficiency or drawing legitimacy from the citizens, but as an entity with a strong military, both share xenophobic suspicion of foreigners, both couch their programs on populist slogans or archaic and unrealistic goals and both invoke some imagined glorious past when drawing their futuristic goals. It seems that the MENA secular parties have a long way to go in order to catch up with Latin America where progressive parties have succeeded in harmonizing the goals of social justice, democracy and openness to the world, thus drawing the marginalized and the poor into the political process.

To sum up: a reform agenda for the political parties in MENA should cease to create artificial dividing lines between secular politics and Islamist politics, as both suffer from a lack of genuine interest in pursuing a democratic program and the establishment of democratic regimes in their respective societies. Many MENA secular, as well as Islamist parties have semi-fascist tendencies. A reform agenda should therefore create a distinction between democrats, or potentially democratic tendencies on the one hand and dictatorial ones on the other.

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

1. The MENA region is undergoing a revival of political activism to which the non-organized and young population is increasingly drawn. The goals of these activities vary from one country to another, yet most of them call for a more open and transparent system of governance, better living conditions, more accountability and less authoritarianism. MENA regimes are no longer able to silence these movements by sheer force.
2. This welcome revival, however, is taking place at a time when political parties seem to be waning or losing the ground all together. It may not be an exaggeration to conclude that some MENA parties have lost the momentum to catch up with the pulse of their societies for good (the Moroccan Progress and Socialism party, the Egyptian, Jordanian, Lebanese and Syrian Communist parties, the Lebanese Phalanges and the Istiqlal (Independence) and National Union for Popular Forces in Morocco. In the meantime, other forces, whether in the form of parties or something different would evolve from the spontaneous political movements. The number of MENA political organizations that have clearly adopted democratic programs is on the rise. These range from the Movement for Democratic Left in Lebanon, to The People's Party and The Democratic Union (FIDA) in Palestine, to the Movement of Justice and Equality in Morocco, and they require special assistance by Democracy assistance organizations. But although the mandate of NIMD focuses on working with political parties, ***working with embryonic groups that have not yet developed into fully-fledged political organizations may prove to be another fruitful path.*** Syrian democracy clubs that have flourished since 2000 provide an excellent case in point, where genuine democratic movements are on the rise. These Movements do not trust the existing parties, the "Washington-based" parties or the Paris-based "opposition" led by an ex-

henchman of the Syrian regime. ***Given the permeability of the Syrian-Lebanese borders, and the proximity between the two countries, it would be a very fruitful idea to organize exploratory meetings with these groups under the auspices of some Beirut-based international organizations, such as the Carnegie Endowment.***

3. Given the complex diversity and vastness of the MENA region, a realistic program should select two or three countries where: a) there are encouraging signs of a political momentum going on; b) NIMD can conduct its activities without severe harassment by the authorities; and c) in countries that have not had much exposure to the assistance of international organization. The suggested candidates here are: Yemen, Syria, Jordan and Morocco. It goes without saying, however, that specific programs must be formulated for each country and that these programs must be designed in close collaboration with the local actors. ***A three-six months exploratory program of intensive contacts with genuine and potential democracy activists can be launched immediately. The program must not be secret but widely publicized, the objectives clearly drawn with special emphasis on respect for the national pride and independence of each of the targeted countries and with explicit legitimization of the program; e.g. Holland is a small country with no colonial past or ambitions in the region. We are not a Trojan horse for America in the region; NIMD is an institute of parties some of which have serious reservations about US policies, others do not. We have no hidden agenda, but we feel that enhancing democracy is good for Holland, Europe and MENA.***
4. The disastrous neo-conservative scheme of “democratizing” the Middle East has plainly shown that even when there is a genuine popular aspiration to establish a democratic system in a given country, humiliating the national pride of a nation by imposing democracy by force or by explicit diktats can lead to a reversal of the democratic mood among the people and may even lead to raising suspicion around the basic principles of ***democracy as a “tool” for subjugation***. Each MENA society is fighting for the goals that it considers most important. The Iranian or Egyptian societies have made great cultural strides through their modern political history. This defines an entirely different set of goals for their democratic movement from Saudi Arabia or Yemen. Thus, international organizations that seek to genuinely assist democratic movements should try to respect the priorities set by the local organizations. Sometimes, these may not necessarily revolve around explicitly political programs, but may involve empowering women, or conducting literacy programs, for example. ***The recommendation to be drawn here is: Never present democracy as a western commodity which MENA democrats act as its marketing agents, but follow the motto of Amartya Sen, the Nobel Prize laureate: Democracy is Universal Value.***
5. A golden rule follows from the above: ***international agencies whether they are superpowers or good-intentioned organizations, can never initiate moves towards reform or democracy in any given society. Their role is welcome when and if there are clear indications that there are domestic***

trends within society that are fighting for reform or democratization. A misjudgment that confuses the agenda of a few individuals with a popular trend could cost the cause of democracy very dearly.

6. Several concrete suggestions could follow from the above. Recognizing that democracy building and consolidation is a continuous process on the one hand, and that perfect democracy does not exist anywhere, ***a very welcome move by NIMD may be to launch a program among MENA countries, whereby less experienced parties would gain experience from the more experienced ones within the region. The Socialist Union for Popular Forces in Morocco decided to spend a year on reflecting on what socialism means in the contemporary era and how a concrete socialist program could be drawn for Morocco. Arranging programs for socially oriented Yemeni or Jordanian parties to learn from that experience and to exchange ideas on the social and organizational setting under which they perform and how to formulate their own programs could be very helpful.***
7. In the same vein, NIMD should take the initiative to bring ***selected groups of MENA Islamists in touch with the Turkish AKP; workshops, or even longer-term encounters such as tutorial courses among say, Moroccan, Egyptian and Turkish democratic (or potentially democratic) Islamists can be path breaking. Perhaps a partial involvement of European Christian Democrats in the process could be very useful as to how they think that religion-based parties can perform within secular political systems.***
8. Assuming that NIMD decides to be involved in MENA and that some of the above recommendations are implemented successfully, a huge opportunity would open up whereby ***serious efforts could be made to try and bring together splintered groups within common umbrellas. This is especially urgent for secular-democratic groups that had splintered in the past for various reasons. In practically each MENA country, one finds several organizations claiming to be the “real” representatives of liberal democracy or social justice, each spending much of its efforts not to tackle everyday problems but to fight its competitors. Bringing these groups together via workshops or training programs can be a very important contribution by NIMD.***
9. Established as a multiparty institution in which left and right, secular and religion-based parties take part, NIMD may be in a unique position to draw on the experience of its constituent parties on how to form coalitions. Organizing workshops with MENA parties on this issue is very useful whether to consolidate already existing coalition practices such as in Morocco, Lebanon and Yemen or in cases where parties are unable to reach common platforms, such as Egypt.
10. Quite related to the above, NIMD should get in direct contact with selected parliaments in MENA with the objective of encouraging parties which dominate the legislative (Egypt and Tunisia, in particular) to work together with the other existing parties irrespective of their parliamentary weight.

11. In most MENA countries, including Turkey with the most developed democratic experience; two major issues require special emphasis by Democracy assistance groups, including NIMD and both could be subsumed under one title: **the rights of the vulnerable groups. While gender equality is formally recognized by some MENA countries, women are still lagging behind in practically all of them. Islamist movements do not hide their opposition to the principle of gender equality, yet even some secular democrats do not put it high on their agenda. A more burning issue relates to ethnic, regional, sectarian and religious equality.** Out of a dangerously misleading perception that the demands for national or religious rights is **divisive and weakening to the state, many secular movements have sided with their repressive governments in denying these rights or even considering them conspiracies nurtured by hostile foreigners. No democracy assistance program can claim to have a chance of success without addressing both of these issues. But, then how can one reconcile a cautious approach whereby western institutions refrain from patronizing others on democracy with invoking sensitive issue such as gender and national/religious equality. An effective way to show that democracy is a universal value and not an American commodity that needs to be marketed is to seek the cooperation of the largest democracy on this planet: India. With historically friendly relations with virtually all the MENA countries, being itself an ex-colony of the western powers, a rising but still developing country just like most of the MENA region, India has much to offer. Despite the serious tensions between the various components of the Indian nation, its federal structure, its affirmative action policies toward the underprivileged communities, its recognition of the equality of citizens irrespective of their ethnicity or belief and its openness to the world can form the basis of numerous programs to assist democratic movements in MENA.**
12. One important but very sensitive tool that can be used in order to induce democracy promotion in MENA is **positive conditionality. Conditionality has been almost always been associated with imperialist diktats in the everyday thinking of MENA citizens. However, positive conditionality, especially when applied by such institutions as NIMD can take an entirely different meaning.** Here, there is no reference to sanctions or “punishment for the renegades”, but additional rewards for those organizations that comply with a set of democratic procedures and respect for pluralism within their own societies. Examples may include scholarships and grants, exchange programs or invitations.
13. It was mentioned above that a crucial prerequisite for the enhancement of the democratic process is that the state institutions are perceived by the population as impartial. An independent judiciary, a professional and apoliticized security force and an impartial media are lacking in most of the MENA countries. NIMD may find it useful to launch or join programs initiated by the World Bank or the UNDP that aim at state reform in MENA. NIMD’s input in this respect could be very valuable if it manages to engage local

political parties and organizations in these programs. ***Without building a firm infrastructure for democracy, electoral practices, political parties or parliamentary politics can camouflage corruption and minority based regimes; a situation that would sooner or later produce a popular revulsion towards democracy.***

14. The subsequent sections of the document will deal in more detail with the implications of the age structure within MENA. In general most MENA societies are very young, with the percentage of those under 25 years reaching around seventy percent in Iran and Algeria. This raises a host of challenges and opportunities to the region. While the youth tend to adopt more radical political attitudes, radicalism need not be necessarily associated with neither fundamentalism nor progressiveness. The dangerous thing about many MENA societies is that the existing systems tend to marginalize and exclude the youth. When this is added to unemployment and soaring costs of living, it can produce a combustible mix, which reformist, liberal or peaceful processes seem unable to diffuse. This mix forms a fertile soil for the calls for quick authoritarian solutions: a “strong but honest dictator” that does away with the endless parliamentary wrangling and discussions. Empowering the youth should thus be an essential component of a reform agenda for the MENA region. Lowering the minimum age of voting to sixteen and involving the youth in the decision making processes and creating jobs are some of the elements to tackle these challenges.
15. A subsequent section will deal in more detail with the implications of the new media and communication means. Satellite TV channels, the internet and the blogger communities, the SMS messaging are increasingly replacing the old means of assembly and expression. Democracy assistant programs may find it worthwhile to examine ***the feasibility and potential of encouraging the formation of cyber democracy groups.***
16. The role and weight of Iran in MENA affairs and beyond needs hardly to be exaggerated. The powerful and vibrant societal movements there need to be examined and studied carefully by all those interested in the democratic transformation of the region. However, it would be extremely difficult for NIMD to launch a viable and realistic program in this important country, it may be important to explore the possibility to coordinate NIMD’s efforts with the *European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI)*. This instrument aims to achieve a much more flexible, policy-driven instrument that can be used to pursue cautious programs in other tightly-controlled countries such as Syria. Funds allocated to the various countries will depend on their needs and absorption capacity as well as their implementation of agreed reforms, which underlines a certain degree of ‘positive’ conditionality in this process. Complementary to the Neighborhood Policy, Europe’s Stability Instrument, and the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights are the main instruments for support of democratization in the MENA region.
17. The ENPI Action Plans reflect the differences in the state of development and the willingness to reform and deepen relations with the EU in the States concerned. In the field of democratization, for example, objectives are

decidedly more ambitious; however, the action plans for Jordan and the Palestinian Authority are more concrete than in those for Morocco and Tunisia. The degree to which they effectively are 'tailor-made' should not be overstated either; the action plans do not allow to distinguish between the main obstacles to reform in the different States concerned, and, are in some cases rather vague on which kind of reforms will be rewarded with additional aid.

18. Finally, in countries where NIMD may operate, an important initiative to bring parties to work together is to encourage the formation of **party observatories**, where representatives from each of the cooperating parties work together to monitor each party's conduct, transparency, and possible violations of the democratic principles. These observatories could eventually evolve into regional observatories bringing parties from more than one country together.

Appendix 1

MENA Heads of States and their Powers

Country	Head Of State	Method of ascending to power	Powers
Algeria	President Bouteflika	Democratic elections	<p>Appoints and dismisses the Prime Minister.</p> <p>Appoints members of the government chosen by the Prime Minister.</p> <p>Presides over the Council of Ministers.</p> <p>Appoints the 42 governors (walis) and magistrates</p> <p>May dissolve the Parliament.</p> <p>May call for early legislative elections.</p> <p>May declare a state of emergency.</p> <p>May declare war and general mobilization.</p> <p>May rule by decree.</p> <p>May initiate revision of the Constitution.</p> <p>Commands the armed forces.</p> <p>Is responsible for national defense.</p> <p>Decides and conducts foreign policy.</p> <p>Can approve the government's annual budget by decree if it is rejected by the Parliament</p>
Bahrain	King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa	Successor to the throne.	<p>Appoints and dismisses the Prime Minister and the cabinet.</p> <p>Has wide-ranging executive and legislative powers.</p> <p>Appoints the president and members of the Consultative Council.</p> <p>Is the commander in chief of the armed forces.</p> <p>Is chairman of the Higher Judicial Council and appoints judges.</p> <p>Has the right to call for a referendum on any issue he deems important.</p> <p>Can rule by decree and dissolve parliament.</p> <p>Has the right to veto laws passed by the National Assembly.</p> <p>Has the power to amend the constitution and propose, ratify, and promulgate laws.</p>
Egypt	President Muhammed Husni Mubarak	Assumed presidency after a public referendum	<p>Has the power to appoint and dismiss one or more vice presidents, the prime minister, ministers, civil and military officials, and diplomatic representatives.</p> <p>Is the supreme commander of the armed forces.</p> <p>Has the right to grant amnesty and reduce sentence.</p> <p>Can call for a referendum.</p> <p>Can, with the approval of the People's Assembly, issue decrees having the force of law, but only for a defined time period.</p> <p>Presides over the Supreme Council of Judicial</p>

			<p>Organizations.</p> <p>Can dissolve the People's Assembly, but only following a referendum or under martial law.</p> <p>Can proclaim a state of emergency for a limited period, which may not be extended without the approval of the People's Assembly. The s</p>
Iran	<p>The highest authority is the Supreme Religious leader: Ayatollah Khamenei</p> <p>President of Republic: Mahmoud Ahmadinejad</p>	<p>Supreme Leader is appointed by religious authorities.</p> <p>The president: General elections under strict vetting rules for the candidates</p>	<p>The supreme leader has the following powers: The Supreme Leader is considered as the ultimate head of the Iranian political and governmental establishment, above that of Iran's president. He has the last say in internal and foreign policies, control of all of the armed forces (Army, Revolutionary Guards, Police), and control of state broadcast and others. The head of the Judicial branch is also directly appointed by him.</p> <p>The President is responsible for the implementation of the Constitution and for the exercise of executive powers, except for matters directly related to the Supreme Leader.</p> <p>The President appoints and supervises the council of ministers coordinates government decisions, and selects government policies to be placed before the legislature.</p> <p>The President appoints the Ministers of Intelligence and Defence.</p>
Iraq	President Jalal Al Talabani	Democratically elected by the Parliament	<p>The President of the Republic is the head of state and "safeguards the commitment to the Constitution and the preservation of Iraq's independence, sovereignty, unity, the security of its territories in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution"</p> <p>The President ratifies treaties and laws passed by the Council of Representatives, issues amnesty on the recommendation of the Prime Minister, and performs the "duty of the Higher Command of the armed forces for ceremonial and honorary purposes"</p>
Jordan	King Abdullah II	Successor to the throne after father's death.	<p>Appoints the prime minister.</p> <p>Appoints the members and the president of the Senate.</p> <p>Convenes and adjourns the House of Representatives.</p> <p>Can postpone elections to the House of Representatives.</p> <p>Can dissolve the parliament and dismiss the prime minister and the cabinet at his discretion.</p> <p>Can declare martial law, thereby suspending the provisions of the constitution.</p> <p>Approves laws and promulgates them.</p> <p>Is the commander in chief of the armed forces.</p> <p>Can declare war.</p> <p>Signs treaties.</p> <p>Orders elections.</p>
Kuwait	Sheikh Sabah	Successor to	Appoints the prime minister and two deputy prime

	al-Ahmad al-Sabah	the throne	<p>ministers.</p> <p>Appoints and dismisses other ministers in consultation with the prime minister.</p> <p>Can adjourn the National Assembly for a period not exceeding one month and may also dissolve the National Assembly and call for new elections within two months.</p> <p>May issue decrees which have the force of law, provided that they are not contrary to the constitution or to the budget law.</p> <p>Initiates laws and promulgates them.</p> <p>Appoints and dismisses civil, military and diplomatic officials.</p> <p>Can declare defensive war and martial law by decree. Such decrees are referred to the National Assembly within fifteen days. Martial law may not continue unless a decision to that effect is made by a majority vote in the Assembly.</p> <p>Can conclude treaties by decree but must submit them to the National Assembly for ratification.</p> <p>Can grant a pardon or commute a sentence; general amnesty can only be granted by law.</p> <p>Is "immune and inviolable"</p>
Lebanon	President Michael Suleiman	Democratic election	<p>Appoints the prime minister in consultation with the parliament.</p> <p>Promulgates laws passed by the parliament.</p> <p>Can only issue decrees with the approval of the prime minister or the relevant minister. The only exceptions are the decree appointing the prime minister and the decree accepting the resignation of the government.</p> <p>Negotiates and ratifies treaties in coordination with the prime minister.</p> <p>Can convene, in agreement with the prime minister, the council of ministers to an extraordinary session.</p> <p>Has the right to request the council of ministers to revise any decision it takes. If the council maintains its position, its decision is automatically considered to be in force.</p> <p>Can request the council of ministers to dissolve parliament before the end of its mandate only if the parliament fails to meet in two successive parliamentary sessions or fails to vote on the entire budget with the objective of blocking the government's actions.</p> <p>Can pardon by decree.</p> <p>Is the commander in chief of the armed forces.</p>
Libya	Colonel Muammar al-Qadhafi, "Leader of the Revolution"	Military coup	<p>Executive power is de facto vested in Colonel Muammar al-Qadhafi. Although he holds no formal position in the government, he is the highest authority and as commander in chief he controls the armed forces. Along with a group of close associates, known as the Revolutionary Command Council, he</p>

			controls all political life.
Morocco	King Muhammad VI	Successor to the throne after father's death.	<p>Appoints the prime minister following legislative elections.</p> <p>Appoints all members of the government taking into account the prime minister's recommendations.</p> <p>Presides over the cabinet.</p> <p>Appoints the governors of Morocco's 16 provinces.</p> <p>May terminate the tenure of any minister and dismiss the prime minister.</p> <p>May dissolve the parliament.</p> <p>May call for new elections.</p> <p>May rule by decree.</p> <p>May declare a state of emergency without explanation.</p> <p>May revise the constitution by directly submitting proposed amendments to a national referendum.</p> <p>Is the head of the military and the country's religious leader. Article 19 of the 1962 constitution designates the king as commander of the faithful.</p>
Oman	Sultan Qaboos bin Said	Succeeded his father after a Palace coup.	<p>Presides over the Council of Ministers (or may appoint someone to do so).</p> <p>Appoints and dismisses Deputy Prime Ministers; Ministers; Under-Secretaries; General Secretaries; Governors and those of their rank.</p> <p>Presides over the Specialized Councils or appoints chairmen for them.</p> <p>Appoints and dismisses senior judges.</p> <p>Holds the portfolios of defense, foreign affairs and finance.</p> <p>Issues and ratifies laws.</p> <p>May declare a state of emergency, general mobilization or war, and make peace in accordance with the provisions of the Law.</p> <p>May sign international treaties in accordance with the provisions of the Law and issue decrees ratifying them.</p> <p>May wave or commute punishments.</p> <p>Is the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces.</p> <p>Is the governor of Oman's central bank.</p> <p>Is "inviolable" and must be respected and his orders obeyed.</p>
Palestinian Authority	President Mahmoud Abbas	Democratic elections	<p>Appoints the prime minister.</p> <p>Initiates and proposes laws to the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC).</p> <p>Can veto legislation within thirty days of its adoption by the PLC.</p> <p>May issue decrees with the force of law in exceptional circumstances while the PLC is not in</p>

			<p>session. Such decrees are subject to the approval of the PLC when it convenes.</p> <p>Is the commander in chief of the armed forces.</p> <p>May declare a state of emergency that cannot last longer than 30 days. The state of emergency may be extended another 30 days with approval of the PLC.</p> <p>During a state of emergency, basic rights may not be infringed and the legislature may not be suspended.</p> <p>Serves a four-year term and cannot be elected for more than two consecutive terms.</p>
Qatar	Sheikh Hamad bin al-Khalifa Thani	Overthrew his father in a palace coup	<p>Appoints the prime minister and ministers.</p> <p>Appointed the current Advisory Council. In the future, under the new constitution, he may only appoint 15 out of the 45 members of the Council.</p> <p>Serves as defense minister and commander-in-chief of the armed forces. He also exercises control over the police and internal security services.</p> <p>Develops government policy in consultation with the Council of Ministers.</p> <p>Can establish ministries and consultative bodies.</p> <p>Ratifies and promulgates laws, but no longer has direct legislative power.</p> <p>Can issue decrees with the force of law when the Advisory Council is not in session. Such decrees must be ratified by the Advisory Council and can be overturned or returned for revision by a two-thirds majority of the Council.</p> <p>May declare martial law by decree in exceptional cases to be defined by law. Such a decree must be presented to the Advisory Council within 15 days or at its first meeting after the decree. The duration of martial law must be limited and can only be extended with the approval of the Advisory Council.</p> <p>May call for a referendum on important issues, the results of which are binding.</p> <p>May declare defensive but not offensive war.</p> <p>Appoints an heir after consulting with the royal family.</p>
Saudi Arabia	King Abdullah	Successor to the throne.	<p>Rules by decree in accordance with Islamic law (Sharia) and with the consensus of senior princes and religious officials.</p> <p>Performs legislative and executive functions.</p> <p>Acts as the ultimate source of judicial power.</p> <p>Through a royal order he can introduce new laws, amend existing laws or reinterpret them.</p> <p>Is the commander in chief of the armed forces.</p> <p>Appoints officers and revokes their duties.</p> <p>Is the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques.</p> <p>Approves and amends international treaties, agreements and regulations by decree.</p> <p>Approves all decisions of the Council of Ministers.</p>

Syria	President Bashar Al-Assad	Nominated by ruling party to succeed father and approved by a referendum	<p>Serves a seven-year term. The presidential candidate is first nominated by the People's Assembly and then runs unopposed in a popular referendum rather than in competitive elections. If the majority of voters fail to approve the candidate, the nomination process is repeated in the People's Assembly and a new referendum is held.</p> <p>Appoints the prime minister, the deputy prime ministers, and the vice presidents.</p> <p>Appoints cabinet members.</p> <p>Appoints civil servants and military personnel</p> <p>Is commander-in-chief of the armed forces.</p> <p>Can declare war.</p> <p>Is the chairman of the National Progressive Front and secretary-general of the ruling Baath Party.</p> <p>Promulgates laws approved by the People's Assembly. The president can reject a bill and return it to the Assembly within a month of receiving it. If the bill is put to a second vote and approved by two-thirds of members present in the Assembly and by at least an absolute majority of all members, the president must sign the bill into law.</p> <p>Can dissolve the People's Assembly. A new Assembly must be elected within 90 days from the date of dissolution. The president cannot dissolve the Assembly twice for the same reason within a term.</p> <p>Assumes legislative authority when the People's Assembly is not in session, but his decrees have to be confirmed by the assembly when it reconvenes.</p> <p>Can assume legislative authority even when the Assembly is in session "in case of absolute need relating to national security."</p> <p>Can call national referenda.</p> <p>Can only be removed from power for high treason. The People's Assembly can initiate impeachment proceedings through a petition supported by one-third of its members voting openly or by two-thirds of its members voting in a closed session.</p> <p>Can only be tried by the Supreme Constitutional Court, of which he is a member.</p>
Tunisia	President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali	Palace coup, followed by controlled elections	<p>Appoints the prime minister.</p> <p>Appoints the cabinet.</p> <p>Appoints the governors of Tunisia's 23 provinces.</p> <p>Can initiate legislation and return a bill to parliament for a second reading.</p> <p>Rules by decree when the legislature is not in session.</p> <p>Can adopt "exceptional measures" after consulting the prime minister and the president of parliament in case of "imminent peril menacing the institutions of the Republic, the security and independence of the country, and obstructing the regular functioning of the</p>

			<p>public powers.”</p> <p>Approves and promulgates laws.</p> <p>Is the commander in chief of the armed forces.</p> <p>Enjoys judicial immunity for his period in office.</p> <p>Can declare war.</p>
Turkey	President Abdullah Gül	Democratic elections.	<p>The president is empowered to summon meetings of the National Assembly, promulgate laws, and ratify international treaties. The president also may veto legislation passed by the National Assembly, submit constitutional amendments proposed by the assembly to popular referenda, and challenge the constitutionality of assembly laws and cabinet decrees.</p> <p>The president's responsibilities include appointing the prime minister, convening and presiding over meetings of the Council of Ministers, and calling for new elections to the National Assembly. The president is authorized to dispatch the Turkish armed forces for domestic or foreign military missions and to declare martial law.</p> <p>Appointive powers that he or she may exercise independently of the Council of Ministers. For example, the president is empowered to appoint the members of the Constitutional Court, one-quarter of the members of the Council of State, all diplomatic representatives, the chief of the General Staff, members of the Supreme Military Administrative Court, the Supreme Council of Judges and Public Prosecutors, the State Supervisory Council, the Council of Higher Education, and all university presidents.</p> <p>The president presides over the National Security Council, a body that contains civilian as well as military members.</p>
United Arab Emirates	Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayid al-Nuhayyan	Successor to father.	<p>Is chosen by the Federal Supreme Council (FSC) to serve renewable five-year terms.</p> <p>Appoints the prime minister, deputy prime minister, and the cabinet.</p>
Yemen	President Ali Abdallah Saleh	Democratic elections	<p>Appoints the prime minister and the consultative council.</p> <p>Can dissolve the parliament but must convoke new elections within sixty days. The parliament cannot be dissolved twice for the same reason.</p> <p>Cannot rule by decree when the parliament is dissolved, following the enactment of a constitutional amendment in 2001.</p> <p>Signs treaties which have to be ratified by parliament.</p> <p>Orders elections and referendums.</p> <p>Can serve a maximum of two seven-year terms since</p>

a 2001 amendment. This amendment allows President Saleh, in power since 1990, to remain in office subject to reelection until 2013.

Appendix II

Major MENA Political Parties and their Status

Country	Major political parties	Legal/Political Status
Algeria	<p>The National Liberation Front (FLN) The Democratic National Rally (RND) The Islamist party Movement of Society for Peace (Harakat Moujtama al-Silm).</p> <p>The Workers Party' (Parti des Travailleurs) The Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD) The National Algerian Front (FNA, nationalist) Algerian Renewal Party (PRA, right wing) National Entente Movement (MEN, nationalist) The National Renovation Movement (or al-Islah, Islamist) Al-Nahda Movement (Islamist) Islamic Salvation Front (FIS)</p>	<p>Ruling alliance</p> <p>Opposition party</p> <p>Islamist parties</p>
Bahrain	<p>National Democratic Action Society (Wa'ad)</p> <p>Democratic Progressive Forum (DPF)</p> <p>Al Wefaq Islamic Action Society (IAS)</p> <p>The Arab Islamic Wasat Society (AIWS)</p>	<p>Leftist/secularist political society</p> <p>Leftist/secularist political society</p> <p>Shi'i political opposition organizations</p> <p>Centrist political society</p>

Egypt	<p>National Democratic Party NDP</p> <p>Wafd Party</p> <p>National Progressive Unionist Party (Hizb al-Tagammu)</p> <p>Arab Democratic Nasserist Party</p> <p>Al Ghad ("Tomorrow") Party (Hizb al-Ghad)</p> <p>The Democratic Front</p> <p>Labor Party (a-Amal)</p> <p>Liberal Party(al-Ahrar)</p> <p>Al-Umma</p> <p>Al-Takaful</p> <p>Green Party</p> <p>Egypt Arab Socialist Party</p> <p>Young Egypt Party</p> <p>Unionist Democratic Party</p> <p>Social Justice Party</p> <p>Democratic Peace Party</p> <p>Egypt Youth Party</p> <p>Muslim Brotherhood Movement</p> <p>Hizb al-Wasat al-Jadid (New Centrist Party)</p> <p>Al-Jamaa al-Islamiyya (The Islamic Group)</p>	<p>Ruling party</p> <p>Opposition Parties</p> <p>Illegal Islamist movements/organizations</p>
Iran	<p>Islamic Iran Participation Front (IIPF)</p> <p>Executives of Construction Party (Kargozaran),</p> <p>Solidarity Party</p> <p>Islamic Labor Party</p> <p>Mardom Salari</p> <p>Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution Organization (MIRO)</p> <p>Militant Clerics Society (Ruhaniyun)</p>	<p>Pro-reform coalition called the <i>2nd Khordad</i> Front, which includes political parties as well as less formal groups and organizations</p>
Iraq	<p>Assyrian Democratic Movement</p> <p>Constitutional Monarchy Movement</p> <p>Da'wa al-Islamiya Party</p> <p>Iraqi National Congress</p> <p>Independent Iraqi Alliance or</p> <p>Iraqi Communist Party</p> <p>Iraqi Front for National Dialogue</p> <p>Iraqi Hizballah</p> <p>Iraqi Independent Democrats</p> <p>Iraqi Islamic Party</p> <p>Iraqi National Accord</p> <p>Iraqi National Congress</p> <p>Iraqi National Council for Dialogue</p> <p>Iraqi National Unity Movement</p> <p>Islamic Action Organization</p> <p>Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq</p> <p>Hizb al Fadilah</p> <p>Kurdistan Democratic Party</p> <p>Kurdistan Islamic Union</p> <p>Patriotic Union of Kurdistan</p>	
Jordan	<p>Islamic Action Front (Jabhat al-Amal al-Urduni)</p> <p>Arab Islamic Democratic Movement</p> <p>Islamic Center Party</p>	<p>Islamist parties</p>

	<p>Jordanian Communist Party Jordanian Democratic Left Party Jordanian People's Democratic Party (HASHD) Jordanian Popular Democratic Unity Party Progressive Party Jordanian Labor Party Jordanian Communist Workers Party</p> <p>Jordanian Arab Baath Socialist Party Arab Baath Progressive Party National Action Party (Haqq) Arab Land Party Jordanian Arab Ansar Party National Popular Democratic Movement Jordanian Arab Party</p> <p>National Constitutional Party Future Party Jordanian Peace Party Jordanian Constitutional Front</p> <p>Freedom Party (al-Ahrar) Nation Party (Al-Umma) Jordanian Generations Party Jordanian Arab New Dawn Party Jordanian Renaissance Party Jordanian Green Party Jordanian Citizens' Rights Movement Jordanian People's Committees Movement Jordanian Rafah Party Mission Party</p>	<p>Leftist Parties</p> <p>Arab nationalist parties</p> <p>Conservative parties</p>
Kuwait	<p>Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM) Islamic Popular Grouping Umma Party (Hizb al-Umma)</p> <p>Islamic National Alliance Kuwait Democratic Forum National Democratic Alliance Justice and Development Movement National Democratic Forum</p>	
Lebanon	<p>Current for the Future (Tayyar al-Mustaqbal) Free Patriotic Movement (Tayyar al-Watani al-Hurr) Progressive Socialist Party Amal Movement Hizbollah Lebanese Forces Syrian Social Nationalist Party Democratic Left Movement Lebanese Communist Party</p> <p>Ramgavar Party Social Democrat Hunchakian Party Dashnak Party (Armenian Revolutionary Federation)</p>	<p>Armenian and Kurdish Parties</p>

	Kurdish Democratic Party	
Libya		
Morocco	<p>The Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP) The Party of Progress and Socialism (PPS), The Leftist Unified Socialist Union (formerly the Organization for Democratic and Popular Action-OADP) Istiqlal (Independence Party)</p> <p>Hizb al-Adala wal Tanmiya (Party of Justice and Development)</p> <p>The Civilized Alternative Party The New Leftist Islamic Party</p> <p>Al-Adl wal Ihsan (Justice and Charity)</p>	<p>Main ruling parties</p> <p>Islamist parties</p> <p>Illegal Islamist movement</p>
Oman	Political parties are illegal.	
Palestine	<p>The Palestinian National Liberation Movement, or Fatah (Harakat al-Tahrir al-Watani al-Filistini).</p> <p>Hamas, Harakat al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyya (Islamic Resistance Movement) Movement of Islamic Jihad The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) The Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine The Palestinian People's Party (Hizb al-Sha'ab) The Palestine Democratic Union (Fida)</p>	<p>Main political party</p> <p>Major political Islamist party</p>
Qatar	Political parties are illegal	
Saudi Arabia	Political parties are prohibited	

<p>Syria</p>	<p>Arab Socialist Baath Party</p> <p>The Arab Socialist Unity Movement The Unionist Socialist Democratic Party The Socialist Unionist Party The Syrian Arab Socialist Party The Syrian Communist Parties The Arab Democratic Union The Syrian Social National Party</p> <p>Muslim Brothers</p> <p>Syrian Democratic Party Baath Arab Socialist Democratic Party Arab Socialist Movement Reform Party of Syria. Democratic Kurdish Party in Syria. Kurdish Democratic Union Party</p>	<p>Leading Party</p> <p>Members of Baath Party-led “National Front”</p> <p>Banned</p> <p>Clandestine political parties</p>
<p>Tunisia</p>	<p>The Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD)</p> <p>Social Democratic Movement (MDS) Popular Unity Party (PUP). Democratic Unionist Union (UDU) Al Tajdid (Renewal Movement) Social Democratic Liberal Party (PSDL). The Green Party for Progress (PVP) Democratic Progressive Party (PDP). Democratic Forum for Labor and Liberties (FDTL)</p> <p>Islamic Nahda Party</p>	<p>Ruling party</p> <p>Legal parties</p> <p>Not recognized</p>
<p>Turkey</p>	<p>Justice and Development Party (AKP) The Republican People’s Party (CHP) The Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) The Democratic Society Party (DTP) The Democratic Left Party (DSP) The Grand Unity Party (BBP) The Freedom and Democracy Party (ÖDP)</p> <p>Kurdistani Workers’ Party</p>	<p>Parties represented in the parliament</p> <p>Banned</p>
<p>United Arab Emirates</p>	<p>Political parties are illegal</p>	
<p>Yemen</p>	<p>The General People’s Congress (GPC)</p> <p>Yemeni Gathering for Reform Yemen Socialist Party (YSP) Popular Nasserite Unionist Organization Arab Socialist Baath Party Democratic Nasserite Party</p>	<p>Ruling party</p>

League of the Sons of Yemen (Rabitat Abna al-Yaman)
National Democratic Front
Union of Popular Forces (Ittihad al-Qiwa al-Shabiyya)
Yemeni League (Al Rabita al-Yamaniyya al-Shariyya)
Popular Unity Party (Hizb al-Wahda al-Shabiyya)
Democratic People's Party (Hizb al-Shab al-Dimuqrati)
Septembrist Movement (al-Tanzim al-Sebtombri)
Yemeni Unionist Gathering (al-Tajammu al-Wahdawi al-Yamani)