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**Authoritarian State Building in the Middle East:
From Durability to Revolution**

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Abstract

What accounts for variation in the durability of authoritarian regimes in the post-colonial Middle East?

This working paper presents a new explanation that underscores how the geopolitical environment mediated outcomes of domestic conflicts pitting early rulers against social opposition. Comparative analysis of six historical cases (Iraq, Iran, Jordan, Bahrain, Tunisia, Kuwait) reveal that at the post-colonial dawn, foreign patrons empowered and constrained autocratic elites facing social opposition in distinctive ways, leaving pervasive legacies over consequent state-building efforts. The more that incumbents enjoyed exogenous assistance to crush early societal challengers, the less likely they would thereafter rally broad bases of mass support in the succeeding decades; conversely, when leaders were forced to confront their own weakness and bargain with contentious popular sectors, they had stronger incentives to reach out and mobilize cross-class coalitions as they consolidated power. Such differing early coalitional commitments engendered divergent kinds of economic and political institutions linking state and society over time, which in turn explains the scope and intensity of opposition decades after these regimes' contentious origins.

INTRODUCTION

Why did post-colonial states in the Middle East experience starkly differing patterns of durability? Although scholars of democratization have long portrayed the region as some authoritarian monolith, the historical record—even before the momentous events of winter 2011—reveals a far different reality. As they exited the imperial epoch and gained international sovereignty during the 1930s to 1950s, nascent rulers in this region were deeply preoccupied with creating and maintaining political stability. Some autocracies, like Kuwait and Tunisia, built robust state institutions resting upon cross-class coalitions of social groups, and easily defused emergent opposition during the decades following independence. Other dictatorships, like Jordan and Bahrain, only tenuously survived. Drawing loyalty from only some popular sectors, they built highly cleaved states that faced bloody rebellions authored by marginalized social groups. Still other regimes, like dynastic Iraq and Iran, faced revolutionary collapse. Erecting only weak institutions that incorporated mass constituents into state policy, these leaderships were ultimately extinguished by violent upheavals and political movements drawing upon cross-cutting support from hostile publics.

Students of Middle East politics have not fully explained these disparate regime trajectories in the late twentieth century. Intent on predicting democratic change in the modern era, they have neglected this basic question of political *order*. Given the extraordinary wave of popular protests that rocked the Arab world during the winter of 2011, this bias towards democratization seems logically appropriate, if not normatively acceptable. Yet in historical perspective, questions of order must precede expectations of change. Few new regimes, whether authoritarian or democratic, will survive long if they lack loyal constituents, construct weak institutions, and engender cross-cutting opposition. Explaining contrasting pathways of post-colonial politics in the Middle East thus cuts to the heart of scholarly debates about state-building—that is, how to construct effective governments that last.

The Middle East provides an elegant database of outcomes to help explore the origins and lineaments of durable government under authoritarian settings. The first generation of post-colonial regimes in the six aforementioned cases (Iraq, Iran, Jordan, Bahrain, Kuwait, Tunisia) experienced very different patterns of stability and contestation. Such variation reveals, above all, that from the unchanging authoritarian monolith as portrayed in popular discourse, the MENA faced as tumultuous experience as any other region in the post-colonial age. Political termination was not a rare occurrence; the Iraqi Hashemites and Iranian Pahlavis are just two examples of losers that missed the cut, their ruling families now relegated as pretenders thanks to widespread and overwhelming resistance from below. And while the survivors today have become global cynosures for “stubborn” dictatorship, they have not subsisted in the same way. Ferocious uprisings from marginalized ethnic majorities posed major challenges to the Bahraini and Jordanian governments starting in the 1950s, whereas the Kuwaiti and Tunisian autocracies enjoyed a sense of popular constancy: as the twentieth century closed, the social discontent s spawned by serious crises like recessions and wars did not pose *existential* threats to their rule.

This paper suggests that divergent pathways of political durability stem from the contentious origins of these authoritarian regimes—and in the Middle East, these origins reflect the influence of two critical variables, namely social opposition and geopolitical mediation. At the dawn of the post-colonial era, national sovereigns faced concerted opposition representing the demands of new classes and actors who fell outside their old, and largely rural, bases of support. Into the fray stepped foreign patrons, who often provided concrete resources to reshape the capacity of national leaders to impose order by force. When leaders received foreign support and could defeat these organized challengers with little cost, they had strong incentives to then forgo the costly task of mass mobilization and rally narrow coalitions of social allies that excluded contentious popular sectors. Conversely, when rulers did not receive external assistance and so began these conflicts from a position of weakness, they were compelled to bargain

with opposition movements in order to reinstate political constancy—an inclusionary strategy that then engendered broad coalitions that incorporated new popular constituents into their national political economies.

From these generic coalitional strategies emerge long-run political outcomes. To reveal the full chain of analysis, we may identify three historical pathways of geopolitical mediation and coalition-building. First, some incumbents harvesting the fruits of international support assembled extremely narrow social bases and became dependent on their foreign patrons. Here, foreign support *substituted* for the domestic mobilization of mass coalitions, because leaders felt little pressure to bargain with potential mass supporters and later erect responsive state institutions to give such constituent forces economic and political stakes in their order. This resulted in widespread urban opposition decades later, giving rise to cross-cutting political movements that successfully dislodged incumbents from office. Iraq and Iran represent this trajectory of terminal collapse.

Second, other sovereigns reaped foreign patronage, which also enabled them to defeat early opposition. However, because their challengers drew upon organized ethnic publics that retained their demographic majorities even after defeat, they pursued selective coalitional strategies—deepening institutional ties of loyalty with their own minority group but excluding the majority from key economic and political arenas. Thus, exogenous mediation *subsidized* the creation of segregating states, resulting in the uneasy persistence of authoritarian rule: they faced bloody, but predictable and thus manageable, insurrections in future decades, which they defeated thanks to a combination of repression, reforms, and minority support. Jordan and Bahrain exemplify this pattern of tenuous survival.

Finally, when other leaders lacked, or were constrained by, external patrons, they were forced to rally cross-class coalitions in the face of domestic opposition. Given this geopolitical *seclusion*, regime elites compromised with those they could not conquer by violence, seeding wide social bases linking newly mobilized groups with old pillars of traditional support. This resulted in more inclusive states

whose economic and political institutions not only constrained arbitrary abuses of power, but also reduced the scope of future opposition by providing key social actors with enduring ties to the regime's survival. Kuwait and Tunisia demonstrate this post-colonial arc of regime resilience.

These pathways of geopolitical substitution, subsidization, and seclusion reify a familiar argument: rulers were more likely to make the coalitional investments necessary to construct inclusive and durable states when they were *forced* them to do so. What makes the MENA exceptional is the extent to which the geopolitical environment influenced the options and perceptions available to early national leaders facing social threats from below, and thus influenced their coalitional calculus as they sought to solidify power and rally political support. While no outcome lasts forever—a point demonstrated by the remarkable revolt that displaced the President Ben 'Ali from Tunisia in early 2011—the fundamental argument is one about *legacies* rather than determinism. My cases reveal that causative events that took place early in the post-colonial era cast profoundly influenced the character of consequent state-building efforts, which ultimately explain varying patterns of durability and opposition in the latter half of the twentieth century, long after these regimes' inception.

This working paper proceeds in several parts. First, it lays a theoretical foundation for engaging the geopolitical context of state-building in the MENA. Second, it imparts a causal framework that takes into account the critical role of early opposition and geopolitical mediation in the consolidation of power and mobilization of coalitional alliances under authoritarian settings. Third, it presents evidence from six cases of Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Bahrain, Tunisia, and Kuwait. Trading historical thickness for comparative breadth, it provides appropriate empirical evidence to support the core geopolitical and coalitional arguments in cross-national context. Finally, it concludes by reviewing the robustness of the theoretical framework and extending its relevance to current policymaking debates.

I. THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

Like other developing zones, the relative youth of Middle East sovereignty means that the rise and consolidation of post-colonial regimes in this region was largely coterminous with modern state-building. By state-building, I mean the institutional process by which rulers consolidate control over their national territory by assembling new centralized administrative and coercive agencies to regulate their populations and allocate resources (Ertman 1997; Waldner 1999). Whereas theories of democratization emphasized how change emerges from struggles between competing elites, historical accounts of state formation instead accentuate the interests of *collective* actors in society, such as organized classes, economic groups, and ethnic factions (Moore 1966; Huntington 1968). Because even dictators cannot rule by violence alone, scholars have long recognized that coalitions were the keystone to effective state-building: rulers cannot broadcast power and control territory unless they extract at least *some* compliance and coordination from the citizenry.

Yet scholars too seldom explore the geopolitical context of how ruling coalitions emerge during the formation of new states. To be sure, comparativists have largely accepted the canonical argument that the international dimension “matters” for domestic political outcomes (Gourevitch 1978). For instance, many democratization theorists highlight how exogenous variables ranging from multilateral organizational pressures to economic ties to the West have helped erode autocratic rule in the post-Cold War era (Pevehouse 2005; Levitsky and Way 2010). Likewise, structural theories of revolution remind us that other exogenous triggers, like economic competition and foreign threats, can make governments and more vulnerable to mass revolts and thus precipitate their downfall (Skocpol 1979; Goodwin 2001).

However, none of these clusters of scholarship precisely captures the *temporal* dynamic at play in the post-colonial Middle East: here, foreign powers intervened at a critical early moment in the state formation process, thereby shaping the coalitional structures and institutional strategies that would typify future decades of governance. Even in the European state-building literature, the external

variables like economic trade patterns (Spruyt 1996) and war-making with neighboring states (Tilly 1990) that were theorized to trigger domestic shifts in class power reflected *intraregional* factors rather than *extraregional* forces. Herein lays the crucial difference between early European sovereigns and state-builders in the post-colonial world. As Ian Lustick has argued, unlike the West, the Middle East never experienced a quasi-Hobbesian war of all against all in its modern state formation process, as it faced large foreign powers who could intervene at will to reconfigure national boundaries, mediate interstate violence, and constrain territorial annexation (Lustick 1997).

MENA analysts know all too well how much Western hegemons have influenced politics in their region. After all, one assessment notes that this region “has been more consistently and more thoroughly ensnarled in great power politics than any other part of the non-Western world... Other parts of the world have been at one time or another more severely buffeted by an imperial power, but no area has remained so unremittingly caught up in multilateral great power politics” (Brown 1984: 3). The problem is that many observers, isolated from the theoretical currents of the state formation scholarship, too often oversell the ability of outside actors like the United States or United Kingdom to mastermind the survival (or downfall) of any regime by virtue of their diplomatic weight, economic resources, and military capabilities (Karawan 2002). That the “outsiders did it” resonates with some views of the *dependencia* literature, which saw autonomous development on the global periphery stifled by the strategic domination of capitalist hegemons (Petrus 1973; Amin 1987). It especially rang true during the Cold War, when it was the norm for international spectators to frame the MENA as little more than a strategic “arena” of global strategic competition, relegating rulers like the House of Saud or the presidents of Syria as little more than rudderless pawns of greater superpowers (Leitenberg and Sheffer 1979; Reich 1987).

It is high time that we revisit these assumptions by adopting a more moderate path. Since the end of the imperial epoch, powerful global states have indeed influenced political regimes across the region;

but this does not mean that “the politics, economics, and destiny of the ‘Middle East’ are dictated by bigger forces and decided at a higher level” (Gerges 1991: 211). After all, short of outright colonial occupation and direct government—a fate that virtually no regional state experienced beyond North Africa—outside hegemons like the US and France only set the stage for national dramas. The state-building process was one in which all the key actors were domestic—regimes and leaders on the one hand, and social forces and popular classes on the other; but the calculations and preferences of the former reflect imperatives originating not just from the latter, but also the external geopolitical environment.

One way to capture this interactive dimension emerges in the new literature on international hierarchy. As David Lake has written, the post-WWII international system has paid lip service to the notion of juridical equality between states sharing some common norm of Westphalian sovereignty; but in practice, much of the system comprises asymmetrical dyads consisting of strong states and weak states (2009). These dyads mirror the classical scholarship on patron-client ties; the hierarchical relationships they entail are reciprocal, consensual, and informal networks struck by rulers of small and weak states with governments of larger and more powerful states. Within such hierarchical dyads, incumbent leaders of the subordinate state attempt to secure exogenous goods like diplomatic protection, economic aid, and military assistance from a larger foreign patron in exchange for fulfilling various services and functions for their patron. While further discussion of international hierarchy requires more space than available here, suffice it to conclude that transnational patron-client networks characterize the relationships sought by the new rulers of many post-colonial MENA polities. It is this external dimension that becomes so crucial in understanding the origins and durability of political order in the Middle East.

II. THE ARGUMENT

Before linking the constraints and opportunities provided by the geopolitical environment to long-term patterns of regime durability, it is necessary to establish the domestic logic of my theory. An extensive literature on post-colonial authoritarianism generates a generalized claim: in general, leaders who sacrificed power and resources to rally mass support from their societies tended to outlast dictators who pursued repressive absolutism and rested upon narrower social bases. Convincing studies by Jason Brownlee (2007), Ben Smith (2007), and Dan Slater (2010) build off this contention, reasoning further that early coalitional alignments created between leaders and supporters shaped the institutional lineaments of new states. Rulers seeking to marshal broad-based loyalty from below needed to expend costly side-payments, or material goods and political concessions that enhanced the status of constituent groups in return for support.

Side-payments give constituents enduring stakes in authoritarian order by lowering the expected gain of regime change, but they are effective only if leaders promise to continue providing such concessions in the future. Institutions provide such credible commitments to supporters. On the political side, leaders often created new parties or parliaments—organizational weapons linking local and sectoral interests with central policymaking; and on the economic side, they engendered state-driven development initiatives, such as selective industrialization and public employment, to redistribute patronage across networks of supporters. These institutional investments not only reduced the scope and intensity of future opposition (especially during crises), but they also provided new tools to defuse potential dissent: when facing social discontent, incumbent elites could not only mobilize social allies to defend their reign, they also enjoyed the credibility to more directly engage public grievances by making promises of reform.

In contradistinction, new regimes that sought only narrow social bases felt little need to trade side-payments for the compliance and support of major social forces. Unconstrained by societal

demands, they preferred to rule more by repression than reciprocity, and their exclusionary institutions reflected this divorce from popular inputs. For instance, state agencies like parties and parliaments (if they existed) strongly favored the enrichment of ruling elites rather than the costly mobilization of new supporters and satisfying demands of key interest groups; likewise, state-driven developmental policies were more poorly coordinated with social actors and sectoral representatives, and failed to distribute patronage effectively. As a result, after autocratic incumbents consolidated power and began to promulgate new policies, they were more willing to injure the interests of potential mass allies rather than seek bargained outcomes with social groups. Such policies fostered new antagonism, including maximalist opposition, over time, which rulers were also more hard-pressed to contain. They had a more difficult time rallying indigenous support to counter such discord, and they lacked credibility in negotiating concessions. Simply unleashing repression often backfired, because it further radicalized activists and raised the cost of restoring order.

These two contrasting trajectories are ideal types, but usefully illustrate a central analytical tenet—namely, that early coalitional choices shape later institutional structures, and institutional structures influence the threats posed by potential opposition. The basic argument here sketches out within the context of the case studies. Authoritarian rulers, by definition, face few legal constraints. Whereas the minimum-winning coalition for democrats is fixed through electoral formula, how autocrats perceive their optimal coalitional model markedly differs across cases. The historical record divulges that post-colonial leaders in the Middle East had markedly different preferences about their ideal coalitional configuration. Stable autocracies in Kuwait and Tunisia rested upon broad-based coalitions encompassing most mass social classes, spanning both rural and urban bases. More tenuously surviving dictatorships in Jordan and Bahrain rested upon more selective bases consisting of an organized minority group, but which still excluded major social forces. And overthrown governments in

Iraq and Iran rested on vapid foundations, one anchored more in small groups of wealthy elite allies rather than a cross-class coalition of social groups.

Why did regime entrepreneurs select such different coalitional strategies? Answering this question requires reaching back into time, and exploring how early dictators adjudicated conflicting imperatives of hoarding power and resources on the one hand, with paying the high price of reaching out and acquiring popular loyalty on the other hand. It is here that the geopolitical dimension, alongside national social conflicts, comes into play.

From the 1930s to 1950s,² rulers in Kuwait, Tunisia, Jordan, Bahrain, Iran, and Iraq faced insurgent opposition groups as their own states began to gain bureaucratic form and international legal sovereignty. Reigning over preindustrial economies and struggling to control their national territories, these untested leaders enjoyed support amongst traditional constituencies like agrarian elites, tribal communities, and petty producers. By contrast, opposition movements represented the demands of newly mobilized middle-sector groups, heavily drawn from (but not limited to) urban centers, such as organized labor, merchant captains, and educated professionals. In all six cases, such early resistance represented more than mild discontent or periodic anti-regime protests: in these countries, the opposition explicitly challenged political authority and demanded radical reconfigurations of power, including options that would have effectively ended the incumbent leadership. The interregnums that ensued were heady; they saw vocal reform demands, violent protests and riots, and other concerted activism punctuate public life. In short, these periods were marked by uncertainty, and were junctures that forced embattled leaders to make critical choices.

These founding struggles did not occur in an international vacuum. Even at the dusk of the imperial era, outside powers like the US, UK, and France sought to maintain or expand their spheres of

² I characterize this broad period of time as a regional transition to post-colonial sovereignty, marked by the gradual secession of power by imperial powers. While countries did not exit the colonial era at the same moment, nor through the same mode of transition, I argue that they all possessed sufficient domestic political authority by this era to rally new social alliances and allocate resources across their polity.

influence on the global periphery. They became deeply involved in supporting local rulers in the MENA through hierarchical networks of mutual support. In return for strategic favors, such as foreign policy alignment and economic market access, they furnished client regimes in the region with various goods. These included diplomatic protection (e.g., minimizing regional threats); fiscal aid (e.g., budget grants, soft loans); and coercive assistance (e.g., arms shipments, force training). Sometimes, outside powers also utilized covert operations or military force to directly crush concerted opposition without delay. Such clientelistic relationships did not end with the passing of conflict, and incumbents continued to reap material and symbolic support as they began to construct new institutional orders. At the same time, the logic of intervention was not purely functional, and superior resources alone did not always induce hegemons to intercede. Sometimes they militated against even mild involvement, because the potential cost was deemed too great or else because local leaders insisted on preserving their independence from foreign actors. Such secluding policies left rulers more vulnerable to domestic threats.

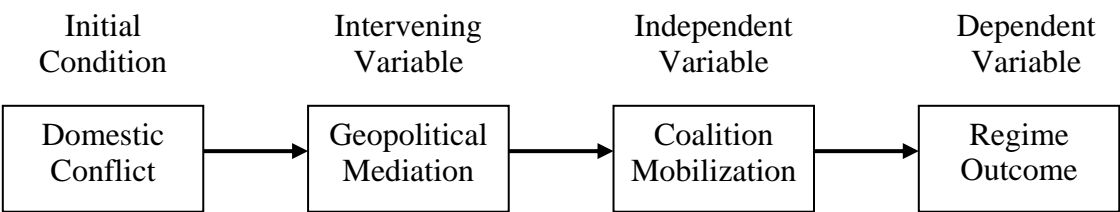
These varying types of geopolitical penetration reconfigured the coalitional options available during these formative social conflicts, and it is here that diverging coalitional pathways emerge. When helping hands from above provided the opportunity and resources to suppress opposition rather than sacrifice, dictators tended to avoid expensive coalition-building measures that would have augured new pacts with restive groups clamoring for more voice. In succeeding years, thanks to the liquidation of prior opposition and pluralism, they also enjoyed a more pliable social landscape as they centralized power. In such contexts, some rulers became highly reliant on external support, substituting it for their own domestic coalitions. Neglecting to link new urban constituencies to new state institutions through side-payments, and increasingly anemic to their own supporters, their exclusionary style of rule created political conditions ripe for cross-cutting unrest, as in Iran and Iraq.

However, other sovereigns reaping exogenous assistance chose to retain a modest social base for a critical reason: they perceived endemic threats from a hostile ethnic majority. Such segregating states

engendered persistent but manageable dissent from below, as in Jordan and Bahrain; leaders incorporated exogenous backing to subsidize their ethnically fractured political orders. Finally, when international assistance was absent, leaders negotiated with rival forces from a position of weakness. Confronting a far more pluralistic and antagonistic social terrain, they impressed stability by trading power for loyalty, tying large constituencies into the national political economy through pacts and promises. Such institutional arrangements reflecting geopolitical seclusion ultimately resulted in more resilient states, as in Tunisia and Kuwait.

Summated once more, the argument here is that the geopolitical environment generated divergent incentives to authoritarian regimes facing early opposition, resulting in systematically varying coalitional approaches that shaped future patterns of durability and contestation. In analytical terms, geopolitical mediation constituted an *intervening* variable that affected how antecedent domestic conflicts produced a successive chain of coalitional choices and consequent institutional outcomes (Fig. 1). The less that external hegemons mitigated the contentious birth pangs of post-colonial rule, the more likely regimes would assemble the sociopolitical alliances essential to their future stability.

FIG. 1. THE ARGUMENT



Before unpacking this argument through case studies, it is necessary to address several competing explanations for authoritarian durability in the Middle East. Iraq, Iran, Kuwait, Tunisia, Jordan, and Bahrain represent a universe of six autocratic cases in which three pathways of order (robust

durability, tenuous survival, revolutionary termination) branch off from common conditions of early social conflict. Can other potential hypotheses hold causal purchase in explaining these variations?

One obvious argument turns on the culturalist paradigm: religious norms or civilizational values explain why some authoritarian regimes succeed or fail—and likewise, why democracy seems so preciously scarce (e.g., Sharabi 1988; Kedourie 1994). Yet culturalist claims falter here. They cannot account for why six regimes sharing similar initial conditions (nondemocratic orientation, Muslim-majority society, located in same geographic region) forged such different *coalitional* approaches in building post-colonial states. If culture dictated outcomes, we would need to see systematic evidence linking distinctive “versions” of Islamic culture or definitive Arab/Persian values with these differing coalitional and institutional patterns.

A more popular explanation springs from the rentier state literature: fiscal reliance on natural resource wealth (such as oil revenues) ensures autocratic longevity by allowing rulers to bypass painful sacrifices, such as the extraction of domestic taxes, and capture mass consent through welfare provision (Mahdavy 1970; Beblawi and Luciani 1987; Anderson 1997). However, inductive comparisons reveal that regimes sharing similar outcomes widely vary on this variable. The Tunisian and Kuwaiti regimes both convened mass coalitions but only the latter had hydrocarbon riches; Bahrain’s oil and gas wellspring no more impeded its discriminatory state-building than did Jordan’s lack of natural resources. Iraq barely scratched the surface of its hydrocarbon substrate when its regime fell, whereas Iran was a leading oil producer when the Shah’s government collapsed two decades later.

Further, those regimes that did secure stable oil revenues pursued contrasting institutional strategies. For example, in the 1960s, rulers in both Kuwait and Iran harvested vast oil riches. Yet whereas the former reinvested these returns to cement a mass social base linking the tribal hinterland with the urban trading class through a web of economic transfers and social guarantees, the Pahlavi regime exploited its revenues to demolish the interests of traditional rural allies and pursue an

industrialization program that alienated urban labor. Advancing claims made by “revisionist” theories of rentier states (Smith 2007; Lowi 2010), these cases reveal that how rulers discharge their rentier windfalls reflect antecedent coalitional preferences forged during *pre-rent* social conflicts—periods of opposition in which leaders, even those that would later reap black gold, sought help from foreign patrons.

A third argument is that regime longevity stems from economic performance: perhaps the severity of fiscal crises explains why some governments survive and others do not, since social unrest that threatens leaders tends to spike during periods of economic decline (O’Donnell 1988; Haggard and Kaufman 1995). This suggests that patterns authoritarian durability mirror the gravity of economic disaster—the worse the shock, the stronger the opposition. However, this variable does not suffice for cases that share the same outcomes. For instance, Iraq in the late-1950s did not suffer the same degree of inflationary shock and financial recession as Iran did after the mid-1970s, yet both regimes saw tenacious unrest by the urban citizenry that each resulted in successful efforts to decapitate the leadership.

Further, while fiscal scarcity may intuitively drive citizens to the streets, it alone does not decree their intensity—that is, when they will demand reforms or revolution. Jordan’s economic collapse in the late 1980s was exceptional even in the Middle East in terms of its fiscal magnitude, and certainly worse than Iraq and Iran’s economic struggles during their revolutionary decades; but the protests that emerged on the East Bank were authored by the regime’s tribal base, which demanded not a radical change in royal leadership but simply new government policies. Neither does it predict the scope of leadership responses to crisis. For instance, both Bahrain and Kuwait faced severe financial shortfalls starting in the mid-1980s due to the global hydrocarbon bust, but over the succeeding decade the al-Khalifah regime proved far more willing to crush budding unrest amongst its Shi’a public than the al-Sabah regime did with its own dissidents, for which the Kuwaiti leadership referred compromise and negotiation. Such

outcomes suggest that the threats posed by social contestation activated by crises turn largely on if leaders have already invested time and resources into mobilizing coalitional alliances and institutional frameworks that enable them to effectively engage societal demands.

A final explanation is coercion. If states are Weberian actors armed with repressive monopolies over their population, can variations in autocratic survival stem from their differing capacities for violence and domination? Some contemporary assessments imply so, suggesting that the litmus test of successful dictatorships lays in their will and capacity to suppress all concerted competition from below (Crystal 1994; Bellin 2004). This comports with insight from structural theorists of revolution, in which mass rebellions only succeed when the state's repressive agencies suffer internal breakdown and organizational decay first (Dix 1984; Goodwin and Skocpol 1989).

Consider, though, the implication: if coercion makes states strong and strong states are durable, then the winning formula should be for autocrats to repress everyone—*and all the time*. Yet while autarchs can squash popular uprisings during crises, mass repression does not guarantee future survival. For instance, the Iranian and Iraqi regimes brutalized the urban labor force, but such unrelenting violence did not prevent their destruction by revolts supported by those same agents decades later. Moreover, while Bahrain and Jordan imposed periodic but bloody controls against hostile ethnic publics in the latter half of the twentieth-century during conflicts that approximated civil wars, Kuwait and Tunisia seldom needed to unleash similarly violent levels of coercion against their citizenry during the same time period. In these cases, preexisting coalitional preferences shape how “much” coercion that rulers perceived was necessary. I argue that this makes some intuitive sense; if incumbents transform potential rebels into reliable constituents, they have less imperative to both build a huge repressive apparatus and to exercise their coercive firepower to enact sweeping violence upon society later on.

III. CAUSAL PATHWAYS AND HISTORICAL CASES

A structured survey of the six Middle East cases follows. Though brief, these empirical vignettes present evidence to corroborate the primary argument by exposing how early social conflicts mediated by geopolitical patrons shaped the mobilization of ruling coalitions, and in turn how these coalitional commitments affected the inclusionary character of both political and economic institutions pursued by these regimes. That is, in analytic terms, *one* causal argument explains *three* historical pathways that account for outcomes in *six* empirical cases.

Substitution and Terminal Collapse: Iran and Iraq

Cases of terminal collapse reflected the antecedence effects of geopolitical substitution. In these contexts, foreign patrons intervened to empower beleaguered authoritarians to score resounding victories over early opposition, as they deemed the potential loss of their client states too costly to bear. Such hegemonic enhancement, however, crippled incentives on part of these local elites to organize inclusive sociopolitical alliances to anchor their regimes; in effect, external support functionally substituted for domestic legitimation during a critical period of consolidation. Thus, not only could rulers avoid making sacrifices to secure the allegiance of new constituent classes, but they could also enact political closure on their own terms, which bode ill for their own existing supporters. As they erected new states, they felt little pressure to build new central organizations, such as effective parties and responsive legislatures, which could both absorb the demands of newly mobilized groups and connect policymakers with local support. Likewise, developmental strategies suffered from poor coordination with key economic actors, often undercutting constituencies that had traditionally supported the regime. Over time, such exclusionary governance resulted in growing and extensive hostility from the public. When crises erupted, leaders could not invoke a counter-base of cross-cutting support to marginalize mass agitation, nor did they have the credibility to negotiate with dissenters after decades of repression. Lacking the

institutional tools to restore legal order through means other than coercion, they faced deposal by political movements drawing upon mass frustration.

These dynamics play out in Iran and Iraq. In Iran, the Pahlavi regime in the early 1950s was sidelined by a decade of foreign occupation, followed by political unrest headlined by the National Front and Tudeh communist party. Averse to losing a vital oil producer and anti-Soviet bulwark to leftist opposition, the US authored a massive campaign of support that effectively insulated its client Iranian regime from any early power-sharing incentive. While a substantial literature has highlighted the consequent Anglo-American coup that displaced Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh's government and returned the Shah to power (e.g., Kinzer 2008: 150-215), less discussed is how the US also saturated Iran with economic aid and military arms and training in the subsequent years. During 1953-1962, Washington transferred approximately \$620 million in financial assistance to Tehran, much of it as unrequited grants designed to close Iran's budgetary deficits and maintain basic state obligations (such as paying civil salaries) while its oil industry recovered from crippling strikes. Likewise, hundreds of American military advisers and intelligence officials entered the country to help reconfigure the Iranian military, rural gendarmerie, and domestic intelligence services (Gasiorowski 1991: 90-120). These subventions had an immediate impact: the Pahlavi autocracy not only remained solvent until the oil industry returned to full operations by the late 1950s, it was also able to disembowel opposition networks ensconced among urban labor and intelligentsia, which threatened Pahlavi continuity.

Herein lays the crucial point: having never been forced to compromise in restoring centralized power, the Iranian leadership felt little pressure to tailor new institutional and developmental projects fueled by oil wealth to win over organized classes and large constituencies. During the 1960s and 1970s, state-created parties served as hollow vehicles of elite advancement rather than true mass-mobilizing associations that cultivated dedicated cadres and enabled local cells and communities to communicate with a national leadership (Smith 2007: 107-111). Parliament, a historical site of debate and

participation, became a rubber stamp largely closed to popular contestation. Not only was the urban center disconnected, but the regime's new industrialization vision (as espoused through the White Revolution) went further to dislocate old allies that had previously legitimated Pahlavi rule. Ambitious new land reforms undercut the landlord class by removing its historical basis of power, while also failing to empower the peasantry given poorly planned land redistribution schemes and large-scale agribusiness ventures (Majd 1987). Likewise, urban commercialization and commercial regulations alienated the old bazaar class of merchants and artisans, as new regulations boxed in traditional small-scale production. The bureaucratization of the religious sector encroached upon the traditional authority of the large Shi'a clergy, whom by the 1970s had been castigated by state officials as outmoded and backwards (Akhavi 1980: 105-110). The tribal community, relegated to the margins of dynastic politics since the early twentieth century, was now permanently marginalized through sedentarization and more vigorous rural policing.

Such invasive reorganizations of the national political economy required a colossal expansion of the regime's coercive apparatus, a process strengthened by an initially intimate bilateral relationship with the US. Yet the constant imposition of wide-scale repression meant that the Shah never crafted institutional linkages with key organized sectors, leaving the government relatively isolated from popular forces. Much of the scholarship on the Iranian revolution makes this point clear. When running inflation and economic shortages triggered a rising tide of protests throughout 1978, the Pahlavi regime found that it wielded few tools apart from brute violence that could engage the demonstrators. While the regime's repressive agencies proved capable of squashing urban demonstrations and riots, whether the Shah could swallow the continuation of wholesale massacre for years was the real question (Arjomand 1988: 190). The reconfigured national party birthed years earlier, the *Rastakhiz*, was a hollow organization with few grass-roots activists to counter these protests. Opposition swelled with the ranks of different actors—for instance, labor, clergy, intelligentsia, and students, all of whom could have been

co-opted and incorporated decades earlier. Further, the Shah's regime had little credibility when promising last-minute political reforms in return for peace. The result was regime termination.

Iraq's first experiment in sovereignty also highlights the substitutive effects of early geopolitical involvements. After gaining formal independence from Britain in 1932, the ruling Hashemite monarchy faced friction from urban elites, professionals, and students endorsing an anti-British stance, also drawing upon the early pan-Arab sentiment swirling around intelligentsia debates at the time. Such tensions colored the political scene until World War Two, and were exacerbated by the fact that many opposition sympathizers were political servants of the nascent Iraqi state as well as officers in the small but well-trained Iraqi army (Eppel 2004: 38-49). In 1941, an army coup embodying the nationalist movement displaced the Hashemite throne. Fearing the prospects of a republican Iraq that tilted towards Germany, Britain marshaled military forces from India, Palestine, and neighboring Transjordan to invade the country and reinforce its nominally independent client regime. After extirpating the revolt, the British and its monarchical ally both moved swiftly to reconsolidate its client regime. For the next several years, the Iraqi government was able to brutally subdue restive Baghdad, crush rumblings of Kurdish separatism, and settle old scores against nationalist foes through relentless purges (Simon 1986: 150-154).

Yet because it had placated its foes through brutality rather than bargains, the post-war Iraqi dictatorship felt no need to engage the interests of growing middle-sector groups. As Hanna Batatu's canonical study notes, because beyond the army and royal elite, the Iraqi regime's social base of support was largely delinked from the contentious urban center, and consisted of little more than a narrow stratum of Sunni tribal sheikhs and Shi'a landowners who lorded over a feudal rural economy (1978). Still, Hashemite elites felt secure thanks to two factors. The first was continuing support from Britain, upon whom they remained dependent for their internal security needs through a network of military bases, diplomatic missions, and defense guarantees. The second was rising financial royalties from its

nascent oil industry; facilitated by British guidance, these revenues rescued the government from post-war budget deficits by 1950 and allow it to pursue early industrialization projects (Sassoon 1987: 96-100). However, these state-building efforts reflected a central leadership disencumbered from popular constraints. During the seminal 1950s, the regime furiously repressed the growing urban middle-class and organized labor, among whom the communist party and Arab Nationalist movement drew support. Parliament remained a lackluster institution dominated by rural allies. The large peasantry remained fragmented and unmobilized, and emergent land reform schemes failed thanks to agrarian elite resistance; likewise, new industrialization projects were poorly coordinated, and failed to satisfy basic labor and wage demands in urbanizing areas.

When a combination of economic lethargy and Arab Nationalist provocations sparked a wave of public agitation in the mid-1950s, the regime found that it could neither reduce such contestation through renewed violence nor negotiate any compromise in hopes of restoring order. It commanded little respectability as a potential partner for any future political transition, given its prior failure to win over coalitional allies. Turning to foreign patrons brought little relief. In the post-Suez War era, Britain's regional influence and material resources to project power in the Middle East was waning. Neither could the US, newly targeted by nervous Hashemite elites to provide military assistance, fill the gap. The crisis came to a head in mid-1958 with the July Revolution. As prevailing assessments of that regicidal episode note, "almost universal approval by the Iraqi people" greeted the decapitation of the monarchy at the hands of the Free Officers (Dawisha 2009: 171). Hundreds of thousands marched in support of the new regime that summer, with communists leading the way. As in Iran, few social forces were moved to defend a regime that could have secured broader support in preceding years of institutional consolidation.

Subsidization and Tenuous Survival: Jordan and Bahrain

Cases of tenuous survival reveal the effects of geopolitical *subsidization*. Here, well-timed international backing enabled ruling elites to terminate early opposition. Yet afterwards, they pursued what I call a “selective” coalitional strategy due to an anterior factor: opposition movements drew from hostile ethnic majorities in their fractious societies, majorities that retained a demographic advantage even after the end of conflict. After safeguarding power with foreign support, such perceived endemic threats generated a powerful incentive to enact a discriminatory blueprint of authoritarian order. Rulers hardened existing networks of loyalty with “nativist” minority groups while marginalizing outsider groups and classes from the state; thus new institutional arrangements reinforced old cleavages. Over time, autocratic rule was characterized by a climate of constant tension: such majoritarian exclusion generated persistent and often hardline opposition that threatened leaders during crises, but such resistance was predictable given the segregating nature of their coalitional commitments. These regimes survived by mobilizing indigenous supporters and repressing dissent, though at high economic cost. Afterwards, they attempted to co-opt opposing elites and embark upon minor reforms to foreclose future uprisings, but kept intact the underlying discriminatory logic of their coalitions.

Jordan and Bahrain demonstrate this pathway. In Jordan, the Hashemite monarchy rested upon a historical bedrock of Bedouin tribes and landed East Bank families, as well as small Christian and Circassian minorities. The 1948 Arab-Israeli War brought a huge influx of new Palestinian residents, which the regime attempted to incorporate into the young state through the granting of mass citizenship and other symbolic entreaties. That political experiment stuttered in the early 1950s as tensions with urban opposition peaked. Leading parties of dissent—among them the socialists, Arab Nationalists, and Ba‘thists—drew upon labor and intelligentsia, many from the Palestinian community (Plascov 1981: 123-157). When this movement gained control of parliament to sideline King Hussein in early 1957, US intervention tipped the balance back to the royalists. Fearful of losing its client state to Soviet influence,

Washington stepped into the patronal gap left by the receding British. For the next several years, the US provided diplomatic guarantees to ensure Jordan's territorial integrity, economic grants to keep the teetering monarchy financially stable, and various arms shipments to modernize and maintain the army's readiness—then busy cracking down on critics and dissidents (Kaplan 1975).

Yet despite the dismantling of opposition parties by the late 1950s, the Hashemite House retained a stubborn perception that a restless urban public driven by Palestinian activism remained ever-ready to revolt. Starting in the 1960s, the regime exploited US support to deepen its coalitional ties with Jordanian constituents while cautiously distancing itself from the Palestinian community. New institutional arrangements reflected this arrangement. Political parties remained banned and parliament circumscribed; Jordanian actors like tribal leaders were instead linked to the palace through royal councils, cabinet placements, and other internal mechanisms of voice. Swelling public employment absorbed Jordanian labor while the army continued employing Bedouin men from rural constituencies. By the mid-1960s, official unemployment among the non-refugee Jordanian population had fallen to under 5 percent (Mazur 1979: 31). Further, official development spending was disproportionately funneled to the East Bank rather than Palestinian West Bank, with the creation of new parastatal firms and other industrial ventures that enriched notable families and landed merchants (Aruri 1972: 56-60).

Such ethnic segmentation contributed to the 1970 civil conflict, when *fida'iyeen* organizations drawing upon local Palestinian resources attempted to depose the Hashemite regime. As in April 1957, well-timed American assistance by an administration unwilling to accept the collapse of a crucial client provided both diplomatic and material relief for the besieged leadership (Little 1995: 543). No less important was the fidelity of the Bedouin-dominated army, which wiped out the last pockets of Palestinian militancy in the summer of 1971. Given the extraordinary costs of this bloody war, the regime widened its narrow base in the succeeding decade by reach out to Palestinian business elites. Yet discriminatory deepening continued in the 1970s and 1980s, as the Palestinian middle-classes and labor

found themselves increasingly boxed in by state repression and isolated from public employment and industrialization schemes. Indeed, it took not sustained dissent from this excluded majority, but brief *tribal* protests during the late 1980s financial meltdown to convince the regime to allow tepid political liberalization (Brand 1995). However, those reforms have not changed a ruling strategy laid a half-century earlier: a selective coalition of ethnic insiders and outside assistance has enabled the regime to muddle through by holding a Palestinian public at arm's length.

Bahrain's segmented development approximates the Jordanian experience. The al-Khalifa, like many other tribal principalities along the Persian Gulf littoral, had placed their sheikhdom under British protection by the early twentieth century. Anglo-Bahraini relations resulted in extensive interference, especially in social relations between the Sunni merchants and townsfolk who backed the regime, and the less privileged Shi'a majority. Sectarian clashes were a frequent occurrence in Manama through the 1930s (Fuccaro 2009: 152-160). Yet British maneuvers—facilitated by the notorious Charles Belgrave's placement as advisor to the ruler—helped preserve the al-Khalifa mandate early on. For instance, the imposition of British martial law helped the regime gut a concerted protest movement in 1938, one that had demanded political reforms (Al-Tajir 1987: 238-248). Britain also helped found and nurture the national oil industry, the royalties of which accrued directly to ruling family and whose employment demands were a financial staple for the island-state's labor force.

In the mid-1950s, however, the most severe public disturbances seen yet engulfed Bahrain as anti-British nationalists and urban labor activists, heavily suffused with Shi'a participation, launched a series of debilitating strikes and riots. After some uncertainty and tension, the al-Khalifa leadership decisively moved to quell the opposition front. Two geopolitical factors facilitated its ability to reinstate centralized order (Lawson 1989: 66-68). First, the regime exploited Britain's repressive resources. Though longstanding Sunni tribal retainers personally protected the ruling family, the al-Khalifa rulership also could exploit a uniformed colonial police force drawn from other British territories and

led by Anglophone officers. Second, the oil industry had deliberately began purchasing intermediate goods and consumables from national suppliers years earlier, which distanced local Sunni producers from potentially supporting the uprising (even if they silently shared its anti-Western overtones).

The aftermath of social conflict, as in Jordan, paradoxically brought both peace and insecurity. The al-Khalifa government remained suspicious of the Shi'a majority, especially its participation in the labor movement—fears aggravated by renewed protests preceding the end of British treaty relations in 1971. The regime hence chose to solidify a selective coalition of Sunni loyalists centered around wealthy merchants and the tribal community. Succeeding institutional arrangements under Emir Isa bin Salman reflected this sectarian segmentation. For instance, parliament existed for only a few years before its dissolution in 1975, as the al-Khalifa leadership believed that a counter-coalition of Shi'a leaders and labor activists would threaten its predominance. With political parties banned, the regime utilized informal political mechanisms to ensure constant proximity with key Sunni constituents. Inversely, the Shi'a fell under increasing surveillance and repression, and isolated incidents of opposition against al-Khalifa rule triggered blanket retaliation (Franklin 1985: 11-12). The Shi'a also faced discrimination in the public economy, as many were frozen out of positions in the police, army, and burgeoning bureaucracy. Further, the light industrialization and service contracts that characterized the non-oil sector disproportionately favored the Sunni businessmen (Bahry 1997: 49-51). Such stifling exclusion isolated the Shi'a community over time. In the mid-1990s, economic downturn precipitated concerted Shi'i unrest. Security forces responded with bloody coercion, and not until 1999 when a new Emir, Hamad bin Isa, ascended with a promise of political reforms did the violence cease. Yet despite some liberalizing promises, the al-Khalifa regime still considers the Shi'a demographic as a persistent and existential threat..

Seclusion and Regime Durability: Kuwait and Tunisia

Finally, cases of robust resilience shared initial conditions of geopolitical seclusion. While these regimes were not necessarily isolated from great power machinations, they did not secure the foreign support that would have helped them suffocate early opposition outright. Strategic circumstances compelled outside kingmakers from involving themselves in these national conflicts. In order to survive, then, rulers here were forced to trade power for loyalty, bargaining with those groups and actors they could not otherwise conquer by force. Such early compromises established the coalitional commitments and inclusionary habits that would flavor succeeding decades of state-building, when leaders turned away from external dependence and cemented new sociopolitical alliances with various economic and political side-payments. They convened central institutions for this reason. Effective parties and parliaments provided an organizational infrastructure that connected local and sectoral interests to the regime's policymaking imperatives; likewise, developmental schemes were synchronized with major economic stakeholders, and distributed patronage to bind their interests with the regime. Over time, these commitments forced leaders to work closely with social actors to defuse tensions as they emerged. When opposition did erupt, rulers wielded a broad repertoire of institutional tools to restore sociopolitical order and assuage the demands of dissenting citizens.

The legacies of geopolitical seclusion emerge in Kuwait and Tunisia. In Kuwait, the al-Sabah dynasty faced vociferous opposition from urban merchants in the late 1930s. Here, relations between the trading merchant class and the tribal-oriented familial regime had deteriorated for decades. As early as 1908, Sheikh Mubarak al-Sabah had attempted to levy higher boat taxes and shop rents in hopes of collecting more revenues, precipitating a showdown that ended only when the wealthiest merchants absconded—along with their fleets of pearling vessels and labor crews—to other Gulf ports, forcing the rulership to back down lest it lose its economic wellspring (Slot 2005: 317-322). The 1938 challenge constituted a more dangerous challenge. The merchants formed a legislative assembly that limited al-

Sabah power, including traditional prerogatives over the budget and other key policies. Though allied to its client regime as in Bahrain, the British gravitated against direct intervention, such as through direct fiscal subsidies or even military gestures, such as troop landings to intimidate the challenge. Instead, the diplomatic record shows that British authorities ignored al-Sabah pleas for late intervention, and insisted instead on a policy of measured neutrality (Loewenstein 2000: 107-111).

Driven to compromise, the al-Sabah rulership responded to crisis by widening its hitherto narrow base. Though the leadership initially disbanded the merchant assembly, continuing ties of economic dependence induced him to later grant amnesty to virtually all the dissidents. In addition to this standoff, the regime also engaged new coalitional partners that could supplement its tribal base. It reminded the large Shi'a minority of their protected status, manipulating their historical fears of discrimination under any other Sunni government (Salih 1992: 85-87). The regime also reached out to maritime labor and other poor Sunni workers beholden to business elite through indebtedness. Such pacting foreshadowed regime responses during the turbulent late-1950s. At a time in which Arab Nationalist-inspired protests interrupted life in the city-state, the al-Sabah government preferred to compromise rather than coerce its critics. As a result, when Britain abrogated its treaty relations in 1961, the Kuwaiti regime began its era of national independence and rentier wealth with a broad-based coalitional strategy.

Consequent Kuwaiti state-building thus enshrined the priority of maintaining political cohesion. Despite the prohibition on political parties, the al-Sabah regime created an elected parliament with a flexible cabinet system that gave mass constituents, from the tribal community to the Shi'a, an institutionalized seat at the policymaking table. Developmental projects fueled by black gold entailed costly but useful side-payments tailored to each constituency. Despite their earlier militancy, the merchants maintained but their proximity to state influence as well as their commercial dominance in the new era thanks to government-granted monopolies and contracts (Crystal 1995: 73-78). The tribes were settled and nationalized in large numbers, and Sunni and Shi'a workers strategically absorbed into

mushrooming public sector payrolls and civil bureaucracies. Tellingly, by the mid-1960s the government reported nearly full employment for the citizenry (Khouja and Sadler 1979: 42-44).

These inclusive coalitional strategies should not connote that no tensions marked state-society relations; as in Tunisia and other inclusive autocracies, dissident movements persisted throughout the post-colonial era. However, the al-Sabah regime could more easily outmaneuver the social discontent that emerged over time, especially during its most severe test—the mid-1980s financial collapse and subsequent Iraqi occupation—without facing the prospect of cross-cutting and radical uprisings. While these episodes generated criticism from merchant elites, urban civil society groups, and other liberal actors about the ruling family's poor crisis management skills, such opposition aimed more at enhancing political transparency than attacking al-Sabah legitimacy. Even after returning home after the Iraqi occupation, the al-Sabah regime found that it could satisfy recrudescing opposition with credible promises of economic and political reform, while also maneuvering its tribal allies to counter liberal demands. The result was a quiet return to authoritarian rule: in the 1990s, when given the possibility of a regime alternative, the Kuwaiti citizenry instead backed the instauration of al-Sabah autocracy.

In Tunisia, gradual negotiations paved the way for the end of French occupation in the mid-1950s. Then, prospective leader Habib Bourguiba faced intense resistance within the leading Neo-Destour nationalist movement from Salah ben Youssef. The resulting conflict pitted two prominent leaders with well-organized constituencies against one another; though Bourguiba was popular, the Youssefist faction drew entrenched support from key social groups like labor syndicates, rural landlords, and students. By late 1955, the country was on the verge of civil war, with Youssefists openly raiding Neo-Destour branches and armed militants deploying guerilla tactics against Bourguiba's supporters (Micaud et al. 1964: 89-92). The French could have easily picked a winner, or at least intervened to constrain violence by either side, but opted for neutrality. Tied by colonial obligations elsewhere and concerned about their timely withdrawal from this former protectorate, the French saw the struggle as an

internal matter. For instance, the French police did not check Youssefist activity, and were deliberately slow in transferring over security functions to their Tunisian counterparts (Moore 1965: 68). Bourguiba, for his part, also had little desire to lean on external support given his prior nationalist struggles against France.

Bourguiba ultimately turned the ND membership on Youssef through a strategy of hard bargaining and popular appeals to party constituencies. Even after the Youssefists' nominal defeat, however, the post-independence political landscape remained fragmented. The founding 1956 parliamentary elections were marked by embarrassing abstention rates, with Tunis alone reporting 40 percent (Perkins 2004: 131). Given the lack of national cohesion, the Bourguibist presidency resolved itself to build a broad and cross-class coalition that could absorb the social foundations of any opposition. Over the next decades, the regime poured considerable resources to construct a corporatist infrastructure, housed within its party apparatus. By the early 1960s, the ND (which President Bourguiba also headed) had become the only legal party organization, one that penetrated nearly all sectors of society. Akin to the rebellious merchants of Kuwait, hundreds of former Youssefist dissenters were forgiven and given loyalist roles. Two major social actors—organized labor and the business sector—sat on the party bureau; and though tensions sometimes marked their demands, their inclusion meant that the regime often worked to accommodate their interests (Rudebeck 1967: 186-200). For instance, the onset of selective industrialization and public sector expansion during the 1960s brought unionized labor extensive wage benefits and legal subsidies. Likewise, the business community relied upon state sponsorship to thrive, a dependency that ultimately constricted its political autonomy by fusing its capital lifeline with the regime (Bellin 2002: 61-70). Similar forms of state-based patronage saturated the agrarian sector, benefiting small-scale cultivators in the countryside.

These coalitional investments paid off during the economic crisis that began in the late 1970s, when many workers split from the state and participated in wide-scale strikes and unrest. Though it

responded with repression, by the late 1980s the regime (under leadership of new president Zine al-Abidine ben ‘Ali) had rehabilitated the workers’ movement through political reprieve and financial promises, restoring its coalition. Moreover, the economic crisis did not stir widespread radical sentiments for regime change among other citizens. For example, when a small Tunisian rebel force mounted a militant uprising in 1980 and called for revolution, nobody answered despite ongoing financial difficulties. Likewise, the regime faced little resistance from either the business community or organized labor when it moved to eliminate its moderate Islamist challenge in the early 1990s, even though this meant retracting other democratic promises that Ben ‘Ali had made a decade prior. As in Kuwait, the social actors that could have been frontline advocates of change during the 1990s became instead the stoutest defenders of authoritarian perpetuity.

IV. CONCLUSION

This working paper has explained variations in the durability of authoritarian regimes in the Middle East by focusing on the geopolitical dimensions and social conflicts that typified state-building in the post-colonial era. It argued that when weak regimes in Iraq, Iran, Jordan, Bahrain, Tunisia, and Kuwait faced surging opposition early on, the constraints and opportunities engendered by their hierarchical linkages with outside powers explains why they responded in distinctive ways. While existing studies chart well how these ruling coalitions—*once formed*—result in institutional legacies over time that shape both regime policies and potential opposition, the theory here usefully explains the contentious origins of these coalitional commitments.

Three final points deserve mention. One is that incorporating international factors into comparative stories of state-building need not be a zero-sum task, in which either local actors or outside powers must bear the whole causal burden. It is the historical interplay of both international and domestic factors that explain different pathways of autocratic stability in the MENA. One way to cast

the geopolitical variable in these domestic causal narratives into sharper relief is to imagine counterfactuals: for each case, *absent* the observed impact of foreign patrons, would the regime leadership in question have responded to social opposition in different ways, selecting different coalitional strategies and institutional commitments in the long-run?

This paper implies this would indeed have been the case, given the hypothesized role that geopolitical mediation played in shaping regime perceptions at a critical juncture. For instance, without massive infusions of American aid and arms, the Shah's government would have lacked a cogent repressive apparatus while facing financial hardship during the mid-1950s, an uncertain period that could have given the National Front and Tudeh groups space to reorganize to repeatedly confront Pahlavi autocracy—actions that would have likely forced a weakened Shah to seek a negotiated compromise in order to win some peace. Likewise, had the French ordered its dormant security forces in Tunis to simply root out Youssefist forces and bolster Bourguiba during the 1955-56 turbulence (not to mention the converse scenario), then the tentative leader would not have had overwhelming incentives to expand his ruling party's social foundations in order to foreclose future opposition. As another example, had Britain not supplied Bahrain with colonial policing, technical expertise, and political guidance when facing mass unrest during the 1950s, then the al-Khalifa dynasty could not have responded to the demands of its Shi'a majority and organized labor as brutally as it did; a response more like Kuwait would have been forthcoming, one marked by grudging bargains and habituation that would have greatly widened the ruling house's coalitional networks and reduced the threat of the Shi'a majority.

Second, for those attuned to foreign policy, the insights offered here comport with the bloody wisdom gained by American policymakers in Iraq and Afghanistan over the past decade. When local allies enjoy guarantees of foreign protection against local antagonists, they feel little pressure to reach across social divisions to build mass coalitions that can reify inclusive political orders and bolster their

otherwise weak legitimacy by drawing in support from resistant social groups. For future adventurers in nation-building, the lesson here is that occupations (when necessary) must be swift and efficient—because the quicker that client regimes learn to stand on their own two feet, the more likely they will adopt strategies of responsive governance that would enhance their long-run stability.

The final point is made in retrospect of the captivating protests that rocked the Arab world during the winter of 2011. Especially given the collapse of the Ben ‘Ali presidency in Tunisia, it remains clear that while a regime’s coalitional origins may cast strong legacies for its consolidation and stability, there are no long-term guarantees. Tunisia was a paradigm of post-colonial durability in the late twentieth century. Even after the fiscal crises and bread riots of the late 1970s through early 1980s, with both rural and urban constituents still integrated into the organizational infrastructure of the party-state, virtually no observer predicted looming trouble for the Ben ‘Ali presidency after its assumption of power from the Bourguibist era. Yet while the new president inherited the coalitional foundations necessary to ensure another era of stability, his regime’s path markedly diverged from the old Bourguibist formula for mass incorporation by the 2000s: neoliberal development programs marginalized the interests of the urban business and organized labor, and the personalization of power within his own office and family resulted in the hollowing out of the RCD (formerly Neo-Destour) party organization. As in other popular upheavals that tore down shell-shocked autocracies in the MENA decades earlier, the authors of the “Jasmine” revolution were former supporters and marginalized constituents who, in the absence of any connection to the incumbent regime, sought a lucid political alternative.

From here surfaces this paper’s axiomatic contention: in the long-run, rulers are more likely to survive if they give citizens concrete reasons to defend political order. Periodic bribes or blanket repression do not ensure the fidelity of popular groups. Instead, by tying social groups directly to the regime’s survival through credible coalitional alliances, leaders can reduce the possibility of their deposal and heighten their institutional capacity to overcome spontaneous opposition during future

crises. Ambitious democrats and autocrats alike ignore this lesson at their own peril, especially when they inherit historical legacies that provide guidance onto the best ruling strategy. The ignominious flight of Ben 'Ali from Tunis in January 2011 provides the latest reminder.

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