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Explaining the Failure of Political Liberalization in the Persian Gulf and Assessing the Prospects for Democratization: The Case of Bahrain

par

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en vue de l'obtention du grade de maître en science

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Explaining the Failure of Political Liberalization in the Persian Gulf and Assessing the Prospects for Democratization: The Case of Bahrain

Abstract

This thesis addresses the applicability to the study of Persian Gulf regimes of the pre-eminent theories within the study of democratization: modernization, political culture and transitology. The thesis begins with a conceptual discussion of democracy in order to establish the recognized minimal standard within the literature for a successful democratic transition. We examine the modernization and political culture approaches and determine that they provide inadequate explanations for the endurance of authoritarian regimes in the region.

We then turn to an analysis of the theory of transitology, the dominant paradigm in the study of democratization. We argue that despite having been used sparingly within the context of Middle Eastern studies, it represents the most comprehensive theoretical framework through which to analyse political liberalization in Arab states. We find that the failure of previous liberalization processes in the region can be explained by the absence of circumstances within the regimes to meet the three main tenets of transitology: advanced liberalization, a schism within the ruling elite between soft-liners and hard-liners and political pacting between regime soft-liners and a moderate opposition. The thesis also emphasizes the flexible nature of monarchies as a regime-type. We argue that the institutional suppleness and adaptability of monarchies makes them receptive to transitology-styled incremental top-down democratization, as evidenced by the historical precedent of European constitutional monarchies. We find that this precedent is related to the ability of monarchies to reform without jeopardizing the status of elites within their respective societies. As a result, the scope of the thesis is limited to the Persian Gulf States since they are the only monarchies in the Middle East, with the exception of Morocco and Jordan and therefore represent the likeliest candidates for successful democratization.

To validate these conclusions, we apply the three different paradigms to the case study of Bahrain, a Gulf monarchy which is in the midst of a substantial liberalization process. This study is supplemented by a complementary analysis of the neighbouring states of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia in order to better contextualize Bahraini liberalization within the Gulf region. This is preceded by a historical account of political reforms in each state. We find that the social, economic and cultural prerequisites for democracy stipulated by the modernization and political culture paradigms have been satisfied in the cases of Bahrain and Kuwait for some time and therefore do not account for the persistence of the respective monarchies. In the case of Saudi Arabia the modernization and political culture approaches are applicable as the country has yet to experience a significant transformation of social and cultural values. When analyzed through the prism of transitology we find that the theory is applicable to all three cases. In Kuwait, advanced liberalization and a moderate opposition are present but the schism within the ruling elite, the genesis of the transition process according to transitology, is absent. In Saudi Arabia, we find none of the three tenets of transitology have been satisfied. Finally, in the case of Bahrain we find that the recent momentum for liberalization has coincided with the emergence of a schism within the ruling elite which has shown itself willing to negotiate with the mature moderate opposition which pre-dates independence in 1971. We therefore conclude that democratization is attainable in Bahrain and that transitology constitutes a useful paradigm for democratization theorists wishing to study political liberalization in the Gulf region and other Arab states.

Résumé

Ce mémoire porte sur l'applicabilité des trois théories prédominantes de la démocratisation - la théorie de la modernisation, l'approche culturelle et la transitologie – à l'analyse des régimes politiques de trois pays du Golfe Persique. Dans un premier temps, nous discutons du concept de démocratie, afin d'identifier les critères minimaux d'une transition démocratique réussie dans la littérature. Dans un deuxième temps, nous examinons les raisons pour lesquelles la théorie de la modernisation et l'approche culturelle ne permettent pas d'expliquer adéquatement la persistance des régimes autoritaires dans la région.

Par la suite nous analysons la théorie de la transitologie, actuel paradigme dominant des études sur la démocratisation des sociétés. Nous soutenons qu 'elle constitue le cadre d'analyse le plus approprié pour éclairer les succès et les limites de la libéralisation dans les pays arabes, nonobstant le fait qu 'elle ait été peu utilisée par les travaux sur la démocratisation au Moyen-Orient. Selon nous, les échecs des processus de démocratisation amorcés dans le passé au sein de cette région sont attribuables à l'absence des trois conditions identifiées par la transitologie : une libéralisation du régime, l'existence d'un conflit entre les élites conservatrices et réformistes du régime, la présence d'une opposition loyale ouverte à la négociation d'un compromis politique avec les dirigeants réformistes.

Le mémoire insiste également sur la flexibilité des régimes monarchiques du Golfe. Nous soutenons que la souplesse institutionnelle et l'adaptabilité des monarchies les rend réceptives à des scénarios de démocratisation par le haut comme le montrent les précédents historiques de certaines monarchies constitutionnelles européennes, car elles peuvent procéder à des réformes en profondeur sans compromettre le statut des élites. Cette hypothèse explique que le mémoire soit centré sur les pays du Golfe Persique, qui sont les seuls États monarchiques du Moyen-Orient à l'exception de la Jordanie et le Maroc et dès lors, les plus probables candidats à des transitions démocratiques réussies.

Afin de confirmer ces hypothèses, nous analysons le cas du Bahreïn, une monarchie du Golfe engagée dans un processus substantiel de libéralisation, à l'aide des trois théories mentionnées. Nous complétons cette étude par l'examen de la situation politique dans deux monarchies voisines – le Kuwait et l'Arabie saoudite – afin de mieux situer la libéralisation au Bahreïn dans le contexte régional. Le rappel de l'histoire des réformes politiques effectuées dans ces deux pays montrent que les pré-requis socio-économiques et culturels identifiés par la théorie de la modernisation et l'approche culturelle ont existé pendant une certaine période de temps, de telle sorte qu'ils ne peuvent expliquer la persistance de l'autoritarisme dans les deux États. La théorie de la transitologie par contre permet d'éclairer la trajectoire différente des trois pays de l'échantillon. Au Kuwait, c'est l'absence d'un conflit entre conservateurs et modérés du régime, et non l'absence d'une libéralisation et d'une opposition loyale qui explique l'échec de la démocratisation. En Arabie Saoudite, la résilience du régime autoritaire est dûe à l'absence des trois variables de la transitologie. Au Bahreïn, la récente libéralisation est attribuable à un schisme au sein du régime entre conservateurs et réformistes et à la volonté de ces derniers de négocier des réformes avec les forces modérées d'une opposition remontant à la période antérieure à l 'indépendance de 1971. Nous concluons, sur la base de ces études de cas, que la transitologie est un paradigme utile pour comprendre les avancées ou les limites de la libéralisation politique dans la région du Golf persique et les autres pays arabes.

Mots clés: démocratisation, transitologie, Bahreïn, Golf Persique, monarchie, modernisation, approche culturelle, Koweït, Arabie Saoudite

To my mother, Sylvia Kissin, to whom I am forever indebted. Her own academic accomplishments in political science have served as an inspiration to me and she has provided me with constant motivation throughout the writing process. Her commitment has been unwavering and she has always been available to provide a listening ear, as well as insightful comments and suggestions. In addition to her guidance, she has also acted as the chief editor of my work. I dedicate this thesis to her, a small token of my appreciation and recognition of her sacrifices and steadfast dedication. Throughout my life she has been a loving parent, teacher and colleague but above all I consider her to be my closest friend.

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Mathieu Kissin

Montréal, August 15, 2007

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Explaining the Failure of Political Liberalization in the Persian Gulf and Assessing the Prospects for Democratization: The Case of Bahrain

Introduction

Transitology occupies a dominant position within the study of democratization. It has been used sparingly in the context of the Middle East because of the absence of any successful democratic transitions in the region. The failure of previous liberalization processes in the region however can be explained applying the theory's emphasis on elite conflict and pacting. In the case of Bahrain, the governing style of the Al Khalifa, dynastic rulers of the Kingdom, was once described as "driving with the brakes full-on and having an olfactory insensitiveness to the results".[1] It was therefore a surprising development when in 1999 the new Emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa extended an olive branch to the opposition, releasing all political prisoners, allowing the return of exiles and lifting restrictions on the press. A traditionally autocratic and repressive state, the recent political developments in the Gulf state would have been inconceivable five years earlier when Bahrain plunged into a state of chaos as a result of civil unrest.

Ironically, the circumstances which provoked the uprising had been the steadfast refusal of Sheikh Hamad's father, then monarch, to implement any political reforms. Instead he chose to deal with demands for greater participation by imprisoning or exiling those who advocated such reform. Until his death, Sheikh Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa had been the only ruler of Bahrain and Sheikh Hamad's arrival marked the dawn of a new political era in Bahrain.

The Emir's gestures appear to have been motivated by a desire to return stability to Bahrain and led to the opening of a dialogue with the opposition and the implementation of a

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[1] Rosemarie Said Zahlan, *The Making of the Modern Gulf States: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman*, (Reading: Garnet Publishing Limited, 1998), 80

series of sweeping reforms. Basic civil rights such as the freedom of speech were granted to Bahraini citizens. Later that year, a national Charter was adopted, restoring parliamentarianism to Bahrain, absent since its first attempt at liberalization failed in 1975 and its national Assembly was dissolved. Universal suffrage was introduced and several parliamentary elections have since been held. In addition, Sheikh Hamad has made efforts to reconcile the relationship between the Al Khalifa and the Shi'i majority which had historically been subjected to systemic discrimination.[2] They amended the previously draconian security law and appointed two Shi'i to the cabinet for the first time in history. Bahrain has moved to the forefront of liberalization among Gulf States.

In light of the foregoing events, this thesis will argue that the theory of transitology provides reasonable cause to predict that liberalization in Bahrain will lead to democratization and thereby overcome the obstacles which have historically doomed earlier transitions in Arab states.

The discussion in the first chapter begins with a conceptual definition of democracy. This is followed by an analysis of the three leading theoretical paradigms of democratization within the context of the Middle East: modernization, political culture and transitology. Following a critique of both the modernization and political culture paradigms and their shortcomings, the discussion shifts to the applicability of transitology within the context of the Middle East, in particular its usefulness in understanding past failed and/or aborted liberalizations and the absence of democracy in the region. From this in-depth analysis we single out the theory of transitology's three most important elements of a successful democratic transition: a schism within the ruling elite between hard-liners and soft-liners, an advanced liberalization process, and a moderate opposition with whom regime soft-liners can negotiate a political pact which will

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[2] The rule regarding the use of Shi'i and Shi'a: Shi'a refers to the collective or community (ex. The Bahraini Shi'a or the Shi'a of Bahrain). Shi'i refers to a member of the community and is also used as an adjective (ex. A number of Shi'i Bahrainis).

form the basis of the new political order. Chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis will evaluate the political reforms of Bahrain, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia on the basis of the satisfaction of these three tenets.

In the second chapter, we discuss the prevalence of monarchies as a regime-type in the Gulf States despite their virtual disappearance in the rest of the world. Drawing from arguments advanced by Joseph Kostiner, Lisa Anderson, Michael Herb and Greg Gause III, we determine that institutional flexibility, cohesion with the ruling elite and vast patronage networks, upheld by substantial oil revenues, account for the resilience of dynastic monarchies in the Persian Gulf. We subsequently examine how these regime characteristics lend themselves to top-down gradual reform and the preservation of elites, both of which make them more apt to democratization according to transitology. This assertion is supported by historical precedent in which monarchies make the transition to constitutional monarchies.

In the third chapter, we focus on the case-study of Bahrain and evaluate its recent liberalization and political reforms. We begin by retracing the rise to power of Bahrain's ruling dynastic family, the Al Khalifa, from its nomadic tribal origins to the consolidation of its rule over a majority Shi'i population through a close alliance with the British. This is followed by an overview of the rapid modernization of the state and its infrastructure following the discovery of oil in Bahrain We provide an historical account of Bahrain's opposition movement and its demands for greater political participation and reforms noting that it has culminated into a united non-sectarian pro-democratic front. The final segment evaluates the recent political developments in Bahrain through the prism of transitology and determines whether or not Bahrain satisfies the three main tenets. This analysis leads to a favourable and optimistic outlook for an eventual democratic transition in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

The fourth and final chapter examines Kuwait and Saudi Arabia and compares their regime's responses to greater demands for political action, the character of their opposition

movements and the strength of their dynastic ruling elite to those of Bahrain. As Gulf States, both countries share several characteristics with Bahrain including relatively short political histories, small and sparsely populated territories in relation to global standards, a large foreign worker population, oil-based economies and most importantly, dynastic monarchy regimes, all factors which assist our comparison. Like Bahrain, Kuwait has undergone significant political reform. It possesses an elected legislative body, basic civil rights, such as the right to public assembly and freedom of the press, as well as universal suffrage for Kuwaiti citizens. Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, represents the most totalitarian and unyielding Gulf State. Its reforms have been minimal, dissent is forbidden, repression is widespread and civil rights are virtually non-existent. The contrasting example of Saudi Arabia allows us to gain a more significant perspective through which to view the level of political reform in Bahrain and Kuwait. We end the chapter's discussion by situating other Gulf States in between these two extreme examples of regime responses to public discontent and demands for modified rights of political participation.

A successful democratic transition in Bahrain could have substantial regional ramifications and alter the character and scope of liberalization in the region. More importantly, it could grant regional relevance to the theory of transitology, a paradigm which, despite its hegemonic position within the broader general context of democratization studies, has been sparsely used in discussions of political reform in the Middle East.

Chapter 1: Research Question, Methodology and Theoretical Framework

1.1 Research Question and Methodology

Since 1999, Bahrain has undergone significant political reform. In a relatively short period of time it has evolved from a repressive state to a liberalized autocracy where citizens enjoy basic civil rights including freedom of speech and freedom of the press. In addition, it has witnessed the reappearance of parliamentarianism with the creation of a newly elected legislative assembly. Elections have been accessible to all citizens.

This thesis discusses whether the theory of transitology represents a better model through which to analyse the successes, limits and failures of political liberalization in Bahrain, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia than the theory of modernization and the political culture approach. Our hypothesis is that the theory of transitology is the paradigm best suited to assess political liberalization in Bahrain, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia and its prospects for eventual democratization. This question is supplemented by a secondary inquiry which considers whether the regime type of the monarchy is particularly pre-disposed to democratization.

The reforms in Bahrain are evaluated through the theoretical paradigm of transitology. The paradigm, which places emphasis on the role of elites in democratization, has assumed a preeminent position within the study of democratization. The theory of transitology emphasizes three main elements of a successful democratic transition: a rupture within the ruling elite between hard-liners and soft-liners, the initiation of a liberalization process and the formation of a political pact through a negotiated compromise between regime soft-liners and moderate opposition leaders. A final additional postulate is that transitions are characterized by uncertainty and that there exists no fixed outcome.

The thesis first determines the relevance of transitology to the Middle East. In the absence of any successful transitions to democracy we apply the theoretical framework to explain that their past transitions were unsuccessful since they failed to satisfy the theory's main tenets. We then apply the main postulates of transitology to the case study of Bahrain. Using deductive reasoning we surmise that if Bahrain's political developments satisfy transitology's main postulates, it will therefore be more likely to successfully achieve democratization.

Particular emphasis will also be placed on Bahrain's regime type, the dynastic monarchy, as being predisposed to democratization. This is based on the considerable historical precedent which exists for monarchies gradually making transitions to constitutional monarchies. The relationship between monarchies and democratic transitions will therefore be analyzed.
The scope of the thesis will be limited to the Persian Gulf, where all but two of the Middle East's monarchies are found.[3]

Other than regime type, the Persian Gulf States share many characteristics which will facilitate comparison. They are newly independent, sparsely populated, relatively wealthy states with modernized state bureaucracies, highly developed social infrastructures and oil-based economies. In addition to the case-study of Bahrain, we will consider two other Gulf State monarchies, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, which have had to respond to public demands for liberalization and implementation of reforms. This discussion will serve to compare and contrast the application of the theoretical model of transitology to the monarchies of the Persian Gulf.

The thesis adopts the normative stance that democracy is a universal political concept which is both desirable and attainable to all states. The thesis will employ qualitative research methods. Research will be based solely on the use of secondary sources. This will not detract from the usefulness of the study since the goal is to evaluate reforms in Bahrain by contextualizing it within the interpretive framework of transitology. This approach will allow us

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[3] Morocco and Jordan are also ruled by dynastic monarchies.

to illuminate the strategies of political actors and determine how they have been shaped by historical circumstances.

The historical approach will be combined with a comparative approach. This will enable us to contextualize the political developments in Bahrain within the Gulf region and establish a qualitative assessment of the different approaches taken by the Gulf monarchies in response to public opposition and calls for increased political liberalization. The case-study subjects have been carefully selected to provide a representation of the wide spectrum of varying reforms in the region. Conclusions drawn from the case study of Bahrain will be useful in evaluating political realities of neighbouring states.

The thesis contains a number of limitations of which we are fully aware. The most important limit is that the prognosis based on our evaluation of Bahrain's liberalization will not be definitive. Transitology emphasizes uncertainty and therefore our conclusions are based on a scale of probabilities which allow no more certainty than an optimistic outlook. Bahrain also is a small state. Its island status has somewhat disappeared since it is linked to the mainland by a causeway. Its territory is geographically limited and its population relatively small. However, Bahrain is more densely populated than its Gulf counterparts and when measured by global standards, the latter also have small territories and population. The small case-study sample limits the inferences which we can make about democratization in the Persian Gulf. A deeper analysis and evaluation of political reform in other Gulf States would allow stronger conclusions.

Another limitation is the reliance on secondary sources. Primary sources could provide additional insight into the motivations and strategies of specific actors. Information from high ranking members of the Al Khalifa family would be invaluable. However, ruling families are notoriously secretive and few researchers can claim to have tapped sources within the Al Khalifa's inner circle. The scope of the thesis however has been purposely narrowed down due to temporal, financial and institutional limitations.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, the thesis will contribute to the study of democratization, a cornerstone process within the study of contemporary politics. Democratization in the Middle East is especially significant given the ongoing hostilities throughout the region and its repercussions on foreign policy in both the United States and Europe.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

Samuel Huntington has argued that the spread of democratization has evolved during concentrated periods which he refers to as "waves". The third wave, set in motion by the Portuguese transition to democracy in 1974, is noteworthy for its global reach.[4] Today, the number of democracies has tripled to encompass sixty percent of the world's governments.[5] Yet, the Middle East, with the exception of Israel, remains seemingly oblivious to the charms of democracy. It is perhaps for this reason that the region has been largely ignored by academics of democratization theory.[6]

The democratic deficit is often chalked up to the region's cultural incongruities, its failure to modernize and its considerable oil revenues by proponents of the modernization and political culture paradigms. While these approaches shed some light on the persistence of authoritarianism in the region, none stands as an explanatory variable. Meanwhile, transitology, the dominant democratization paradigm first advanced by Dankwart Rustow and further refined by Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, has been used sparingly to explain the persistence of authoritarianism in the Middle East despite its apparent applicability.[7] This chapter

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[4] Samuel P. Huntington, "After Twenty Years: The Future of the Third Wave", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (1997), 4

[5] Larry Diamond, Marc F. Plattner and Daniel Brumberg, eds., *Islam and Democracy in the Middle East* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), ix and Samuel P. Huntington, "After Twenty Years: The Future of the Third Wave", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (1997), 4

[6] Seymour Martin Lipset and Jason M. Lakin, *The Democratic Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 4

[7] The term transitology is not used by G. O'Donnell and P. Schmitter themselves. It has however come to be used to describe their theory which has become "hegemonic" in the study of democratic transitions. Valerie Bunce,

argues that transitology's emphasis on regime crisis, elite pacts, democracy from above and uncertain outcomes provides the most convincing explanation for the absence of democracy in Arab states. The following thesis explores the relevance of transitology and the other predominant theories of democratization to the existing political realities of Arab states. The relative unity within Middle East regimes, their control of the armed forces and the absence of a moderate opposition thus render the prospects for democratization bleak unless they emanate from a top-driven initiative. As is customary within the study of democratization, the analysis is preceded by a discussion of the key concept of democracy.

1.2.1 Democracy

A greater understanding of democracy is necessary to account for its absence within the Arab states of the Middle East.[8] While there is an academic consensus that democracy is desirable, an objective definition remains problematic due to its "culturally and temporally" dependent context.[9] The predominant definition of democracy is attributed to Joseph Schumpeter. It is best summarized by Seymour Martin Lispet as "an institutional arrangement in which all adult individuals have the power to vote, through free and fair competitive elections, for their chief executive and national legislature".[10] The Schumpeterian definition emphasizes the role of competition or contestation as the main tenet of democracy. While Robert Dahl, Philippe C. Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl have sought to establish more precise criteria, the procedural minimum as defined by Schumpeter remains unchanged.[11] The minimalist approach has been employed in most empirical democratization studies, most notably in Guillermo

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"Comparative Democratization: Big and Bounded Generalizations", *Comparative Political Studies* (Vol. 33, No. 6-7 (September 2000), 721
[8] The use of the term 'Middle East' designates the states in the Middle East and North Africa
[9] Bruce Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post-Cold War World.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 15
[10] Lipset and Lakin, 19
[11] Schmitter and Karl put forth 9 criteria for democracy and attempt to incorporate conceptual and operational criteria. See Philippe C. Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl, "What Democracy is...and is Not", in Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner, eds., *The Global Resurgence of Democracy* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993), 45

O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter's *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule* and Adam Przeworski's *Democracy and Development*.

For O'Donnell and Schmitter, democracy is based on the principle of citizenship. It implies a dual responsibility of the individual and the state. The individual must respect the equality of other individuals and their collective choices and the government becomes responsible for the well-being and rights of its citizens within the scope of its legally constrained authority. No existing institutional model alone has a monopoly on democracy.[12] The procedural minimum is in this case "secret balloting, universal adult suffrage, regular elections, partisan competition, associational recognition and access, and executive accountability".[13]

Przeworski elaborates more in-depth criteria regarding the competitive dimensions of the procedural minimum *sine qua non* for democratic regimes. In order for a regime to be considered democratic, both the executive and the legislative body must be directly or indirectly chosen through popular elections. These elected officials must be only constrained by the electorate. Furthermore, the election must feature an opposition which could hypothetically win. This ensures that it is possible that an incumbent could lose. The outcome of the elections is therefore somewhat uncertain beforehand.[14] The results of these elections must be honoured allowing the victors to assume their rightful place within government. Lastly, the results are temporary and elections must be held in the near future following the same criteria listed above.[15]

Electoral continuity is important because the election of a government may in fact prove to be the establishment of a new authoritarian regime. Only through a repetition of the electoral process can doubts regarding the viability of the democracy be erased. In this vein, Przeworski's

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[12]Examples include majoritarianism, territorial representation, legislative sovereignty and popularly elected executives. Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain democracies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 8
[13] Ibid., 8
[14] Adam Przeworski, Michael E. Alvarez, Jose Antonio Cheibub and Fernando Limongi, *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 16
[15] Ibid., 18

study of regimes therefore adds the additional criterion of alternation as a precaution. Until the incumbent party which originally comes to power following a democratic transition loses an election, the regime cannot be characterized as democratic.[16]

While the Schumpeterian definition is used by many prominent democratization scholars, it has often been the subject of criticism. Laurence Whitehead's critique of the minimalist approach is perhaps the most interesting. According to Whitehead, the procedural definition is simultaneously too demanding and too inclusive.[17] Requisites such as universal suffrage and the unconstrained authority of a popularly elected political executive would periodically exclude long-standing democracies such as the United States and the United Kingdom.[18] More importantly, the emphasis on the minimalist definition is criticized for its narrow scope which ignores the social dimension of democracy.[19] The oversight however is intentional. Social and economic aspects are left out to avoid bias and comparisons with Western standards.[20] Seymour Martin Lipset and Jason Lakin argue that expanding the definition of democracy to include "liberal" values can embroil the study of democratization in an endless debate over which values are most crucial. "The point of democracy is to leave outcomes to the electoral process" and while features such as judicial review and accountability may be advantageous, they are characteristic of more 'complex' democracies.[21]Nevertheless, Lipset includes both the freedom of expression and association to his minimal definition of democracy.

The decision to exclude basic personal freedoms however can cause one to question the appeal of democracy. Does the absence of an independent judiciary not open the door to abuses

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[16] Ibid.

[17] Laurence Whitehead, *Democratization: Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 13

[18] In the United Kingdom, the House of Lords veto on Parliament was only lifted with the 1911 Parliament Act. In the United States, universal suffrage was only codified by the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

[19] Ian Shapiro, *The State of Democratic Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 58

[20] Przeworski, 33

[21] Lipset and Lakin, 22 and O'Donnell and Schmitter, 8

of power? After all, "the players of the game are not well situated to act as their own umpires".[22]

Without minority rights, De Tocqueville's tyranny of the majority can be played out within society.[23] Can a society really be democratic where women have no rights or the press is not free? Whitehead, an adherent to the currently popular constructivist school of thought, provides an interesting answer. He argues that democracy, like many other political concepts, is a social construct. The difficulty of achieving a catch-all definition is a consequence of the "wide range of historical, cultural and social contexts where it is being employed".[24]

Rather than being set in stone, democracy is in a constant state of revision. Although the Schumpeterian-based definition may be prevalent today, further change and development may not be far off depending on the emergence of new circumstances. Indeed, the idea of democracy today is no longer the same as it was in Greek antiquity. Nonetheless, despite the fluctuating nature of democracy, the principle of citizenship remains at its core: the combination of individual consciousness and a belief in the building of shared values through deliberation.[25]

Whitehead argues that the limits and boundaries of democracy are socially contested and determined by a "deliberative filter".[26] Within a given cultural or historical context, the court of public opinion determines the democratic standard. Future attempts to alter the definition of the concept require the persuasion of citizens who remain the ultimate arbiters.

So what is democracy? Whitehead acknowledges that while imperfect, by virtue of its predominance, the procedural definition characterizes the modern-day conception of democracy. It should thus serve as our basis for the study of democratization since in the "absence of an

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[22] Shapiro, 64
[23] Susanne Karstedt "Democracy, Values, and Violence: Paradoxes, Tensions, and Comparative Advantages of Liberal Inclusion" *The Annals Of The American Academy Of Political And Social Science*, vol. 605, no. 1, (May 2006), 58
[24] Whitehead, 7
[25] Ibid., 17
[26] Ibid., 22

agreed definition there can be no dialogue" within comparative politics.[27] While Whitehead's reasoning may appear tedious, a critical assessment of our personal perspective is important when studying a contextually dependent concept such as democracy.

Democratization studies in the field of comparative politics are often entrenched in a normative bias. Acknowledging this bias is important since our beliefs and assumptions influence our analysis of the object of study, in this case the Arab states of the Middle East. [28] The globalization of democracy and its ability to reach remote locations has led some to label it a universal concept.[29] Huntington states that "democracy is good in itself...and has positive consequences for individual freedom [and] domestic stability"[30]. In addition, democratic norms and institutions appear to create a "peace" among democratic states. The proliferation and consolidation of democracy would therefore "reduce the frequency of violent conflict and war" and lead to peaceful and negotiated settlements of disputes.[31]

Since democracy's global reach has skipped the Middle East, with the exception of Israel, the region has thus been relatively ignored within democratization literature. Nevertheless, several arguments have been advanced by two closely related paradigms to explain the region's impermeability: the theory of modernization and the political culture approach.

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[27] Ibid., 8
[28] Robert Cox with Michael G., Shechter, *The Political Economy of a Plural Word: Critical Reflections on Power, Morals and Civilization* (London: Routledge, 2002), 28
[29] See Kofi Annan, "In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All", March 2005, http://www.un.org/largerfreedom/contents.htm, (December 4, 2006), 35
[30] Samuel P., Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), xv
[31] Russett, 120

1.2.2 Modernization and Political Culture

The modernization paradigm, outlined in Seymour Martin Lipset's *Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy*, argues that there exists a linear progression of causally linked phases which culminate with the attainment of democracy. The main stages of interrelated growth are industrialization, urbanization, education, communication, mobilization and political incorporation.[32] The combination of economic security and higher education moderates the lower class, reinforces the middle class and weakens the power of the ruling class. The working and middle cases "gain an unprecedented capacity for self-organization" and as a result, society becomes less stratified.[33] A common ground can then be achieved between classes and democracy as conflict resolution becomes institutionalized through intermediary state apparatuses.[34]

Modernization was conceived as a general theory of democratization; however its applicability to the Middle East was championed by Michael Hudson. He argued that modernization would place considerable pressure on existing Arab authoritarian regimes to alter their current relationship with citizens in order to retain their legitimacy.[35] To remedy this legitimacy deficit, Hudson affirmed that the state would need to institutionalize popular participation. While the social dimension of modernization should not be ignored, its contribution to the study of democratization lies in its emphasis on economic development as "the engine of social mobilization".[36] According to the theory, once a society reaches a certain level of economic development, stable democracy is likely to emerge and consolidate.

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[32] Przeworski, 89
[33] Evelyne Huber, Dietrich Rueschemeyer and John D. Stephens, "The Impact of Economic Development on Democracy", *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (Summer, 1993), 74-75
[34] Seymour Martin Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy", *American Political Science Review*, vol. 53, no. 1 (1959), 84
[35] Michael Hudson, *Arab Politics: The Search for Legitimacy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 126
[36] Ibid., 127 and Jacek Kugler and Yi Feng, "Explaining and Modeling Democratic Transitions", *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 43, No. 2, (Apr. 1999), 140

The economic correlation has long been an important question for democratization theorists. It was thought that economic development was best achieved through "a strong government insulated from pressures, guided by technical rationality and capable of imposing order and discipline."[37] Democracy needed to be mortgaged and it would emerge naturally when a state 'matured'. David Waldner points to Korea and Taiwan as model examples of the greater economic freedom afforded by delaying popular incorporation. While he focused more on the degree of elite conflict without making reference to democracy, Waldner argues that premature popular incorporation complicates economic development. In the case of Syria, policy choices were restrained by loyalties required to maintain the stability in the regime. Thus structural reforms needed to develop the economy could not be implemented.[38] Simply put, modernization views authoritarian regimes as incubators of fledgling democracies.

On the surface, the link between democracy and development is striking. The wealthiest states in the world are democratic. Per capita income can correctly predict 77.5% of democracies.[39] Przeworski argues that in order for a correlation to be confirmed, there would need to be a development threshold at which point authoritarian regimes evolved into democracies. His findings, however, indicate that dictatorships survive in both poor and rich countries and that their collapse is unpredictable based on economic factors, an assertion shared by other academics.[40] Some democratic transitions took place in countries with very low levels of economic development such as India, Belize and Mauritius. Conversely, countries with high per capita levels such as Mexico, Chile, Portugal, Iran and Iraq, remain under authoritarian rule.[41] Throughout history there have been many examples of modernization without

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[37] Przeworski, 3

[38] David Waldner, *State Building and Late Development* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 37

[39] Przeworski, 79

[40] Karen L. Remmer, "Review: New Theoretical Perspectives on Democratization", *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Oct., 1995), 105

[41] Oil states such as Venezuela, Iraq and Iran are eventually excluded from the analysis to strengthen the findings since high oil revenues distort the per capita income.

democratization. While it is possible that economic development plays a role in transitions to democracy, its power as an independent explanatory variable is doubtful in light of evidence which suggests that "dictatorships die under all kinds of economic conditions."[42]

Lipset's *Social Requisites* was caricatured by critics who were quick to criticize the assertion that economic prosperity was in direct correlation with transition to minimal democracy. Firstly, Lipset's writings were aimed at explaining the chances of survival of minimal democracies and not predicting transitions hence his careful word choice in setting out social 'requisites' and not 'prerequisites'. Lipset never argued that higher per capita income alone automatically engendered political competition and contestation. Lipset and other modernization theorists such as Larry Diamond and David Plattner, argued that industrialization, urbanization and education are integral to altering the state's social structure.[43] Industrialization leads to the formation of new classes and relationships. The resulting growth in employment opportunities encourages migration to urban centres which leads to the emergence of new groups, classes, collective interests and patterns of income and consumption which alter the societal landscape.[44]

The income distribution which accompanies industrialization allows for a more equal income distribution which then permits a middle class to emerge. The middle class acts as a counterweight to the state and the impetus of change in social norms and rules towards a political culture of moderation.[45] In his 1993 Presidential Address entitled "The Social Requisites of Democracy Revisited", Lipset reiterated that a transition from authoritarian rule to democracy

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[42] Przeworski, 111, Shireen T. Hunter and Huma Malik, *Modernization, Democracy and Islam*, (London: Praeger, 2005), 13 and Larbi Sadiki, "Popular Uprisings and Arab Democratization", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 1. (Feb., 2000), 86
[43] Huber, Rueschemeyer and Stephens, 85
[44] Mehran Kamrava, Politics and Society in the Developing World 2nd Edition, (London: Routledge, 2000), 100
[45] Seymour Martin Lipset, "The Social Requisites of Democracy Revisited", American Sociological Review, Vol. 59, No. 1 (Feb., 1994), 3 and Mehran Kamrava, Democracy in the Balance: Culture and Society in the Middle East, (New York: Chatham House Publishers, 1998), 2 and Jose Nun, "Democracy and Modernization, Thirty Years Later", *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 20, No. 4, The Struggle for Popular Participation (Autumn, 1993), 10

was facilitated by the presence of a compatible system of tradition and beliefs. As a result, Lipset argues that cultural factors appear to be even more important than economic ones.[46]

As a reflection of the centrality of culture in the evolutionary design of modernization theory, a separate yet closely linked political culture paradigm emerged. Political culture has been defined as a "collection of the understanding, values, attitudes, and principles of a community or society that relate to its political organization, processes, disputes and public policies".[47] Culture represents the link between politics and society. The process of modernization alters unconscious cultural beliefs and values and as a result modifies political behaviour, political roles and the content of political demands.[48] Roy Andersen, Robert F. Seiber and Jon G. Wagner argue that culture has become increasingly viewed by social scientists as a competitive arena in which the definition of societal ideals and symbols are subjected to constant negotiation.[49] In order for democratization to occur, the general population must be convinced to embrace democracy and its virtues including "the acceptance by the citizenry and political elites of principles underlying freedom of speech, media, assembly, religion, of the rights of opposition parties, of the rule of law, of human rights, and the like."[50]

Proponents of the cultural approach have traditionally been pessimistic about democratization in the Middle East. Huntington and Lipset held that democracy was doubtful as democratic values were incompatible and alien to Islam.[51] Hisham Sharabi characterized current Arab society as a subordinate "modernized version of the patriarchal sultanate".[52] Perhaps the most comprehensive analysis of Arab political culture is provided by Mehran Kamrava.

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[46] Hunter and Malik, 15

[47] Rand, Dyck, ed., *Studying Politics: An Introduction to Political Science* (Scarborough: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 74

[48] Mehran Kamrava, *Politics and Society in the Third World*, (London: Routledge, 1993), 121, 136

[49] Roy R. Andersen, Robert F. Seibert, Jon G. Wagner, *Politics and Change in the Middle East: Sources of Conflict and Accommodation, 6th Edition,* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2001), 151

[50] Seymour Martin Lipset, "The Social Requisites of Democracy Revisited", 30

[51] Lipset, "The Social Requisites of Democracy Revisited", 6 and Hunter and Malik, 14 and Dale Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*, (Princeton: University Press, 2004), 18

[52] Hisham Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 7, 31

Kamrava acknowledges that no common political culture exists in the Middle East, however he argues that it is possible to discern certain commonalities. The family is the most important social institution in the Middle East. In the regional context, the family extends beyond the nuclear to the tribal level. The tribe is a traditional feature of Middle Eastern culture which continues to play a significant political role in the region. Tribal members are united by a common geographic, linguistic and biological ancestry which makes it a "highly cohesive institution that remains largely impenetrable to outside influences".[53] Within the tribe, the chief holds moral, military and political authority over its members and acts as the ultimate arbiter in disputes. As a result, they are both patriarchal and hierarchical and therefore authoritarian in nature demanding "blind obedience."[54] Leaders of Middle Eastern states often portray themselves as paternal figures leading "faithful children", creating a neopatriarchal society.[55] This is particularly true with regards the Persian Gulf states, a facet which will be explored in further detail in the next chapter.

Kamrava argues that the only social institution in the Middle East which rivals the tribe is Islam. He argues that Islam provides "a comprehensive blueprint for social order....[which] ideally at least, subsumes, overwhelms and dictates all others".[56] While most Middle Eastern leaders recognized this early in the 20th century and sought to ally themselves with the Islamic religious establishment, the practice has subsided with the exception of isolated cases such as Saudi Arabia.[57] Yet, as a highly organized institution with significant moral clout, Islam has retained its political salience. It is remarkably pervasive in Middle Eastern society and has enjoyed a recent resurgence which Kamrava attributes to the failure of secular institutions to

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[53] Ibid., 45, 49, 50,
[54] Ibid. 52, 80
[55] See James A. Bill and Robert Springborg, *Politics in the Middle East* (New York: Addison Wesley Longman, 2000) for a discussion of the patriarchal and patrimonial character of Middle Eastern regimes.
[56] Kamrava, *Democracy in the Balance*, 63
[57] Ibid., 61

properly address the needs of society. It possesses more legitimacy in the eyes of the general population than the state.

Kamrava argues that both tribalism and Islam constitute impediments to democratization. With regards to Islam, Kamrava states that it is "rigid, doctrinaire and hostile to any semblance of change".[58] As an example of its incompatibility with democratic values, he points to the status of women in the Middle East. While Kamrava does not claim that Islam is misogynistic in nature, he does argue that its interpretation and implementation in the region has been repressive towards women. Accordingly, democracy is unattainable if "half the population is viewed as unequal in rank".[59]

As a result of the infallibility of Islam and the patriarchal nature of tribalism, Kamrava argues that Arabs are culturally and psychologically submissive and ideally suited to hero worship and demagogues.[60] Discourse, bargaining and civil society are absent in Arab political culture as well as any other democratic values. Therefore Kamrava reaches the same conclusion as Lipset, Huntington and Sharabi arguing that at this present time, the Middle East as a region does not possess the social or cultural prerequisites necessary for democratization.[61]

While the political culture paradigm can be useful within comparative politics to make cross-national and infra-national comparisons, critics rightly underline that placing great emphasis on culture can lead to a biased view with ethnocentric undertones.[62,] The traditional political culture's methodological shortcomings are apparent within Middle East democratization

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[58] Frank Tachau, "Review of Democracy in the Balance: Culture and Society in the Middle East by Mehran Kamrava", *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 62, No. 1 (Feb., 2000), 302
[59] Kamrava, *Democracy in the Balance*, 229
[60] Ibid., 223
[61]Kamrava does not rule out the possibility of democracy in the future as long as there is significant change and the pervasiveness of tribalism and Islam are curbed significantly. Kamrava, *Democracy in the* Balance, 34, 224, 225
[62] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 3,12 and Martin, Kramer, *Ivory Towers on Sand: The Failure of Middle Eastern Studies in America* (Washington DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2001), 29

literature where it has often been invoked to account for the persistence of authoritarianism.[63] As a result, the region has been stigmatized by democratic theorists to the point of alienation. Despite the fact that we are still within the third wave of democratization, the Middle East has been written off by several democratization experts cited previously such as Huntington, Diamond, Lipset, Sharabi and Kamrava who have dismissed their democracy prospects on the basis of political culture.[64]

The failure of democracy to find a foothold in the region is attributed to incompatible cultural 'defects'. The reductionist view of an overarching Arab and Islamic culture is however based primarily on stereotypes and anecdotal evidence which result in "sloppy, self-indulgent or even damaging prescription".[65] Islamic values[66] are deemed irreconcilable with democratic principles of pluralism, tolerance and competition. Considerable evidence however refutes the reductionist cultural argument. Democracies have been established in states with Muslim majorities such as Turkey, Indonesia and Nigeria.[67] Conversely, authoritarian regimes continue to survive outside the Middle East. Cultural studies with methodologically sound foundations have also cast significant doubt on the use of Islamic or Arab values as explanatory variables for the persistence of authoritarianism.

Designating Islam as an obstacle to democracy is problematic because several competing interpretations of Islam exist.[68] Even the most radical extremists are not unanimous in their

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[63] Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany, and David Noble, eds., Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World: Theoretical Perspectives (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), 77

[64] Ibid., 5

[65] Ibid., 90

[66] Brynen describes the reductionist characterization of Islamic values as emphasizing divine rather than popular sovereignty, being resistant to change and lacking fundamental equality within groups such as women and religious minorities. Arab values are based on "primordialism (strong clan, tribal and sectarian loyalties) which inhibits a sense of common citizenship... a lack of a tradition of liberal tolerance of pluralism and dissent, patterns of authoritarianism and submissiveness." Brynen, Korany and Noble, 6-7

[67] Freedom House, "New Study Details Islamic World's Democracy Deficit", Dec. 18th, 2001 http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=70&release=101 (Dec. 12, 2006)

[68] Kramer discerns 2 different strands: Unitary (Islamic principles are absolute and cannot be opposed and subjected to free debate) and Moderate (core values of Islam cannot be debated but due to human infallibility, the

interpretation of the Koran, particularly in its application to policy. [69] Through different readings of law and morality, Islam concedes a place for openness, tolerance and innovation. In fact, concepts traditionally identified with democracy such as the principles of justice and accountability of leadership are evoked within Islam.[70] Nevertheless, the role of culture in Arab society, whether fragmented or not, is often exaggerated. The ideological and religious motivations of Islamist groups are not responsible for their increased popularity within Arab states.[71] Instead these groups are the beneficiaries of political circumstance where they represent the only political alternative to Arabs dissatisfied with the status quo.

Islamists hold a virtual monopoly on any organized opposition since their only real opponent, the political left, was forsaken following the defeat of socialist Arab governments at the hands of Israel in 1967. These governments proved ineffective in dealing with temporal economic, social and regional problems.[72] Other secular groups in autocratic states face significant challenges in the absence of any civic or political rights. Conversely, the religious character of Islamist groups affords them legitimacy vis-à-vis the state. The high level of organization of Islamist groups has enabled them to recruit adherents through mosques, universities and the large social networks created by the gamut of social services they offer. Although supporters of Islamic groups may be uncommitted to the religious ideals the groups espouse, the leadership clearly intends to establish government rule by Islamic law. This has led many to argue that Islamists may well subvert any transition to democracy.[73]

Islam's violent and confrontational nature however has been overstated, a consequence of

interpretation of the Koran can be debated). Brynen, Korany and Noble 114 and John L. Esposito and James P. Piscatori, "Democratization and Islam", *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 45, No.3, (Summer, 1991), 434

[69] Saad Eddin, Ibrahim, "Anatomy of Egypt's Militant Islamic Groups", *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* Vol. 12, No. 4 (December 1980), 432

[70] Howard Handelman and Mark Tessler eds. *Democracy and Its limits: Lessons from Asia, Latin America and the Middle East* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 263

[71] John Entelis, ed., *Islam, Democracy and the State in North Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 109

[72] Tessler cites poor performance of leftists groups in elections in Tunisia (April 1989) and Algeria (June, 1990). Handelman and Tessler, 271

[73] Ibid., 273

the myth that religious values espoused by Islamist groups make them prone to the use of violence.[74] Instead it appears more likely that violent behaviour of Islamists is a response to repressive clampdowns on opposition by Arab autocratic regimes and the absence of any alternative avenues to influence public policy. Previous experiences in Jordan and Algeria seem to support the notion that when included in the political process, Islamists have capitalized on the opportunity. Tessler argues that the participation of Islamist groups in the political process will weaken their power since they will have to share the responsibility of dealing with societal problems. The Islamic "solution" will necessarily be put to the practical test of political expediency.[75]

The political significance of Islam remains unclear.[76] The cultural approach raises more questions than answers and therefore constitutes a weak explanatory variable for the persistence of authoritarianism in the region. A solely cultural explanation cannot account for the absence of democratization in any region.[77] That said, the cultural dimension, especially with the increased importance of civil society in democratization cannot be ignored. Cultural factors do play a role in the democratization process and they can be altered by shifting economic and political developments. They do not however constitute on their own sufficient impetus for democratization. Ironically, some thirty years after the birth of the modernization and political culture paradigms, Jose Nun points out that a number of academics presently view political democratization as a prerequisite to economic and social modernization.[78]

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[74] John Esposito, ed., *Political Islam: Revolution, Radicalism or Reform?* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1997), 17
[75] Handelman and Tessler, 284
[76] Anderson in Brynen, Korany and Noble, 87
[77] Hunter and Malik, 15
[78] Nun, 10

1.2.3 Transitology: Rethinking Social and Economic Factors as Prerequisites to Democracy

"One road only has in the past led into democracy...the wish to be rid of tangible evils"
- James Bryce

In *Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model*, Dankwart A. Rustow attempts to determine what conditions are necessary for democratization to occur. Rustow rules out the possibility that beliefs, psychological attitudes or economic and social conditions alone bring about democracy for several reasons. Firstly, Rustow points out that democratization is far from a unique process. Each successful transition to date has created its own path. This is not surprising since in each state democratization involves different classes, issues or methods of solutions.[79] In addition, he argues that there exist ample examples of authoritarian states that score impressively on social and economic indicators.

Instead, Rustow proposes a new model to explain democratic transitions. The only background condition stipulated by Rustow for a successful transition is national unity, a sense of belonging to a singular common identity by the majority of a state's population. This identity can be formed at any time as long as it occurs prior to the transition process.[80]

In the event that national unity is present, the democratization process according to Rustow is triggered by the emergence of a political stalemate between entrenched factions.[81] Rustow argues that the conflict of interest usually emerges between social classes, particularly if a new elite has emerged and finds itself excluded from the current power arrangement. The opposing camps' entrenched positions will result in political polarization.

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[79] Dankwart A. Rustow, "Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model", *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 3, (Apr. 1970), 345

[80] Rustow, 351 The idea of elite conflict as an integral element of democratic transitions was borrowed by Rustow from Barrington Moore's *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (1966)

[81] Rustow, 352, and John Waterbury, "Fortuitous By-Products", *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 29, No. 3, Transitions to Democracy: A Special Issue in Memory of Dankwart A. Rustow, (Apr. 1997), 383

If national unity is maintained, Rustow argues that certain scenarios are possible. One party may be able to trump the other, the reason behind the conflict may disappear or eventually the parties will compromise their positions and a democratic solution will be forged. Any compromise will be negotiated by a small number of individuals representative of the primary stakeholders in the conflict. The resolution will be second-best for all stakeholders and certain differences in opinion will likely remain. However, the compromise will signal the acceptance of diversity and signal a willingness to play the democratic game.[82]

Rustow's national unity condition was criticized by academics such as Waterbury because it fails to account for the cases such as Ethiopia where fragile democracies have emerged despite the absence of a singular identity.[83] It is worth noting however that Rustow's national unity condition has at times been mistakenly interpreted as ethnic homogeneity. Despite the absence of consensus on this issue, Rustow's model does provide certain key insights into the transition process. While they may be helpful, no particular political, social or economic context is necessary for a transition to occur. The path to transition is not predetermined and democracy emerges as the result of a compromise between opposing camps which resolves a political impasse. Circumstances may even "force, trick,, lure, or cajole non democrats into democratic behaviour".[84] Academics have embraced the notion that the transition process is fraught with uncertainty and heavily reliant on individual political decisions made by elites and their ability to conclude negotiated pacts. Therefore, they admit that there exists many paths to democracy. Today, these elements constitute the basic principles of the dominant democratization theory: transitology.

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[82] Rustow, 355 and Waterbury, 387
[83] Waterbury, 396
[84] Rustow, 344

1.2.4 Refinement of Rustow's model by O'Donnell and Schmitter

The seminal work on transitology was developed by Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter in *"Transitions From Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies, Defining Some Concepts"*. The authors offer an overview of the domestic conditions necessary for a transition from authoritarianism to democracy. They argue that the collapse of authoritarianism is a foregone conclusion in light of the success of democracies around the world which serve as a constant reminder of the fatal lack of legitimacy of all authoritarian regimes. A transition is therefore inevitable. The authors define a transition as the "interval between one political regime and another".[85] Although the process is unavoidable, its final outcome cannot be determined *a priori*. The transition can lead to the re-establishment of an authoritarian regime, the installation of a democracy or an alternative configuration.

With the benefit of hindsight, a transition process with a democratic outcome can be labeled democratization. As Przeworski succinctly states, it is the process whereby authoritarian regimes die and democratic ones emerge.[86] Whitehead, true to form, sees democratization as "a process of movement towards an outcome that is neither fully stable nor entirely predetermined."[87] What is important to retain is that all transitions are characterized by uncertainty. The 'rules of the game' are always initially undefined. In addition, the convergence of different actors attempting to protect their long-term interest in the construction of the new political order, often at the expense of others, renders the process competitive.[88]

While no specific set of circumstances are provided, transitions require the formation of a schism within the ruling elite. The absence of fault lines within the ruling elite in Arab regimes may therefore explain the absence of democracy in some Arab states. Michael Herb argues that

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[85] O'Donnell and Schmitter, 6
[86] Przeworski, 88
[87] Whitehead, 32
[88] O'Donnell and Schmitter, 6

the family-based state formation of dynastic monarchies is responsible for their stability and persistence in the region.[89] Leadership is restricted to candidates within the family and succession is decided through a deliberative process based on family consensus thus avoiding any potential destabilizing conflicts.[90] The monopoly of dynastic ruling families over the military, cabinet and bureaucracy and the shared profit of oil revenues make the maintenance of the status quo a common goal. Unity within the ruling elite at this level renders any involuntary transition unlikely and difficult, although it can never be ruled out. The persistence of military authoritarianism in Algeria is also often attributed to its cohesiveness among an otherwise divided society.[91]

Where an internal rupture of the ruling elite occurs, two factions emerge: the *duros* ("hard-liners") and the *blandos* (soft-liners). The *duros* represent the conservative faction of the regime. They reject democratization because of the fear of the instability which in their opinion would inevitably accompany the transition.[92] In contrast, the *blandos* have already accepted the ineluctable fate of the authoritarian regime. They favour the start of a liberalization process in order to solidify the regime's image in preparation for eventual elections. Soft-liners recognize that the longer the regime remains repressive, the less likely are its chances of playing a role in the future political order. Many authoritarian regimes in the Middle East have relied on repression to control and coerce, prompting some to develop sophisticated security apparatus. This undoubtedly has increased the number of revenge-seeking groups and the potential risks which authoritarian incumbents run in a democratic transition.[93]

That said, the performance of an authoritarian regime does not seem to determine when

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[89] Dynastic monarchies: Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.
[90] Conflicts may still emerge within ruling families, the assassination of Saudi King Faysal in 1975, but these tend to be overcome as evidenced by the sustained strength of the Saudi monarchy today.
[91] Diamond, Plattner and Brumberg, 63
[92] O'Donnell and Schmitter, 16
[93] Diamond, Plattner and Brumberg, 38

and if a transition will be initiated.[94] A failed regime with little or no confidence in its ability to prolong its survival risks very little by attempting a transition towards democracy. In this case, the transition will be relatively quick since the population will be able to mobilize without the resistance of the regime. If the same regime decides to prolong its stay in power, change can only be achieved through armed revolt. Thus, even seemingly "weak" states such as Syria with control over the military would be difficult to topple if they remained resolute in their survival.

Conversely, a thriving authoritarian regime can also embark on a transition. In this case, *blandos* argue in favour of initiating a transition to capitalize on the regime's positive performance. The risks of the transition are low and the process will enable the regime to acquire popular legitimacy and improve its perception within the international community. It is equally possible that the regime will content itself with the status quo. Kuwait with its elected parliament would appear to be an example of the former, while Saudi Arabia, which remains totalitarian and has made no significant concessions, would be an example of the latter. Whatever the cause, O'Donnell and Schmitter argue that a transition initiated from the top will be more orderly and thereby more likely to be successful in attaining democracy.[95]

During the initial phases of the transition, the hard-liners are the most influential faction in the regime. The ongoing tension between the two camps within the ruling elite creates an omnipresent menace of a political coup by the *duros* which would nullify any progress which the *blandos* may have previously achieved. The *blandos* are cautious in their decision-making in order to avoid provoking such an outcome.[96] This explains why liberalization, the first phase of the transition, is often implemented gradually. O'Donnell and Schmitter defined liberalization as a process where certain rights and liberties are granted to individuals and groups by the

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[94] O'Donnell and Schmitter, 19
[95] Ibid., 7
[96] Ibid., 22

government.[97] These rights protect the population from the arbitrary use of force by the government or other groups. *Habeas corpus*, freedom of speech and freedom of association are provided as examples of rights which are commonly granted. However, no specific set of rights characterizes the process.

The most important element of liberalization is the will of the authoritarian regime to grant additional rights.[98] These new rights help to eliminate the risks which would have previously discouraged free individual and collective expression. On many occasions, Middle Eastern authoritarian regimes have employed tactical liberalization as a safety valve in times of crisis. The most notable example is the Jordanian liberalization of the late 1980s amidst domestic unrest over the economy and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Jordan unleashed a series of significant reforms, calling a National Assembly election, loosening constraints on rights and putting an end to overt state repression.[99]

The liberalization process however often "triggers a number of (often unintended) consequences which play an important role in determining the scope and extension of that process."[100] Once new rights are extended and visibly exercised in public by members of society, the rest of the population will mobilize in groups to voice their demands. This phase is referred to as the "resurrection of civil society".[101] This is not always well-received and may lead to an abrupt suspension of liberalization. Returning to Jordan, King Hussein eventually determined that his opponents had become too outspoken.[102] The legislature was suspended and the regime reneged on many of its reforms. The instability created by the mobilization, whether real or perceived, is sometimes interpreted as a threat to the regime and a confirmation of the hard-liners' worst fears. Therefore the stage is a defining moment of the transition because it can

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[97] Ibid., 7
[98] Ibid., 7
[99] Diamond, Plattner and Brumberg, 99
[100] O'Donnell and Schmitter, 7
[101] Ibid., 26
[102] Diamond, Plattner and Brumberg, 99

easily result in a return to authoritarianism and de-liberalization.

The failure of most transitions in the Arab world can be situated at this juncture where governments, frightened by the prospect of losing power, particularly to Islamists, return to their repressive ways. Brumberg underlines that many Arab regimes alternate back and forth between liberalization and de-liberalization.[103] The standard bearer of relapse to authoritarianism in the Middle East is Algeria. It embarked on an ambitious reform initiative in 1989, by calling elections. The Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) surprisingly emerged as the winner at both levels. The military then seized power quelling fears of a "Tehran on the Mediterranean".[104] While the outcome of the Algerian election was unexpected, the fear of Islamists coming to power through democracy is widespread. The debate over whether or not Islamist groups would subvert the democratic system has already been discussed. While practical experience, such as the Muslim Brotherhood's participation in the Jordanian National Assembly, seems to discredit this claim, Islamist groups are still not trusted. Their performance in elections in which they have been allowed to participate has been impressive, fuelling fears of a "one man, one vote, one time" transition to theological totalitarianism.[105]

Michael Herb argues that the fear of Islamists and the absence of secular opposition parties prevent transition in the Arab world. The regime's fear of Islamists is shared by liberals who would normally support democratization and end up tolerating existing regimes as the lesser of two evils.[106] Herb's findings were drawn from a case-study of Muslim countries where transitions to democracy were attempted. Only where secular parties were predicted to emerge

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[103] Brumberg, 35
[104] Quandt, 60
[105] FIS in Algerian elections (1990), Muslim Brotherhood in Jordanian election (1989) and Hamas in Palestinian elections (2006). Diamond, Plattner and Brumberg, 22
[106] Michael Herb, "Islamist Movements and the Problem of Democracy in the Arab World", paper delivered to the MESA annual conference, November 2005, http://www2.gsu.edu/~polmfh/herb_democracy_islam.pdf, (Dec. 13, 2006), 2

victorious in elections (and did) was democratization finalized.[107]

The absence of moderate opposition groups however is largely a consequence of repression by authoritarian regimes and the absence of civil and political rights in Arab states. Therefore, while elite fears of radical elements seizing power democratically may be legitimate, authoritarian regimes undoubtedly exploit such fears to justify repression of Islamist groups to delay reforms. Elite perceptions however are as important as reality in transitology since developments are based on rational choices by the various actors. Therefore, as a precaution, the *blandos* usually resort to incremental liberalization. Individual rights for example are often granted before collective rights.

Incremental reform is accepted by regime opposition groups under the threat of a return to the status quo. In exchange, the opposition agrees to remain demobilized. The manoeuvre is in essence a bluff since the *blandos* have no interest in a return to the status quo. The need for the opposition to moderate its demands and behaviour however is crucial to avoid antagonizing the *duros.*[108] While gradual liberalization slows down the transition, it institutionalizes rights acquired during the process and makes their removal in the future much more difficult, adds stability to the transition and enhances its chances of succeeding.

The reform initiatives in Bahrain, Qatar and Oman where elections have been scheduled, as well as the Kuwaiti parliamentary experience, provide some optimism for the merits of gradual transitions in the Middle East.[109]According to Herb, these monarchies could in the long-term negotiate a compromise reminiscent of the European model whereby power is relinquished to the elected assemblies. Despite the constraints which exist in these countries on political participation, free elections in these states offer hope that democratization is a possible outcome.

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[107] Ibid., 27

[108] O'Donnell and Schmitter, 24

[109] Parliamentary elections in Bahrain and Qatar; elected Majlis al-Shura (consultative council) in Oman. Diamond, Plattner and Brumberg, 85

There are however many instances in which liberalization has been manipulated by Arab states. Liberalization is not a uniform process. It does not have to be implemented in its entirety and it often evolves differently in different cases. O'Donnell and Schmitter provide the example of liberal authoritarian regimes. Under this system, the regime grants certain rights to individuals which allow the government in place to gather feedback from citizens without having to hold any elections. Regimes however remain unaccountable to the public and liberalization can therefore be used as a façade which can arbitrarily be manipulated and retracted.

The most obvious examples of liberal facades were the presidential elections held in 1999 in Yemen, Egypt and Tunisia. In Yemen, Ali Abdullah Saleh ran against two minor opposition parties; in Tunisia Zine El Abidine Ben Ali ran against a candidate from within his own party and in Egypt, Hosni Mubarak ran unopposed. Not surprisingly, each emerged victorious, and many opposition parties were noticeably prohibited from participating in the elections.

Where actual liberalization is undertaken, demands for democratization increase. Democratization is defined as the process which grants the rights of citizenship upon all individuals and groups in a society. By citizenship, O'Donnell and Schmitter refer to the principle of individual equality and respect of collective choices.[110] At the executive level, government becomes responsible for the rights of its citizens. Government must fulfill this obligation within the constraints of the rule of law and always remain accountable to the population. This process constitutes the path to minimal democracy. According to the authors, becoming a more "complex" democracy requires a popular upsurge, an unexpected explosion of a social movement of 'the people'.[111] Ethnic, linguistic and class divisions disappear as the population is united in removing the remaining traces of authoritarianism. While there are no examples of democracy among Arab states, it is worth noting that civil society in the region

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[110] O'Donnell and Schmitter, 8
[111] Ibid., 24

lacks a common purpose. Arab authoritarian regimes, notably monarchies, intentionally reinforce local identities to create divided societies.[112] Nevertheless, the upsurge is not an essential element of the transition. As long as inter-elite and inter-class conflicts are resolved, democratization can be considered to have been achieved.[113]

1.2.5 Elite Pacting

The "zenith of inter-elite and inter-class conflict" brought upon by liberalization is an integral juncture in the transition process. The competition among different self-interested actors foments instability and makes this the most susceptible occasion for a coup and a regression towards authoritarianism. The resolution of these conflicts can be substantially facilitated through the formation of 'pacts', "agreement[s] among a select set of actors which seeks to define or redefine rules governing the exercise of power on the basis of mutual guarantees for the "vital interests" of those entering into it."[114] Used as a tool to ensure that transition proceeds in an orderly fashion, pacts are temporary in nature and ease the transition. They can eventually be recycled with their principles becoming embodied within the constitution or laws of the new political order.

In order for a pact to materialize, there must be a conflict between interdependent groups. The emergence of new actors may require the renegotiation of pacts to better reflect the current distribution of power if it differs from the distribution of authority. Like Dankart Rustow, the authors admit that pacts are compromises which do not entirely satisfy any of the parties.[115] The three most common types of pacts are military, political and socioeconomic.

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[112] Joseph Kostiner, ed., *Middle East Monarchies: The Challenge of Modernity* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), 56
[113] O'Donnell and Schmitter, 34
[114] Ibid., 37
[115] Ibid., 38

The military pact is significant because it can protect *blandos* from the prospect of a coup. This pact requires an alliance between *blandos* and at the very least a selection of influential military officers. The object is to secure the support of the military as a whole or at least fragment its loyalties. As a result of the alliance, the risks which hard-liners run if they do mount a coup increase and therefore serve as a deterrent.[116] In exchange, the *blandos* must guarantee that the opposition will temper its demands for immediate change and renounce recourse to violence.

Concluding a pact with the military can be difficult if it played a significant role in repression within the authoritarian regime. This appears to be an issue which Arab states will need to confront. As was previously noted, Arab autocracies have built sophisticated security apparatus to control their populations through repression. In this case, the *blandos* must reassure the army that it will not be penalized in the new political order. This creates a moral dilemma to which the authors offer a solution: prosecute and hold accountable the major human rights violators to appease the general population and publicize the brutality of the previous regime. This will serve as a reminder for future generations of the perils of authoritarianism, thus ruling out a relapse.[117] This approach also allows the military to retain its integrity. In exchange, in order to ensure that the situation does not repeat itself, O'Donnell and Schmitter argue that it is necessary to circumscribe the role of the army within the constitution and delegate nominations and resource allocation to civil representatives.[118] A fissure within the senior military ranks would seem unlikely in several Arab states in light of their close relationship with the regime, particularly in dynastic monarchies where major posts are monopolized by the family.

The second type of pact is the political pact. The authors characterize the political pact as more important since it tends to be more permanent. The pact forms between the *blandos* and the

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[116] Ibid., 25
[117] Ibid., 31
[118] Ibid., 36

main opposition parties which emerge after the onset of liberalization. The pact is ironically undemocratic as it aims to reduce competitiveness and conflict, limit accountability to the wider public and control the agenda of policy concerns by removing controversial issues.[119] Rights are withheld from radical elements of society. The restriction of political parties is the second element of the political pact. As a result, the electoral choice is limited and ensures a certain continuity in authority. The final element of the pact is the agreement on the distribution of benefits.

Political pacts, while not sufficient, can have a major impact on the outcome of a transition since they guarantee the protection of the various actors' personal interests, even after the conflicts which they were created to resolve no longer exist.[120] However, just like authoritarian regimes, limited democracies upheld by undemocratic pacts suffer from a legitimacy deficit. Members of the pact are eventually no longer representative of their constituents because of the multiplication of interests brought upon by liberalization. As a result, actors can no longer control the behaviour of their groups. The priority of maintaining the conditions of the pact explains this detachment. The inability to incorporate new actors into the pact ensures a popular mobilization which removes the "last restrictions on full political citizenship."[121]

The absence of moderate opposition in Arab states in the Middle East constitutes a large obstacle to the formation of a political pact. As long as Islamists remain the sole prospective partner, negotiated transition to democracy is unlikely.

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[119] Ibid., 38
[120] Ibid., 41
[121] Ibid., 43

1.3 Conclusion

While the shortcomings of the traditional modernization and political culture approaches have long been apparent, there remains a tendency within democratization literature to treat Arab states in the Middle East as different. Within the broader discipline culture, economic development and international factors, while important have long been dismissed as explanatory variables for democratization. The emphasis placed on uncertainty and the lack of a predetermined outcome renders transitology globally applicable. As such, it has become the dominant theory of democratization. While no Arab state has completed the transition from authoritarian rule to democracy, failed transitions have taken place. They have generally stalled due to a marked lack of desire on the part of the elites to democratize. Even in unstable regimes where a political alternative is desired, the absence of moderate opposition groups combined with the fear of radical Islamists leaves no plausible partners for a negotiated transition.

One of the main unknowns of transitology is the cause of the division within the regime's elites. Perhaps here, economic progress, economic crises, regional and international developments and a vibrant civil society could destabilize regimes and initiate their downfall. The most important point is that the outcome of the transition will be unpredictable. Uncertainty is not culturally or temporally dependent. Transitology's greatest asset is that it allows us to reintegrate the Middle East within the broader context of the study of democratization rather than perpetuating its exile as an anomaly.

The situation in the Middle East is susceptible to change and some envision the possibility of long-term democratic transitions through incremental reform in Middle East monarchies. This regime type has in the past shown in itself to be predisposed to gradual top-down transitions favored by transitology. This leads us to a focused examination of the monarchies in the Persian Gulf.

Chapter 2: Explaining the Endurance of Persian Gulf Monarchies through Elite cohesion, bargaining and incremental top-down reform

2.1 Introduction

Regimes led by a monarchy are often dismissed as relics, having virtually disappeared in most regions of the world, or when in place, relegated to symbolic relevance. Highly respected academics such as Samuel Huntington have long foreseen the impending doom of traditional monarchies, arguing as early as the 1960s that their future was bleak and "the key questions concern simply the scope of the violence of their demise and who wields the violence."[122] Surprisingly, however, several monarchies continue to survive and defy their detractors. Nowhere are they more prevalent than in the Persian Gulf where six monarchical regimes continue to rule. The persistence of these regimes, despite the fall of monarchies elsewhere, has been overlooked by many scholars and merits further scrutiny, especially in light of democratization efforts elsewhere in the world.[123] The following chapter examines the factors responsible for the persistence and stability of monarchies in the Persian Gulf. We argue that the main factor which has immunized the Gulf monarchies from collapse is their strong and united ruling elite. Accordingly, any transition to democracy in these regimes will require a division within the ruling class which also happens to be the basic tenet of transitology. The study of monarchies as a regime type in the Gulf is of particular importance due to the extensive historical precedent in other regions where monarchies have democratized into constitutional regimes.[124]We find that this historical precedent is indicative of the monarchy's flexible nature which allows it to satisfy transitology's top-down democratization model of political pacts while

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[122] Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 190. For discussion on the dilemma facing monarchs see 167
[123] Lisa Anderson, "Absolutism and the Resilience of Monarchy in the Middle East", *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 106, No. 1 (Spring, 1991), 1
[124] Ibid., 2

preserving the ruling elites.

2.2 Causes of Endurance

The traditional explanation for the perseverance of the monarchies invokes Arab political culture as the determinant factor. Gregory Gause III outlines the three major arguments advanced by culturalists to account for the persistence of Gulf monarchies: tribalism, religion and traditional institutions. In this vein, Kamrava argues that Gulf monarchies are tightly controlled traditional regimes which stifle political and social change. They provide continuity and resonance and are supported by historical legitimacy.[125]

Lisa Anderson scoffs at the notion of monarchies being any more indigenous to the Middle East than liberal democracy pointing out that the monarchy was imposed by European powers as a regime type in the early 20th century.[126] While tribal support may have helped consolidate many of the Gulf monarchies, the states have since undergone significant transformation. Monarchies still promote tribal identities but tribal groups are heavily dependent on the monarchy and have been 'tamed', stripped of all political or military power in the new states which have emerged.[127] Others, citing Saudi Arabia as an example, argue that the Gulf monarchies benefit from a dual political and religious legitimacy. Gause however points out that the monarchies in Kuwait, Bahrain, Abu Dhabi and Dubai do not profess to possess any religious authority. Furthermore, the monarchy of Yemen collapsed in 1962 despite its politico-religious dichotomy.[128] The third explanation offered is that Gulf monarchies embody Arab cultural values of patrimonialism.[129] The term, first elaborated by Max Weber, is used to describe traditional small-scale political configurations in which a singular figure rules over a territory and its

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[125] Kamrava, *Democracy in the Balance*, 152
[126] Anderson, "Absolutism and the Resilience of Monarchy in the Middle East", 3,4
[127] Kostiner, 174
[128] Ibid., 175
[129] Ibid., 170

inhabitants as an extension of his personal domain, thereby blurring the divide between public and private.[130] Rulers in these societies assume the role of patriarch, wielding unconstrained and uncontested power. The leaders' ability to provide both material benefits and guarantee the security of their loyal subjects, to whom they have a personal attachment, legitimizes their authority.[131]

Institutionalists such as Herb and Anderson therefore argue that the Gulf monarchies are in fact neo-patrimonial regimes. Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle define neopatrimonialism as "the incorporation of patrimonial logic into bureaucratic institutions."[132] Jean-François Ménard, Bratton and Van de Walle all describe neopatrimonialism as a hybrid political configuration blending traditional customs and values on a larger scale with the institutional trappings of the modern state. Neopatrimonial states share many of the characteristics of their precursor. Leaders retain unbridled authority over the territory and population using bureaucratic posts as new bargaining chips to garner loyalty and consolidate their position, staving off competing claims for leadership. Bureaucratic posts carry with them privileges bestowing their holders with the opportunity to amass both formal and informal personal wealth through salaries and illicit rents.[133] There is no distinction in neopatrimonial entities between the leader and the state. National laws and constitutions, if they exist, are inconsequential to the ruler who assumes the role of authoritarian despot, stripping the bureaucracy of any functional purpose for public policy decision-making.

Leaders perpetuate the image of themselves as patriarch of a large family, father of the nation, by maximizing their public exposure, thereby creating a personality cult. This devotion is reinforced by the penchant of leaders to entertain personal audiences to address the concerns of

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[130] Jean-François Ménard, "L'État néopatrimonial en Afrique noire", in Jean-François Ménard ed. États d'Afrique noire : formation, mécanismes et crises, (Paris : Karthala, 1991), 326
[131] Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle, Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in Comparative Perspective, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 61
[132] Ibid., 62
[133] Ibid., 62

individuals. Retaining political power requires these leaders to perform a delicate balancing act in order to avoid alienating important members of the elite. While employment within the government constituted one form of patronage, it is usually insufficient to preserve the clientelist structure. Neopatrimonial political structures can be found in other parts of the world, particularly throughout Africa, and are not exclusive to "Arab culture". Persian Gulf monarchies are distinguished by their ability to build and maintain complex patronage networks without alienating any elites.[134] This is in large part due to their enormous oil revenues which have enabled them to develop sophisticated bureaucracies and infrastructure.

Michael Herb along with Joseph Kostiner and Lisa Anderson attribute the stability of the Gulf monarchies to the structural flexibility of their regimes. In *All in the Family*, Michael Herb hypothesizes that it is the role of the family as the founding institution of dynastic monarchies which accounts for their resilience. In a case-study analysis of Middle Eastern monarchies in the post-War period (the still existing eight of Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE as well as the failed monarchies of Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan and Iran), Herb tests the validity of this variable as responsible for the stability of the monarchy, along with other variables including education and rentierism.

In the case of the failed regimes, Herb finds that rulers were often isolated and had not shared power with their relatives so that their deaths created succession crises which plunged their regimes into uncertainty.[135] In contrast, the family's role as the organizing principle of dynastic monarchies ensures the continuity of rule. Dating back to the pre-oil Middle East sheikdoms, political units were traditionally ruled by one family and thus the only competing claims for leadership came from within. Leaders were chosen internally through family consensus, thus avoiding any conflicts over succession. Not surprisingly, the family played an

[134] Lisa Anderson, "The State in the Middle East and North Africa", *Comparative Politics*, Oct. 1987, 7
[135] Herb, *All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution, and Democracy in the Middle Eastern Monarchies*, 2

integral role in attempts by leaders to centralize power over the segmented society following the oil boom.[136] Oil revenues allowed for the creation of a modernized unmediated state with a large bureaucracy. Using these bureaucratic posts as bargaining chips, leaders were able to garner the support of their families, thus consolidating their power.[137] As a result, the ruling family gained a monopoly over the state which endures today in the dynastic monarchies of the region.

The built-in tradition of compromise engendered by the succession process ensures that any internal conflict which may emerge within the family will be quickly resolved. Maintaining the current distribution of posts and oil revenues is in the interest of the entire family. Unlike states such as Iran and Libya, power consolidated within the family ensures that the regimes are not reliant on one person and can therefore continue to thrive for more than one generation. The large presence of the ruling family in both the administrative and military apparatus of the state renders any coup unlikely.[138] In addition, family dispersion creates a network which allows the monarchy to collect reliable information allowing policy-makers to remain in touch with the societies over which they rule. Herb thus presents the Gulf monarchies as being ruled by strong united family-based ruling classes. This very impermeability, when viewed through the paradigm of transitology as argued by O'Donnell and Schmitter, reinforces their claim that the collapse in any regime with a unified elite is highly improbable. O'Donnell and Schmitter argue that a schism within the ruling elite is the genesis of the transition process without which there is no democratization.

Herb's analysis dismisses rival explanations for the stability of dynastic monarchies such as rentierism and education. The rentier state is defined by Giacomo Luciani as one "that economically supports society and is the main source of private revenues through government

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[136] Ibid., 22
[137] Salim Mansur, "Review: *All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution, and Democracy in the Middle East Monarchies* by Michael Herb", *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (Dec., 2000), 850
[138] Herb. *All in the Family*, 35

expenditure."[139] The main source of the government's revenue, labelled rents, is derived either from foreign aid or a reliance on a single commodity.[140] In the Middle East, rentier states profit from substantial oil revenue. Proponents argue that this allows the state to become detached from its population. Since they do not rely on their citizens' taxes, they have no obligations to fulfill their demands. Through oil revenues, rentier states develop sophisticated institutional apparatus' and welfare distribution systems. Individuals and groups become reliant on the state for employment and social services, which fosters a sense of loyalty. The theory argues however that an economic crisis caused by a disruption in rents would cause these states to become unstable and perhaps even collapse as they become unable to maintain the complex patron-client relationships.[141]Rentier theory is important to any analysis of variables leading to enduring monarchies because it takes into account the international dimension, specifically the market, which other paradigms ignore. Its applicability however is somewhat limited in light of the fact that not all regimes in the Middle East are rentier states. In addition, while admitting that oil undoubtedly played a large role in the development of the dynastic monarchies, Herb points to Libya and Iran as examples where monarchies failed despite the presence of substantial oil revenues.

The relatively high level of education within dynastic monarchies compared to the rest of the Arab world leads Herb to question its merit as an independent variable. While he does not discount it as a possible destabilizing force, Herb argues that education would have a negligible impact on a strong regime such as a dynastic monarchy.[142]

In *Middle East Monarchies: The Challenge of Modernity* the focus returns to explaining the persistence of monarchies in the Middle East. In his introduction, Joseph Kostiner reiterates

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[139] Anoushiravan, Ehteshami, "The Democratization Process in the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries", *Journal of Social Affairs*, vol. 222, no. 86, pp. 55-69, Summer 2005, 61
[140] Handelman and Tessler, 70
[141]Kostiner, 182
[142] Ibid. 240

some of Herb's points, agreeing that there is a distinction between individual absolutist monarchies and dynastic-hereditary monarchies based on the one hand on a state bureaucracy loyal to the ruler and on the other on a "social system based on kin, ethnic, religious affiliations, arranged in hierarchical divisions."[143] Kostiner demonstrates the emergence of two distinct models of rule in pre-oil Middle East: the centralized monarchical system of the Ottoman Empire and the peripheral system of the chiefdoms. The Ottoman Empire used Islam to legitimize its rule by force, affording it the support of the *ulama* (religious community) and legitimacy of the *Bay'a* (people). While the source of power of the Ottoman Empire was largely derived from family and clan affiliations, they were able to build loyal administrative and military institutions through patron-client relations.[144] In contrast, the chiefdoms were far less institutionalized and based primarily on a series of agreements among families and tribal groups.

While the two models appear to be complete opposites, Kostiner points out that they, in fact, share several characteristics which live on today in the modern monarchies of the Arab world: tradition of bargaining and negotiation, pragmatic agreements and social pluralism.[145] Kostiner admits that the origins of Gulf monarchies have influenced their institutions but he differs from Herb in arguing that the stability of the regime is related to its performance. According to Kostiner, the traditional balancing of the elements listed above has become more difficult for present-day regimes. The ruler is still the leader of society; however his task of rewarding and regulating groups within their states has been rendered more difficult due to the presence of competing demands. The surviving monarchies have therefore been characterized by the "ability of a leading family – a dynasty – to form a coalition among various social segments, drawing on earlier monarchical legacies, by using bargaining methods."[146] In these cases, the

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[143] Kostiner, 1
[144] Ibid., 2
[145] Ibid. 4
[146] Ibid. 5

monarchies have demonstrated an ability to build consensus through give and take and form political pacts, a key tenet of transitology. Regimes that failed to achieve popular legitimacy, such as Egypt and Iran, became detached from society and were eventually overthrown by the emergence of the middle class within the administration and the military which the monarchs no longer controlled.

The performance of dynastic monarchies has also benefited from their relations with superpowers and large oil revenues. Oil revenues, especially in the Persian Gulf monarchies, have enabled regimes to modernize their societies while providing social welfare subsidies to their populations. In addition, the failures of competing left-wing nationalist governments to achieve socio-economic development and their defeat at the hands of Israel have also helped solidify the legitimacy of monarchies in the region.[147]

In *Dynasts and Nationalists: Why Monarchies Survive*, Anderson echoes Kostiner's argument that superior performance of monarchies relative to other regime types in the region is responsible for their stability. She argues that monarchism as an institution is more flexible than its nationalist counterpart and therefore better equipped to deal with the modern challenges presented by state transformation. Anderson quickly dismisses suggestions that tradition and culture are responsible for the resilience of Arab monarchies, pointing out that in addition to all being relatively modern states, none are endorsed by Islam.[148] She argues that the despotic power of the monarchies, consolidated by their monopoly on military and communication technology, renders them virtually indistinguishable from presidential systems. Unlike Herb and Kostiner, Anderson does not differentiate between absolutist and dynastic monarchies. On the contrary, she argues that all regimes in the Middle East are centralized, personalistic and potentially or

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[147] Ibid. 7
[148] Ibid. 53

actually coercive.[149]

What differentiates monarchies from republican governments in the region, according to Anderson, is their ability to achieve successful state-transformation. As an exclusionary concept, nationalism places primary importance on individual ethnic groups. While members within the ethnic group are equal, the concept becomes problematic in complex heterogeneous societies. In contrast, monarchies thrive on plurality.[150] They simultaneously promote the family unit while espousing a sweeping religious ideal. This allows them to reinforce the social hierarchy of family, used to legitimize succession, while rejecting the dominance of a singular ethnic, linguistic or cultural group.[151] While political parties and freedom of the press are restricted, the monarchies subsidize individual groups and allow them to gather publicly and operate without any constraints.

Monarchs assume a centrality within the society by creating complex social structures, "acknowledg[ing], sustain[ing], [and] even encourage[ing] heterogeneity among their subjects."[152] This allows them to assume the role of both patron and mediator, and the fragmentation of actors facilitates the task of balancing, manipulating and controlling society. Anderson argues that nationalism therefore finds little support, as kinship loyalties are reinforced by the monarchy through patron-client relations and the fostering of political alliances through strategic marriages. She cites the example of Abd Al-Aziz Ibn Saud and his consolidation of power over Saudi Arabia through marriages, a statement contested by Michael Herb's findings.[153]

Anderson also cites the example of the strong link between Hassan II and the Jewish community in Morocco to demonstrate how patron-client relationships can garner loyalty for the

[149] Ibid. 55
[150] Ibid. 56
[151] Ibid. 57
[152] Ibid. 60
[153] Herb, *All in the Family,* 40

monarchic regimes. The monarch's ability to "assign privileges, dispense largesse and provide protection on the basis of personal loyalty" ensures that their overthrow would result in a substantial loss of privileges for many groups within the society.[154] This leads Anderson to conclude that the strong leadership and power of monarchies, combined with their ability to forge and balance personal relationships with competing groups in a fragmented society, renders them more efficient and legitimate. It is this institutional flexibility, according to Anderson, which explains the persistence of monarchical regimes in the Middle East. The ability of Gulf monarchies to adapt and implement social and economic measures while retaining their status at the top of the social hierarchy bodes well for the prospect of an eventual transition to democracy. O'Donnell and Schmitter argue that democratic transitions which employ this top down approach are more likely to succeed because it preserves the elites and therefore reduces the perceived costs of liberalization.

While the previous authors emphasized the role of endogenous factors to explain the stability of Middle Eastern monarchies, Gregory Gause argues that exogenous factors are responsible for the stability of monarchical regimes. In *The Persistence of Monarchy in the Arabian Peninsula: a Comparative Analysis* he identifies alliances with superpowers and oil revenues from the international market as the culprits responsible for the persistence of monarchies in the region. Gause agrees with Anderson in dismissing cultural and traditional explanations. He points out that despite attempts by these regimes to invent traditions to achieve greater legitimacy, dynastic monarchies in the region are modern states with large revenue and welfare distribution systems.[155]

Gause points to Yemen to support his argument that superpower alliances contribute to the stability of monarchic regimes. Here, the monarchy collapsed after the United States

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[154] Kostiner, 63
[155] Ibid. 171

withdrew its support in favour of the new republican regime. Gause admits however, that such an alliance can be insufficient for regime stability since it can be mismanaged, as in the case of the Shah in Iran.

The second argument advanced by Gause points to direct oil revenues from the international economy to the ruling family as a substantial factor in the stability of dynastic monarchies. Rentier theory explains why six of the eight monarchies in the Middle East are within the Arabian Peninsula. He argues that oil revenue has allowed monarchies to build extensive patron-client relationships without alienating powerful domestic groups.[156] He agrees with Herb that oil revenues alone are not sufficient and proper management by the government is essential for it to become a stabilizing force. Nonetheless, in the dynastic monarchies, Gause demonstrates that oil has allowed ruling families to control society by building large modern state institutions, subsidizing large segments of society thereby rendering them dependent upon the monarchy. The anticipated future curtailing of oil revenues leads Gause to predict tough times ahead for the monarchies of the Middle East as they become unable to continue to uphold their costly patron-client relationships.[157]

Gause's prediction seems reasonable as diminishing oil revenues and reserves have coincided with the emergence of a new set of challenges confronting the Gulf Cooperation Council states.[158] The Gulf monarchies have experienced what Gary Sick refers to as a 'demographic explosion'. The population in the region is expected to triple from 45 million in 1970 to 162 million by 2010, the result of elevated population growth rates which hover between

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[156] Ibid. 168
[157] Ibid. 182 and Sean McKnight, Neil Partrick and Francis Toase eds. *Gulf Security: Opportunities and Challenges for the New Generation*, (London: Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies and the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, 2000), 109
[158] The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was founded in 1981. It is composed of six states: Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The Council is a regional organization which seeks to promote economic integration and cooperation (ex. Foreign policy, security, trade) among its membership.

3-4% annually in the six states.[159] The increased population has put added stress upon the welfare state systems, with oil revenues no longer capable of covering the accompanying costs.

As a result, many GCC countries are running budget deficits.[160] In addition, youths in the GCC states which account for a significant part of the population are finding it increasingly difficult to find employment. Gause states the regimes of the Gulf face difficult decisions and choices if they wish to avoid serious financial crises. The main dilemma is whether to cut services and risk the wrath of the population which under the existing social contract has acquiesced to regime policies in exchange for subsidies. Or, barring any sharp increase in oil prices, do the regimes raise revenues through taxation even though this will likely lead to demands for greater political accountability and participation from the general population? Gause points out that several countries have already taken some limited measures, citing Saudi Arabia's cuts to funding during the 1990s and increased rates charged by the UAE in the health sector and for electricity.[161] As oil revenues of Gulf rentier states diminish, the states become less autonomous from society and face increased pressure for reform and political accountability. Worsening economic conditions and their alienation of large segments of the population create "a volatile recipe for social unrest" and demands for regime change.[162]

The absence of any legitimate political outlets and the repression of regime opposition can lead to violent uprisings as seen in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain during the mid 1990s. Bratton and Van de Walle argue that the personal fate of neopatrimonial leaders is inextricably linked to the survival of the regime. The rulers are therefore faced with several options: remain defiant and resort to coercion, step down, or implement political reforms in the hope that they can remain in power by steering the process or use these measures as façade to prolong their rule. For the most

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[159]Gary G. Sick and Lawrence G., Potter eds. *The Persian Gulf at the Millennium: Essays in Politics, Economy, Security and Religion.* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 19
[160] Sick and Potter, 68 and McKnight, Partrick and Francis, 109
[161] Ibid. 69
[162]Bratton and van de Walle, 82 and 83

part, dynastic monarchies have no reason to abandon absolutist rule since they face little or no opposition from outside of the regime. While the monarchies of the Gulf remain stable in the short-term, their rulers appear to have recognized "the need to make some gestures toward their populations" by renegotiating the existing social contract.[163] They have responded with various degrees of reform depending on the individual circumstances of each state and the level of opposition they have encountered.

2.2.1 Monarchies and Political Participation

Herb agrees with Anderson and argues that the adoption of strategic reforms by the Gulf States is indicative of the flexible nature of monarchies. He argues that they may evolve into liberal monarchies which preserve "existing authoritarian elites while at the same time expanding political participation", a key facilitator of democratization according to the model of transitology.[164] In his opinion, monarchies provide a better opportunity for transition to democracy than any other authoritarian regime-type. Herb cites the parliamentary experience in Kuwait as well as the temporary creation of the majlis al-shura and other consultative bodies as safety valves to alleviate public pressure as evidence of the prospects for liberalization. While he acknowledges that there exists little incentive at the moment for dynastic monarchies to reform, Herb believes that negotiated compromise as outlined in transitology is possible in the long-term where the monarchy relinquishes some of its power. After all, this trail has already been blazed by European monarchs.

This argument is explored in greater detail in Herb's article *In Princes and Parliaments.* Herb compares present-day Arab monarchies to other monarchies throughout the world in an attempt to determine the necessary prerequisites for a successful transition to democracy. In his opinion, this comparison is long overdue since an analysis of the unique path which monarchies

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[163] Sick and Potter, 71
[164] Herb, *All in the Family*, 259

have followed to democratization in the past could provide answers to the prospects for democratization in the Arab world. Herb views recent reforms by Arab states and the experimentation with parliaments by countries such as Kuwait as encouraging signs of an eventual transition. This contrasts with the more pessimistic views that these experiences are merely "hollow facades".[165] Herb agrees with O'Donnell and Schmitter and argues that a gradual transition or "democracy from above" is advantageous since it eliminates the risks which accompany a sudden transition to democracy. While he does not elaborate on what these risks may be, O'Donnell and Schmitter contend that a rapid transition is less likely to succeed since the mobilization phase is likely to be chaotic and a confirmation of hard-liners' reservations.

Herb argues that several lessons and necessary steps can be identified from the experience of European monarchies in their successful transition to democracies including: the adoption of a constitution which creates an elected house vested with ministerial responsibility and the ability to block legislation, the presence of political parties capable of forming a government, and a probationary period where monarchs manage the parliament through appointments.[166] Herb also finds that unsuccessful transitions were characterized by the failure of governments to hold free elections, leading to a loss of credibility in the democratic process. In addition, the interference of powerful anti-liberal groups within the administrative and military apparatus of the state played a role in failed transitions.[167]

Applying these lessons to the three constitutional Arab monarchies of Morocco, Kuwait and Bahrain, Herb concludes that while power remains for the moment concentrated within the monarchy, the presence of free elections in Kuwait and Bahrain should offer hope that democratization in the region is possible.[168] While elections of any kind are encouraging

[165] Michael Herb, "Princes and Parliaments in the Arab World", Middle East Journal 58, 3 (Summer 2004), 2
[166] Ibid. 11
[167] Ibid. 16
[168] Ibid. 27

developments, Mai Yamani points out that they have been manipulated by monarchies looking for "a patina of popular consent without threatening the status quo."[169] However, elections are merely one aspect of the democratization process. Wolfgang Merkel requires five supplementary characteristics: a democratic electoral regime, political rights of participation, civil rights, horizontal accountability, and the guarantee that the effective power to govern lies in the hands of democratically elected representatives.[170] He defines defective democracies as hybrid regimes which possess both authoritarian and democratic characteristics. Despite the progress, neopatrimonial traditions remain heavily entrenched in the Gulf States and the top down transition of which Herb speaks could easily veer towards defective democracy.

Merkel outlines four types of defective democracies: exclusive, domain, illiberal and delegative democracies.[171] While all these variations are clearly flawed they can become institutionalized if their defects are accepted by the elite and the population at large.[172] Merkel states that this is particularly common in "societies with a low educational level or having clientelistic and patrimonial structures."[173]

Although Herb acknowledges that various outcomes are possible in the Gulf, he stops short of making any bold predictions. Furthermore he admits that there is no set time line and that for the moment monarchies have little incentive to share power. Other obstacles, such as the lack of any viable moderate secular opposition to ease the concerns of the ruling elite remain.[174]Nevertheless, Gerd Nonneman points out that Arab parliaments are not unlike their European predecessors who underwent similar growing pains during the early stages of their

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[169] [169] Mai Yamani, "The limits of political reform in Saudi Arabia" in Birgitte Rahbek ed. *Democratization in the Middle East: Dilemmas and Perspectives*. (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2005), 113

[170] Wolfgang Merkel, "Embedded and Defective Democracies", *Democratization*, (Vol. 11, 5, 2004), 36

[171] Exclusive democracy, wherein electoral participation is restricted; Domain democracy wherein specific actors such as the military have a final say on all political decisions; Illiberal democracies, wherein individual rights and freedoms are not guaranteed and are susceptible to abuse. Delegative democracy wherein executive power is unrestrained, freedoms and liberties are arbitrary, judicial and legislative institutions can be circumvented and elections (flawed) are the only formal democratic trappings.

[172] Merkel, 49

[173] Ibid. 55

[174] Michael Herb, "Islamist Movements and the Problem of Democracy in the Arab World", 31

democratization processes.[175] According to Nonneman, parliaments and elections should be viewed as encouraging signs of a positive change in political culture. They are also evidence of the flexibility of monarchies as a regime type to impose and control a gradual top-down transition more likely to succeed towards democratization as envisioned by transitology.

2.3 Conclusion

The arguments put forth by the studied authors provide us with a comprehensive understanding of the factors responsible for the persistence of the Gulf monarchies. Herb identifies the family-base of the dynastic monarchies and its ability to resolve succession and other internal conflicts through negotiation to explain the unity of the ruling elite. This unity, combined with the family monopoly of the state, renders the state almost impervious to a coup. Kostiner also emphasizes the bargaining culture inherent within dynastic monarchies; moreover he views it as a crucial tool which enables the monarchies to negotiate compromises with groups outside of the ruling elite and ensure their acquiescence. This requires a delicate balancing act of a complex set of competing demands which Lisa Anderson argues allows the monarchs to assume a flexible role in society as both the mediator and patron of the society. This societal control is due to the modernized state apparatus and welfare distribution system, all of which Gause reminds us was made possible by seemingly limitless oil revenues.

It has become clear however that the changing economic climate in the Gulf threatens the region's monarchs' ability to maintain their sophisticated patronage networks. Their revenues have become overextended and force them to run large deficits to cater to their rapidly expanding populations. In addition, unemployment is high, particularly among the youth. Tough choices will have to be made to either cut back on subsidies or raise revenue through taxation. Either way, a renegotiation of the current social contract seems inevitable and regimes will be

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[175] Gerd Nonneman. "Rentiers and Autocrats, Monarchs and Democrats, State and Society: The Middle East between Globalization, Human 'Agency' and Europe", *International Affairs*, Vol. 77, No. 1 (Jan., 2001), 155

faced with demands for political accountability and participation. The Gulf States have not been oblivious to these developments and instead have implemented various degrees of tactical political reform. While Gause predicts the imminent failure of these regimes, they have defied sceptics before, and their persistence remains possible. However, the model of transitology suggests that democratization is an equally plausible scenario for monarchies given the historical precedent of monarchies as flexible regimes capable of undergoing gradual liberalization and political reform without endangering the survival of the ruling elite.[176] The following chapter examines the case-study of Bahrain, a dynastic monarchy which appears to be in the midst of such a transition.

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[176] Anderson, "Absolutism and the Resilience of Monarchy in the Middle East", 2

Chapter 3: The Case of Bahrain

3.1 Introduction

In 1999, Sheikh Isa ibn Salman Al Khalifa, Emir of Bahrain since 1960, before his state gained official independence, passed away and was replaced on the throne by his son Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa. Upon his accession, the new Emir called for a national reconciliation and a re-opening of a dialogue with government opposition ending a five-year uprising which had mired Bahrain in a period of civil unrest. The Emir released all political prisoners, allowed exiles to return, and implemented drastic reforms which granted Bahrainis unprecedented rights, placing the state at the front of the liberal curve in the Persian Gulf. In addition, thirty years after the dissolution of the elected National Assembly, a new representative body revived parliamentarianism in Bahrain.

This chapter begins by retracing the rise to power of the Al Khalifa in Bahrain and the state's rapid modernization following the discovery of oil. This is followed by a detailed analysis of the reform movement in Bahrain and the government strategy in addressing these demands for greater political participation since 1923 to the present day. The final section assesses the recent political developments in Bahrain through the prism of the modernization, political culture and transitology paradigms. It concludes by arguing that transitology provides the best assessment tool of the three and allows us to conclude that there exists probable cause to believe that liberalization in this Gulf state will successfully culminate in democratization

3.2 Overview and the Early History of Bahrain

3.2.1 Overview

The Kingdom of Bahrain is an archipelago consisting of thirty-six different islands in the Persian Gulf, three of which are heavily populated. An overwhelming majority of the population lives in the capital city of Manama and Bahrain's second largest city Al Muharraq.[177] Bahrain's territory covers 725 square kilometres and neighbours two regional superpowers, Saudi Arabia and Iran. It is connected to the former by the King Fahd Causeway built in 1986. While Bahrain was the first Gulf country to discover and export oil, its oil resources are nearing depletion. It has attempted to take advantage of its geographical position as a regional centre to become both a financial hub and tourist destination. Bahrain's population of 708,573 is bolstered by an additional 235,108 non-nationals which are an integral part of the Bahraini labour force.

The country is ruled by a dynastic monarchy headed by the Al Khalifa family. The Sunni Al Khalifa are headed by the Emir Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa and rule over a population that is overwhelmingly Shi'a.[178] The structure of Bahraini society is built along sectarian lines with the Sunni community traditionally richer and stronger than their Shi'a counterparts. This has fostered resentment within the Shi'a community towards the government which has discriminated against them in the past. On several occasions the Shi'a have expressed their discontent through demonstrations. The Shi'a themselves are not homogeneous and can be divided into two groups: those of Indian origin, the Baharinah, who are in large part poor rural farmers and those of Persian origin, a minority group of traditionally rich and powerful merchants and professionals. The two groups are differentiated by their allegiance to different Shi'i martyrs, as well as their contrasting socio-political position within Bahraini society.

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[177] 89% of the population lives in these 2 major cities. Central Intelligence Agency, "CIA – The World Factbook – Bahrain", June 21st https://www.cia.gov/library/publiations/the-world-factbook/geos/ba.html#Govt (June 21, 2007). For a general overview of Bahrain see Federal Research Division, *Bahrain*, (Kessinger Publishing, 2005)

[178] The Shi'a account for 70% of Bahrain's native population - Central Intelligence Agency https://www.cia.gov/library/publiations/the-world-factbook/geos/ba.html#Govt

Despite being relatively poor within the Gulf context, Bahrain enjoys a reputation as an intellectual and cultural learning centre within the region. Its adult literacy rate is 89.1%, a by-product of free education from primary school to university. Bahrain is home to several universities including the Bahrain University, the Arabian Gulf University and the College of Health and Science.

Bahrain also enjoys a reputation in the region for being "free". In the Gulf context, this refers mainly to the availability of alcohol. While not exactly the conventional definition of freedom, this factor should not be underestimated as it is both a large attraction for tourists and indicative of Bahrain's relatively secular society. Women for example have more rights in Bahrain than in most Gulf States. They work, mostly out of necessity due to the high cost of living, in hotels, offices, shops and banks and can venture out in public alone.[179] In addition, very few women in Bahrain wear veils to cover their faces and recent reforms have granted them suffrage. Bahrain's libertarian reputation has also been enhanced in recent years by increased freedom of the press and expression as part of a liberalization process which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

3.2.2 The Rise of the Al Khalifa

The ruling Al Khalifa family descends from the Nejdi tribe, one of the three original Sunni tribes.[180] Fleeing famine in Nejd (Central Arabia), the nomadic Al Khalifas settled in Kuwait with their fellow members of the Utub tribe, the Al Sabah, before relocating to Zubara in 1766 in modern-day Qatar.[181] In Zubara, they became adept sailors and entered the pearling

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[179] Graz, Liesl H., *The Turbulent Gulf,* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd. , 1990), 161

[180] For a thorough and detailed account of Gulf history see J.B. Kelly, *Arabia, the Gulf & the West*, (London: George Weidenfeld and Nicholson Limited, 1980)

[181] Despite moving to the islands of Bahrain, the Al Khalifa's have maintained their claim to Zuhara along with a couple Qatari-owned islands which they argue seceded unlawfully. This issue is at the core of the unresolved dispute between Bahrain and Qatar.

industry where they quickly gained a monopoly.[182] Bahrain at the time was ruled by Arab governors loyal to Iran and this is where Iran's claim to Bahrain originates. In 1783, the Al Khalifa under the leadership of Ahmad ibn Muhammad Al Khalifa expelled the Persian rulers and conquered Bahrain. While several Sunni tribes followed the Al Khalifa and settled in Bahrain, the Al Khalifas ruled over a Shi'i majority.

The previous chapter outlined Anderson and Gause's assertion that Gulf monarchies, as relatively new states, have fabricated and embellished historical legacies to solidify their ruling credentials. The practice is common to authoritarian regimes in general. The Al Khalifa have also been guilty of such revisionist recounting of history, an attempt to strengthen their position not only to legitimize their rule but also to portray the Shi'a majority over which they rule in a negative light. The Al Khalifa claim that members of their Utub tribe have been in Bahrain since 1700. Ahmad ibn Muhammad Al Khalifa, revered as a saviour of sorts, "liberated" Bahrain which prior to 1783 was "full of troubles" from its Persian overlords.[183] This constituted a significant Arab victory in the long-standing rivalry with the Persians. To this day, the Al Khalifa associate the Shi'a to the Persians, an effort to continually cast doubt on their "Arab and Muslim credentials"[184]

The Bahraini Shi'a, not surprisingly, refute the Al Khalifa's historical account as fictional. They maintain that they are the native population of Bahrain and point to their local dialect as proof of their Arab origins. They substantiate their assertion that their presence in Bahrain dates back further than the Al Khalifa to the 13th and 14th century when it was a Shi'i religious center. The arrival of the Al Khalifa is characterized as a brutal invasion by foreigners who stripped the Bahraini Shi'a of their land and livelihoods and submitted them to humiliation

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[182] Yizhak Nakash, *Reaching for* Power, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 17
[183] Nakash, 20
[184] Ibid.

and domination, establishing a system of "political apartheid based on racial, sectarian and tribal discrimination."[185]

While neither account can be said to be impartial, the Shi'i version appears to be significantly more accurate and accounts for the socio-economic legacy of sectarian division in Bahrain. The Al Khalifa increased the Sunni population in Bahrain by extending invitations to tribes on the mainland.[186]The Shi'a were treated unfairly and subjected to taxes from which Sunnis were exempt. Since the Al Khalifa conquered Bahrain, they assumed private ownership of virtually the entire island and leased it back to Shi'i who worked the land. The feudal land system rendered the Shi'a dependent on the Sunnis for work and created an economic gap which remains today.[187] The same applied to the pearling industry where the majority of boats were owned and captained by Sunnis while Shi'i worked as divers. The repercussions of the social and cultural sectarian divide reverberate to this day with Shi'a and Sunni communities still living in segregated areas.[188]

3.3 Bahrain under British Rule

While the Al Khalifa ruled over Bahrain, they continued to pay tributes to the regional power of the time during the rest of the 18th century and early 19th century. At first it was the Ottomans, later the Al Saud. Only when the British arrived did the Al Khalifa gain exclusive jurisdiction and authority over their territory as a result of signing a series of treaties during the late 19th century, essentially making Bahrain a protectorate of the British Empire.[189]

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[185] Ibid., 23-24
[186] This practice continues. In 1990 the Al Khalifa invited members of the Dawasir (Saudi Arabia) and Shammar (Syria) tribes, remote relatives, and granted them citizenship, housing and special schools. Ibid., 69
[187] Nakash, 58
[188] Ibid. 20 and 53 and Graz, 4
[189] 17 States who signed bilateral security treaties with the British in the 19th and early 20th centuries were known as the Treaty States. They included Bahrain, Qatar, the territories which now form the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar and Oman.

The new British relationship deterred overzealous neighbours looking to move in on the islands. Depending on foreign states for protection and survival would become a tenet of the Al Khalifa's policy and crucial to their survival. This was a by product of Bahrain's small size, its geographic proximity to Saudi Arabia and Iran, as well as its minority rule over the much larger Shi'i population. The British initially regarded Bahrain as an important territory because of its location on the shipping route to India. Later, however, it would gain strategic relevance for the British for its central location in the Persian Gulf, and the discovery of oil in the early 20th century made it a vital asset. At the beginning of the 20th century, the British appointed a Political Agent to the island. While the official British policy was not to interfere in domestic affairs of Treaty States, the British would become highly involved and play an influential role in Bahrain's domestic and international affairs as well as in shaping the development of its society.

In the face of Iran's longstanding claims to Bahrain, the British were careful to maintain good relations with the Shi'i populations on the islands. In 1923, a minor altercation involving a Sunni and a Shi'i escalated into rioting. The British seized upon this opportunity to implement a series of reforms aimed at restoring order and redressing inequalities between the Shi'a and Sunnis. In a rather bold move, the British Political Resident replaced the ruling monarch, Sheikh Isa bin Ali, with his son Sheikh Hamad bin Isa. This was followed by a total revamping of the government's administrative structure. Several British citizens were appointed to important bureaucratic positions. The most influential appointment would prove to be that of C. Dalrymple Beglrave as adviser to the ruler. Sheikh Hamad delegated the day to day management of Bahraini affairs to Belgrave. He would retain this position for more than three decades and become the symbol of colonialism in Bahrain.[190]

Not surprisingly, British meddling in Bahrain's domestic affairs fomented resentment among the local population in both the Sunni and Shi'a. In 1923, a group of leading opposition

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[190] Nakash, 64

figures convened to form the Bahrain National Congress. The Congress demanded an end to British interference in Bahrain's internal affairs, the return of Sheikh Isa to the throne and the creation of a consultative council to assist the ruler.[191] It is worth noting that while the Congress was made up entirely of Sunnis, they had attempted to solicit leading Shi'i but were rebuffed by the latter due to their historical distrust and their preference to remain under the protection of the British. The movement's inability to garner widespread popular support led to its demise. It was easily suppressed by the British and its leaders exiled from the country.

At the end of the 1920s, the Bahraini pearling industry suffered a major blow as a result of Japan's emergence as the leading supplier of cultivated pearls. Fortunately, not long thereafter in 1932, Bahrain became the first Gulf state to strike oil. While in retrospect the discovery was miniscule in relation to subsequent discoveries in the other Gulf States, the windfall of Bahrain's oil reserves enabled Belgrave to construct a modern state apparatus and fund a number of development projects. The booming Bahraini economy created an abundance of employment opportunities and as a result, many rural farmers, mostly Shi'a, relocated to urban centres, bringing together sectarian populations which had traditionally been geographically segregated.[192] In addition, a universal education system was created, a printing press installed and various cultural clubs developed in urban areas.

While the windfall of oil revenues modernized Bahraini society and resulted in positive changes, new grievances emerged and older issues raised years before by the National Congress remained unaddressed. While citizens had traditionally been able to have an audience with their leader whenever a problem arose, the mushrooming bureaucracy rendered the leader inaccessible to his people and contributed to an ever growing gap between the two.[193] Bureaucratic inefficiency became a common theme and extended to both the judicial and educational systems.

[191] Zahlan, 63
[192]Ibid. 64
[193] Ibid. 64

Citizens lamented that Bahraini education did not provide relevant skills and training to obtain jobs in government and the oil industry. Instead, these jobs were being given to foreigners in an effort to avoid the formation of unions and political organizations and the social unrest they would invariably provoke. Foreign workers traditionally have been from Southeast Asia, India in particular, Britain and Iran. While initially foreign workers comprised only twenty percent of the Bahraini workforce, Nakash states that it climbed to as high as sixty-five percent in 2002.[194] This "invasion" has throughout Bahrain's modern history been a main source of discontent among the local population.

In 1938, Bahraini nationals who were employed by the Bahrain Petroleum Company (BAPCO) complained of discriminatory employment conditions and unfair treatment in comparison to their foreign counterparts. Calls for reform had already been sounded in the neighbouring Gulf States of Kuwait and Dubai. As grievances mounted in Bahrain, opposition movements emerged including the Representatives of the People, the Society of Free Youth and the Secret Labour Union.[195] The collaboration between students and oil workers resulted in a stronger reform movement than the earlier BNC. Nevertheless, the Labour Union was at a disadvantage since its members, if discovered, were fired immediately by management. While the movement eventually lost momentum, it did manage to secure several minor concessions from the government. A national labour committee was created and a labour relations representative to the oil company was appointed. In addition, consultants were hired to reshape the educational system to satisfy the needs of the Bahraini population.

The concessions unfortunately were superficial and did not address the movements' demands for major reform. Political activity during the Second World War was subdued and restricted to the social clubs where merchants, teachers, students and oil workers held intellectual

[194] Nakash, 60
[195] Zahlan, 65

discussions.[196] In what proved to be an ironic twist, the British created the Bahrain Broadcasting Station in 1940 to disseminate ideas of freedom and democracy as part of its war propaganda machine. These ideas proved to be particularly popular among Bahraini citizens eager to apply the lessons at home.

It was ultimately an entirely different set of external factors which led to the re-emergence of a reform movement in Bahrain during the 1950s. As in Kuwait, the issue of Palestine resonated within the Bahraini population, with Persians, Sunnis and Shi'a all uniting in a solidarity movement. While the ruling monarch Sheikh Salman bin Hamad also sympathized with the Palestinians, he saw no need for Bahrain to take any action despite the peaceful demonstrations taking place in the streets. Perhaps more influential was the ascendance to power of Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt to whom Bahrainis were able to listen on the radio. His nationalist discourse was particularly relevant as it coincided with the relocation of the British Political Residency from Iraq to Bahrain. While the Sheikh never wavered in his approval of Belgrave's conservative financial and administrative policies, the public's discontent was equally unrelenting.[197] This led to the re-emergence of the opposition movements calling for greater political participation and reform. "General frustration with the existing socio-political status of Bahrain became fused with nationalism and anti-British sentiments which resulted in open defiance of the government."[198]

In September of 1953, sectarian tensions flared during Ashura, a day of particular importance for Shi'i Muslims commemorating the martyrdom of the Imam Hussein. In the aftermath of these clashes, a disproportionate number of those arrested were Shi'i. In addition, Sunni rioters received significantly lighter sentences than Shi'i rioters. This miscarriage of justice further inflamed the Bahraini Shi'a and led to more protests. During a July 1953 protest,

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[196] Ibid. 66
[197] Zahlan, 68
[198] Ibid. 67

police opened fire on a group of Shi'i demonstrators gathered at the prison to protest the unfair sentences, killing four.[199] Outraged, the Bahraini Shi'a declared a general strike. They called on the British to intervene on their behalf and defend them from Sunnis loyal to the monarchy who were intent on breaking up the strike.

As tensions continued to escalate, four leading members from both the Sunni and Shi'a convened and formed the Higher Executive Committee (HEC). They called for an end to sectarian violence condemning it as unproductive and detrimental to their common desire for political reform. The HEC believed that the government had failed to modernize and keep pace with the thriving Bahraini society. They argued that the growing gap between the government and the population, the main source of public dissatisfaction, could only be narrowed and redressed through increased political participation.[200] While political participation constituted a significant demand, it is important to note that the authority of the monarchy itself was never challenged. In addition, several Bahraini institutions already incorporated forms of representative government. For example, half of all municipal councillors were elected.[201]

As pamphlets advocating reform began to circulate in Manama and Muharraq, the HEC declared a general strike. Rioting broke out between opposition groups and government forces aided by the British. Sheikh Salman declared a state of emergency and outlawed all political activity. The Sheikh believed that "all would be well if people stuck to their own concerns...it is the function for Government to govern, of merchants to trade, of the farmers to farm and of the workers to work and the less any of these groups interfere in the concerns of the other the better."[202]

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[199] It should be noted that nowhere within the literature is there any allegation that the government ordered the police to fire into the crowd.
[200] Zahlan, 68
[201] Ibid. 68
[202] Ibid. 69

The British however recognized the legitimacy of the grievances voiced by the HEC. Careful not to publicly undermine the Sheikh, they recommended he make a series of minor concessions to appease the populace. A special inquiry of police behaviour during the crowd shooting was commissioned which resulted in damages being awarded to the victims' families. The government's actions were deemed insufficient by the HEC who were adamant that only political reform would stabilize domestic tensions. They petitioned the Sheikh to create a legislative assembly, civil and criminal codes of law, a trade union and a court of appeal. When the Sheikh refused to meet these demands and instead created a series of supervisory committees of various public sectors including health and education, the HEC declared a general strike. The strike succeeded in bringing life in Bahrain to a grinding halt for an entire week. The HEC and the government were locked in a stalemate with neither party willing to compromise.

During this same time period the British and Nasser faced off in what would eventually culminate into the Suez crisis and as a result anti-British sentiment in Bahrain was high.[203] In spite of these developments, the British were able to mediate a compromise between the government and the HEC while rioting continued in the streets and the general strike persisted. The government agreed to recognize the HEC under a different name, the Committee for National Unity (CNU) in exchange for the latter dropping their demands for a legislative Assembly. In addition, the Sheikh consented to dismiss Belgrave and eliminate the post of adviser to the ruler. Unfortunately for the CNU, the government claimed that its leadership was responsible for a series of demonstrations protesting the Suez conflict and they were promptly exiled. While the Higher Executive Committee failed to reach its ultimate goal of securing political reform, it managed to successfully alter and strengthen the Bahraini opposition movement by eliminating sectarian tensions by which it had previously been sidetracked. The

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[203] Ibid. 70

result was a unified reform movement which to this date has not relapsed into sectarian infighting.

The Bahraini government would not declare an end to the state of emergency for another decade. It strengthened its police force and created an intelligence agency with the help of the British in order to curb political unrest. Nevertheless, demonstrations and strikes continued during this period, usually in response to job cuts by BAPCO. Students sympathetic with their plight joined forces with the oil workers to form the National Front for Progressive Force (NFPF). With the help of the Bahraini security apparatus and British troops, the government was able to clamp down on the opposition movement and restore order.

The Bahraini government however would not be able to rely much on the British for their security. In 1968, the British announced their intention to close their bases in the Gulf. Bahrain, along with the other Gulf States, faced an uncertain security climate. Unable to convince the British to rethink their decision, Abu Dhabi and Dubai banded together to form the United Arab Emirates (UAE), extending invitations to the rest of the Gulf States. While the idea was initially intriguing for Bahrain, it soon fizzled as a result of the inability to co-exist with Qatar. Bahrain and Qatar had both sought a leadership position within the prospective new federation. Land claim disputes between the two and the fact that Bahrain still refused to acknowledge Qatar's legitimacy presented major obstacles.[204] Reputed as the cultural centre of the Gulf, Bahrain was unwilling to take a backseat to Qatar and therefore opted to remain independent.

Before leaving for good, the British performed one last favour for the Bahraini monarchy. They organized a UN sponsored referendum in Bahrain on the question of independence or annexation with Iran. They convinced the Shah of Iran to agree to respect the results and when

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[204] Zahlan, 71

Bahrainis voted overwhelmingly in favour of remaining independent, the Iranian government dropped its historical claim to the islands, the Shah having accepted the "will of the people".[205]

3.4 Indecisive and Wavering Political Liberalization Since Independence

Following independence in 1971, Sheikh Isa bin Salman, pledged to develop "the necessary framework for political participation."[206] In June, 1972 he created a Constitutional Assembly of twenty-two elected and twenty appointed members to draft and ratify a constitution. The constitution called for the creation of a National Assembly consisting of thirty elected members and fourteen appointed government ministers. Elections were held in December 1973 with no irregularities. Although the franchise was restricted to male citizens, the voter turnout was impressive, as high as 90% in certain districts.[207] The two major winners of the election were the People's Bloc and the Religious Bloc. The People's Bloc was the reincarnation of the Committee of National Unity, a nationalist liberal coalition supported by both the Shi'i and Sunni communities while the Religious Bloc was a rural conservative Shi'i party which advocated a greater role for Islam within Bahraini society.[208] Fourteen of the elected members and seven appointed ones were Shi'i.

The Assembly however would prove to be a failed experiment. It would only convene for two sessions before being dissolved by Sheikh Isa in August of 1975 after it became deadlocked over a controversial security bill and a military agreement with the United States. The Security Bill drastically expanded the government's authority allowing it to arrest and imprison any individual suspected of a threat to national security for a period of up to three years.[209] In addition to disagreeing with the provisions of the bill, the opposition believed that its passage

[205] Ibid. 72 and Nakash, 54
[206] Zahlan, 72
[207] Nakash, 134
[208] Zahlan,73
[209] Ibid. 73

into law was unconstitutional as the Sheikh had implemented it without the required approval of the Assembly. This complaint had previously been voiced by opposition members following the signature and ratification of the Jufair Agreement of 1971 without the Assembly's approval. The Jufair Agreement leased land to the American navy and military in exchange for $4 million per year. It was deemed detrimental to the national interest by the Assembly which cited continued American support of Israel. In addition to dissolving the Assembly, the government also imposed a ban on all political activity.[210]

In its short existence, the Assembly had passed bills limiting the Emir's access to the state budget and transferring land ownership from the ruling family to the state. The parliamentary experience proved that Bahrainis were indeed ready and capable of working together having united to curb the Emir's power and check his perceived abuses of power. On the other hand it confirmed the fears of the ruling family's hardliners who had from the outset opposed any political reform and resulted in a deliberalization.[211] Both Herb and Nakash suggest that pressure from the Saudi government, concerned about potential demands for reform in their own country as the result of a spill over effect, also factored into the decision to terminate the parliamentary experiment.[212] While possible, the Khalifas had enough reasons of their own to dissolve the parliament and it is therefore questionable that the Saudi opinion played a significant role in their decision.

Frightened by the spectre of reforms snowballing and becoming uncontrollable, the Al Khalifa reversed course. The Assembly's dissolution was possible due to two main factors: the Al Khalifa's strong financial position which allowed it to remain independent from its population and the distraction caused by significant regional developments catalyzed by the 1973 Arab-

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[210] Graz, 163
[211] Nakash, 136
[212] Ibid. 136 and Herb, "All in the Family", 177

Israeli war.[213] The Arab oil embargo resulted in a steep spike in global oil prices. Taking advantage of their newfound bargaining power, the Gulf States re-negotiated their agreements with oil companies, garnering them a greater share of the profits. The financial windfall afforded the Gulf States immense wealth and they began to modernize their state infrastructure through massive development projects.

Unfortunately, Bahrain with its dwindling oil resources was left behind. In what amounted to more bad news, despite its enormous oil revenues, the Iranian monarchy collapsed and the Shah was deposed and replaced by a theocratic government headed by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. The new government renewed its claims to Bahrain and its sizeable Shi'i community. They encouraged the Shi'a of Bahrain on radio broadcasts to lead an insurrection against the Al Khalifa monarchy. In 1981, Bahraini authorities uncovered a plot to overthrow the government sponsored by the Iranian government. The group responsible for the failed coup was the Islamic Front, a fundamentalist Shi'i group led by foreign clerics which sought to establish an Islamic Republic in Bahrain modeled after Iran. This desire held little appeal among the Bahraini Shi'a and only represented the will of a radical minority.[214]

Nonetheless, feeling insecure and vulnerable to Iranian interference, Bahrain, as it had done on past occasions due to its precarious geographic position, turned to a foreign power for protection. It signed a mutual security agreement with Saudi Arabia with whom they had always maintained a strong relationship due to their proximity and their common Shi'i populations who were once linked.[215] The relationship dates back to the first Saudi State when the Al Khalifa paid tribute to the Al Saud and the latter attempted to spread Wahhabism by sending their missionaries. Eager to distance themselves from Iran the Al Khalifa played up their links to the

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[213] Zahlan, 74
[214] Nakash, 64
[215] Ibid. 54

Saudis, tracing their relationship to the Anaza tribal confederation they both once belonged to in their nomadic days.[216]

The rapprochement with Saudi Arabia paid significant dividends for Bahrain and they have since depended on them for their survival.[217] Saudi Arabia has been more than just a deterrent against Iranian ambitions. As its oil resources began to dwindle, Bahrain attempted to diversify its economy by attracting, with the help of the Saudis, regional political and financial institutions. With their help they became a banking centre host to a number of regional institutions. Bahrain benefited from the civil war in Lebanon and by 1982 had more than 120 banks.[218] It has more recently become an Islamic finance center, with thirty-two Islamic banks currently operating on its territory, the most in the Middle East.[219] The Saudis also gave up their share of the offshore Abu Safa oilfield to Bahrain and provide the island-state with financial aid which accounts for 45 per cent of Bahrain's annual budget.[220]

The close relation between the Al Khalifa and Al Saud led to the construction in 1986 of the Saudi-financed King Fahd causeway linking Bahrain to Saudi Arabia. Bahrainis were initially hesitant about the construction of the causeway. They worried that it would result in a loss of sovereignty and distinctiveness with potential pressure from the Saudi government to adopt more conservative legislation. In addition, businesses were concerned that they would be undercut by an influx of cheaper Saudi imports. These fears quickly disappeared. The twenty-four kilometre causeway played a crucial role in the development of Bahrain's tourism industry, in particular its big hotels with cabarets, shows and restaurants whose primary clientele has

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[216] Ibid. 55
[217] Ibid. 55
[218] Nakash, 62
[219] United States Department of State, March 7th "Bahrain (03/07)", June 19th
http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/26414.htm
[220] Nakash, 56. It is also worth noting that the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait provide Bahrain with $50 million in annual aid. – Central Intelligence Agency, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ba.html#Govt

always been Saudi vacationers. The causeway also has an added dimension of security providing easier access by Saudi forces.

The employment created by these institutions has resulted in the emergence of a relatively large middle class, a unique feature in the Gulf.[221] Composed of both blue-collar oil workers and white-collar bureaucrats and businessmen, the burgeoning middle class's steady growth was boosted by the migration of poor rural Shi'a to urban centres. Their ability to secure better-paying jobs gained them more political influence within Bahrain.[222] Saudi Arabia however, with its own Shi'i population has been leery of the Al Khalifas making any concessions to their Shi'i populations out of concern of the spill over effect.

Unfortunately, Bahrain's economy remained largely oil-based and dwindling oil resources brought on a recession in the early 1990s. Government spending was curbed considerably and unemployment has risen substantially. Economic troubles led to the re-emergence of demands for political reform. The government however "remained seemingly impervious to the national, regional and international reverberations of its policies."[223] The absence of any avenue for dialogue between the government and opposition movements resulted in a series of increasingly violent confrontations. The government's response was to repress dissidents rather than address their demands.

Following the Gulf War, the dawn of a 'new world order' prompted the Gulf monarchies, including the Al Khalifa in Bahrain, to promise political reform.[224] In 1991, more than fifteen years after its dissolution, a group of three hundred professionals unsuccessfully petitioned the Emir to restore the National Assembly. Instead, in December of 1992, he created an advisory Consultative Council comprised of 30 appointed members chaired by the Emir. As the

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[221] Graz, 280
[222] Zahlan, 76
[223] Ibid. 77
[224] Nakash, 64

unemployment rate reached fifteen percent nationally and thirty percent in rural Shi'a areas, the opposition continued to gain momentum. The rural Shi'i Bahrain Freedom Movement, the Marxist-nationalist National Liberation Front comprised of Sunni and Shi'i and the Popular Front supported by Sunni and Shi'i students, workers and intellectuals united to convey to the Emir their discontent with the current political climate through a petition signed by over twenty thousand Bahraini citizens.[225]

Therein, they outlined their demands for greater political participation through the reinstatement of the constitution, the National Assembly, the return of exiles, a reduction of the foreign workforce and freedom of expression.[226] In addition, demands were made to abolish the controversial security act which essentially gave police carte blanche. In both cases, the petitions had been cordial and respectful of the monarchy. However, once again, the Emir ignored the petition and ordered the arrest of the leaders of the opposition and a crackdown on demonstrations which led to another round of violent confrontations and the beginning of the 1994 uprising. Among those arrested was Shi'i cleric Abd al-Amir al-Jamri. A Bahraini "Gandhi", recognized by both sects as the voice of the opposition movement, al-Jamri advocated peaceful resistance and cooperation between Sunni and Shi'a who both stood to gain from political change.[227]

During the first year of the uprising, thirty demonstrators were killed, hundreds were wounded and over three thousand arrested. The government purposely targeted Shi'i demonstrators in an attempt to split the opposition along sectarian lines. Sunnis and Shi'i who signed the petitions often "faced official retribution ranging from harassment and employment blacklisting to detention and ill treatment."[228] Unlike the reform movement in 1938 however, the

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[225] Zahlan, 78
[226] Nakash, 64
[227] Ibid. 67
[228] International Crisis Group, "Bahrain's Sectarian Challenge", Middle East Report no. 40, (May 6, 2005), 5

opposition was strong and united. No longer able to ignore the unrest, the government released Al-Jamri within four months as part of an agreement between the government and the opposition to open a dialogue on reform.

The Emir attempted to quell discontent through a series of mostly cosmetic changes. In 1995, he reshuffled his cabinet which had remained unchanged for nearly two decades and the following year announced the addition of ten more seats to the existing Consultative Council, bringing its membership to forty. The truce momentarily brought stability back to Bahrain however it broke down in December as the opposition became frustrated over the government's reluctance to make any significant reforms. Unfortunately for Al-Jamri, the resumption of hostilities led to his arrest and he was sentenced to ten years in prison for spying and conduct detrimental to the stability of the state. With Bahrain mired in yet another uprising, government repression increased.

In June 1996, the government arrested forty-four Bahraini Shi'i for plotting to overthrow the government and install an Islamic Republic. While this attempted coup was also supposedly financed by Iran, unlike in 1981, there was little proof to substantiate these allegations.[229] Instead it appears to have been yet another attempt to form a schism within the opposition movement by portraying the Shi'a as enemies of Bahrain in cahoots with the Iranians and the Al Khalifa as the "guardians of the Sunnis" and scaring off demands for reform.[230]

However, the attempt to splinter the opposition and the exiling of Shi'i opposition leaders backfired. The exiles were able to mount a public relations campaign which won support from international human rights organizations, members of the United States Congress and members of both the European and British parliaments.[231] The Bahraini government was admonished by several international human rights organizations for alleged human rights abuses. In a 1997

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[229] Nakash, 68
[230] Ibid. 68
[231] Ibid. 70

report, Human Rights Watch detailed "serious, extensive and recurrent human rights abuses in the form of arbitrary detention, abusive treatment of prisoners and denial of due process."[232] Leisl however argues that Bahrain may attract more attention from human rights organizations than any other Gulf state because its citizens enjoy a relatively high level of personal freedoms which makes them unafraid to speak freely about abuses.[233] However, there is no denying that opposition leaders have been tortured during their time in prison.[234]

Sheikh Isa's death in 1999 provided the government with an opportunity to re-open the dialogue with the opposition. The new Emir, Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa made a number of goodwill gestures towards the opposition. Political prisoners were released, exiles allowed to return and civil society was allowed to thrive as a ban on newspapers and labour unions was lifted. In an effort to make inroads with the Bahraini Shi'a, the Emir granted citizenship to the Bedouins and amended and softened the 1975 security law.[235] In 1999, Bahrain adopted a national Charter which called for the creation of a new bicameral assembly consisting of both an elected and appointed house.[236] The elected assembly, the Council of Representatives, would be entrusted with legislative powers while the appointed chamber, the Consultative Council, would serve as an advisory body. The Charter extended the franchise to all citizens over the age of twenty and made women eligible to run for office. The Charter was the subject of a national referendum on February 14th 2001 and it received nearly unanimous approval.[237] Shi'i turnout at the vote was impressive despite calls by the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain to boycott the election, indicative of the minimal support the party enjoyed within the community.

However, the buoyancy accompanying the adoption of the Charter quickly subsided as the government implemented an amended document which preserved the Emir's absolute power

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[232] Zahlan, 79
[233] Graz, 164
[234] International Crisis Group, 2
[235] Nakash, 70
[236] The appointed chamber had one Jew, one Christian and 6 women.
[237] 98.4% of the population voted in favour of adopting the Charter. Nakash, 134

and stripped the elected representative chamber of its ability to act independently.[238] In addition, the Al Khalifa have diminished the voting power of the Bahraini Shi'a through rather creative gerrymandering making Sunni votes effectively more important.[239]

This led several parties, including the major Shi'i party, al-Wifaq, to boycott the parliamentary elections as well as the institution itself. The low voter turnout accounted for the fact that Shi'i parties only gained seven of twenty-one seats.[240] It is unclear whether or not this has helped the opposition's cause. On the one hand the al-Wifaq party and its allies in the boycott have missed out on influencing legislation within the parliament.[241] Their rejection of the institution has meant that they entertain virtually no dialogue with any members of either house. It can be argued that the resulting divide has weakened the drive for reform[242] However, it can also be argued that al-Wifaq party has gained from the boycott. It has gone back to its roots and circulated various petitions. It also organized two Lebanon-style mass demonstrations. While mass demonstrations are risky since they include youths who can turn violent and "rally the economic elite and the Sunni parts of the Bahraini populace around the government," for the most part they have been peaceful. [243] On occasion however they have turned violent, mostly on account of the provocation of the heavy-handed tactics of the Bahraini government forces. [244] The ability to organize mass mobilizations, along with the petitions solidified the al-Wifaq's credentials as a major entity representative of a large segment of the population.

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[238] The amended document vested the appointed Consultative Council with equal legislative powers as the elected body. Approval by both houses was required for a bill be approved the appointed body held the tie-breaking vote.
[239] Katja Niethammer, "Voices in Parliament, Debates in *Majalis* and Banners on Streets: avenues of Political Participation in Bahrain", *European University Institute Working Papers*, (No. 27, 2006), 5
[240] Nakash, 138; The voter turnout was 53%, the voting breakdown by party and unofficial sectarian affiliation was as follows: Islamic Bloc (Shi'i) 20%, Independents (Sunni conservative) 19%, Islamic Platform (Sunni) 18%, Islamic Purity Society (Sunni) 13%, Democrats (liberal left) 8%, Other 22%, Niethammer, 6
[241] Three other smaller parties joined the al-Wifaq party's boycott of the 2002 Parliamentary elections, a Shi'i party and two left-leaning liberal parties.
[242] Niethammer, 12
[243] Ibid. 18. The March 2005 rally held on Sitra Island attracted 120 000 according to its organizers, 5000-7000 according to the government although it is believed that they significantly played down the turnout. The same can be said for the second rally in front of the Dana Mall where the government reported the turnout to be much lower than the 15 000 which the organizers claim showed up.
[244] International Crisis Group, 5

The regime appears to have reacted to the demonstrations as they have conducted behind the scenes negotiations with leaders of al-Wifaq to reach a compromise regarding the Consultative Council. They ended their boycott and ran in the November and December 2006 parliamentary elections winning seventeen of the forty seats, the most by any one party. The election not surprisingly saw an increased voter turnout of 72%.[245] The presence of al-Wifaq resulted in a more balanced chamber.[246] It is worth noting that following the 2002 elections, a new party organized as a non-governmental organization emerged, the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, led by Abdulhadi al-Khanaja. A radical Shi'i opposition group, it champions a sectarian platform aimed at addressing the unfair treatment of the Bahraini Shi'a at the hands of the Al Khalifa.[247] As such it has adopted a confrontational approach which has often led to what Niethammer argues are sometimes intentional clashes with police while paying lip service to the West as a human rights movement.[248] While the party has attracted disillusioned youth, it remains a fringe party. However its emergence should not be ignored since it could stand to gain legitimacy if the reform process continues to stagnate or relapses, leaving citizens frustrated and disheartened. A strong radical opposition would also lend ammunition to regime hardliners wary of reform.[249]

This is particularly important since according to Niethammer, the ascension of Sheikh Hamad to the throne has created a division within the government between the Emir and the Prime Minister. Hamad's father, Sheikh Isa had entrusted his Prime Minister Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman (also Hamad's uncle) since independence with the responsibility of running the

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[245]F Gregory Gause III , "Bahrain Parliamentary Election Results: 25 November and 2 December 2006" , *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 39, 2007, 170

[246] Seats by party as of February 2007 - al Wifaq 17 (Shi'i), al Asala (Sunni Salafi) 8, al Minbar (Sunni Muslim Brotherhood) 7, al Mustaqbal (Moderate Sunni pro-government) 4, unassociated independents (Sunni) 3, independent affiliated with al Wifaq (Sunni oppositionist) 1. Central Intelligence Agency - https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ba.html#Govt

[247] Niethammer, 20

[248] Ibid. 22

[249] Ibid. 23

government. Sheikh Hamad however has shown a willingness to take on a more active role than his father and has sought to curb the duties of his uncle to the latter's dismay. Hamad has made changes to the cabinet, appointing a second woman and a Persian Shi'i as ministers of minor portfolios. Sheikh Hamad also made headlines when in an unprecedented move he dismissed the Minister of the Interior, a member of the ruling family. Niethammer argues that the Emir has been trying to replace the 'old guard' which includes the Prime Minister, as it opposes any reform.[250] Complicating matters is the fact that both maintain an entourage of advisors and consultants. While at times it is unclear who is making which decisions, both the Emir and the Prime Minister have an interest in maintaining the power of the Al Khalifa.[251]

One element on which the Emir has long been able to rely is his strong relationship with the United States.[252] The Americans, as early as 1949, have used Bahrain as a military operations base. While the Jufair agreement represents the pillar of this relationship, Bahrain only truly became a vital asset for the United States after the first Gulf War. The United States designated Bahrain as a major non-NATO ally and signed a bilateral free trade agreement and security agreement in September 2004.[253] Bahrain currently hosts the Fifth Fleet of the US navy and over 1,500 personnel.[254] While closer ties with the United States and their continued military presence have engendered local resentment, it has reduced the Al Khalifa's reliance on Saudi Arabia.[255] Bahrain has traditionally been able to count on US support of the regime and its "efforts to ensure its stability" due to American fears that political reform would lead to the emergence of a

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[250] Niethammer, 9
[251] Ibid. 10
[252] Bahrain has contributed troops to assist the Americans in Iraq. It has also been helpful in curtailing terrorist-related banking activity as part of the War on Terror. United States Department of State - thttp://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/26414.htm
[253] This is an exclusive designation reserved for a select group of countries with which the United States enjoys close relations. Other Major non-NATO allies are Australia, Egypt, Israel, Japan, South Korea, Jordan, New Zealand, Argentina, Philippines, Thailand, Kuwait, Morocco and Pakistan.
[254] Zahlan, 77
[255] Nakash, 65

Shi'i regime sympathetic to Iran and opposed to the presence of the US military. Thus they have

yet to apply any significant pressure on the Al Khalifa to enact political reforms.[256]

3.5 Assessing Bahrain through the paradigms of Modernization, Political Culture and Transitology

3.5.1 Modernization and Political Culture in the Bahraini Context

Following the discovery of oil, Bahrain rapidly industrialized and the industrial sector

continues to account for a significant portion of the country's annual Gross Domestic Product

(GDP). In 2003, industry represented 41.8% of Bahrain's annual GDP.[257] The figure actually

indicates a decline as demonstrated by the 51% share of the GDP it occupied in 1984.[258]

Urbanization in Bahrain is also very elevated with 90% of the population living in urban

centres.[259]The 85% urbanization rate in Bahrain in 1975 proves that this is hardly a recent

development.[260] The 2004 per capita income in Bahrain was measured at $20,758. Per capita

income in Bahrain has since the oil boom remained relatively elevated and it shares the

distinction of being classified as a "high income state" along with its fellow Gulf neighbours.[261]

As a result Bahrain also boasts a strong middle class.

Bahrain's education rates are also notable. The Bahraini state placed particular emphasis

on creating a solid scholastic system and as was mentioned earlier takes pride in its reputation as

an educated society. This is reflected by its high literacy rate of 86.5%.[262] The literacy rate

among Bahraini youths is even higher at 97.1%, an identical figure to its school enrolment rate

[256] Ibid. 68

[257] The Service sector accounted for 59.9% of the GDP - World Bank, "Bahrain At a Glance", September 19th 2005, http://devdata.worldbank.org/AAG/bhr_aag.pdf, July 27 2007

[258] Ibid.

[259] Ibid.

[260] Ibid.

[261] Hunter and Malik, 3 and United Nations Development Programme, "Human Development Report 2006 – Beyond Scarcity: Power, Poverty, and the Global Water Crisis – Bahrain", August 1 2007, http://hdr.undp.org/hdr2006/statistics/countries/data_sheets/cty_ds_BHR.html, August 1 2007

[262] Figure is from 2006 statistics World Bank, "Bahrain Data Profile", July 30 2007, http://devdata.worldbank.org/external/CPProfile.asp?PTYPE=CP&CCODE=BHR, July 30 2007

which extends to secondary school education.[263]Education is also equally accessible to women and men scoring a 1 on the Gender Parity Index.[264]

Although we cannot quantify Bahrain's political culture, the behaviour and demands of opposition groups as well as the current rights and freedoms granted to its citizens reveal that society is also predisposed to democracy. While the extensive set of rights and freedoms accorded by the Bahraini government are relatively recent, a civic culture can be found in Bahraini society even prior to the county's official independence in 1971. As we have detailed earlier, the Bahraini opposition movement dates back to the late 1930's, re-emerging at various intervals in the 1950's, 1970's and more recently in 1999 in the form of large mass movements. While the power and influence of these mass movements increased over time due to better organization and lessons learned from previous experiences, the demands have always centred around increasing political participation through contested elections. In its relatively short parliamentary experience in both the 1970s and today, elected officials have demonstrated both a willingness and ability to play the democratic game.

Viewed through the prism of the modernization and political culture paradigms, Bahrain appears to represent a fertile ground for democracy. This assessment is based on a series of favourable economic and social indicators. Elevated levels of industrialization, urbanization, education, per capita income suggest an economically "modern" society. A traditionally pro-democratic opposition movement and the recent drastic liberalization of Bahraini society are indicative of its progressive political culture. While the presence of positive social and economic

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[263] Figure is from 2005 statistics. United Nations Development Programme
http://hdr.undp.org/hdr2006/statistics/countries/data_sheets/cty_ds_BHR.html
[264] Gender Parity Index (GPI), gross enrolment ratio in primary and secondary education is the ratio of the female-to-male values of the gross enrolment ratio in primary and secondary education. A GPI of 1 indicates parity between sexes. (Data Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics), "Bahrain Data Profile"
"http://devdata.worldbank.org/edstats/SummaryEducationProfiles/CountryData/GetShowData.asp?sCtry=BHR,Bahrain and World Bank, "Key Development Data & Statistics", July 22 2007,
http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/DATASTATISTICS/0,,contentMDK:20535285~menuPK:119269 4~pagePK:64133150~piPK:64133175~theSitePK:239419,00.html July 26 2007

conditions in Bahrain are encouraging, as we have shown, for the most part these do not represent recent developments. Thus while modernization has occurred in Bahrain and it arguably led to cultural change, if these were the only prerequisites to democracy, Bahrain would likely already be democratic. Instead the reason for renewed optimism regarding Bahrain's prospects for democratization revolves around the emergence of a schism in the ruling elite and the presence of a moderate opposition which have increased the likelihood of an eventual democratic pact. These are the factors which according to the paradigm of transitology explain and contextualize recent political developments in Bahrain.

3.5.2 Transitology applied to Bahrain

As was discussed in the initial chapter, the presence of moderate opposition groups capable of forming a pact with soft-liners within the ruling elite advocated by O'Donnell and Schmitter have largely been absent in the Persian Gulf and the Middle East in general. This element of transitology partly explains why democratization appears to have failed to materialize in Arab states to date. While we can speculate as to what impact the British presence had on the dissemination of democratic ideas, it is clear that Bahrain's indigenous proletariat holds the most experience in political action within the Gulf.[265] It is also one of the oldest reform movements in the region. The highly visible presence of a moderate pro-democracy opposition augurs well in an assessment for the prospect of democratization in Bahrain.

Bahrain's labour movement dates back to the pearling industry. As we have noted, the labour movement has obtained concessions on numerous occasions from both industry and government, thereby creating avenues through which grievances can be expressed. Bahrain also holds the distinction of being the most educated Gulf State with a literacy rate over 90%. While higher education is not a requisite of democratization, it is helpful to the process in that it

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[265] Graz, 138

moderates the opposition.[266] The other factor which distinguishes Bahrain from its regional counterparts and facilitates the formation of political pacts in transitology is its established middle class, which often plays a key role in creating a middle ground during transitions. Its emergence also allowed some poor rural Shi'i to move up within Bahrain's social hierarchy, garnering more clout within society.

The moderate behaviour of the Shi'a in the Bahraini reform movement is especially significant considering the systematic discrimination they have endured under the Al Khalifa. Nakash argues that Shi'ism is somehow more predisposed to democracy than its Sunni counterpart.[267] He bases this argument on the special relationship between Shi'i followers and clerics. While the preservation of the Islamic community's unity is sacred for Sunnis to the point that they will tolerate a despot, Shi'a recognize no authority on earth.[268] While they follow the leadership of mujtahids, doctors of Islamic law, they choose which one to follow based on their own preference. It is rare that mujtahids attract large followings, however if they manage to do so they acquire both financial and political clout which allows them to remain independent from the state. They are, however, at all times accountable to their followers who form their power base. Nakash therefore argues Shi'i ability to choose mujtahids and check their power are values consistent with democracy.[269]

Although Nakash's argument is novel, it falls into a culturalist pitfall, implying that Sunnis are less predisposed to democracy. The example of Iran drives home the point that religious values can be manipulated to justify a non-democratic order while a democratic

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[266] Lipset, 84

[267] Shi'ism emerged as a separate Islamic sect as a result of the controversial succession following the Prophet Muhammad's death. The Prophet's son-in law and cousin Ali ibn Abi Talib was supposed to become the caliph however he was passed over on numerous occasions before finally being assassinated in 661. His son Hussein was urged by his supporters, the Shi'At Ali (Shi'a), to retake the caliphate from the Ummayad who had by this time established themselves in Syria. Hussein failed and he was killed. His death marked the birth of Shi'ism. The Shi'a believe in the existence of twelve imams, the last of which is the Prophet Muhammad who will one day reappear as the Messiah. Nakash, 5

[268] Ibid. 5

[269] Ibid. 6

Indonesia could be cited as an example of Sunni compatibility. Nakash underlines the openness to democracy exhibited recently by the Shi'i populations of Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Iraq among others. However, their receptiveness is more likely explained by Nakash's other argument, that it stems from a desire to redress the power balance in their favour and more accurately reflect their demographic status within these states. In Bahrain and Iraq, in particular, where the Shi'i population vastly outnumbers their Sunni counterparts, democracy represents an enticing alternative to the current power arrangement. The opposition movement in Bahrain, however, has been unique in its non-sectarian emphasis. While political societies within Bahrain are often affiliated to certain sects, the pro-democratic activism is prevalent among both Shi'a and Sunnis. The support for the democratic movement itself is astonishing within the larger context of the region.

Barry Rubin in his book, *The Long War for Freedom: The Arab struggle for Democracy in the Middle East*, examines the state of liberalism in the Arab world. Through interviews with prominent Arab reformers he paints a bleak picture.[270] The position of Arab regimes on issues within Arab society including human rights, poverty, and the rights of women is to either deny their existence or fault the West and Israel. Similarly, Islamists blame foreign intervention and an insufficient commitment to Islam within society. Since the failure of Arab nationalism, most Arab states in the region have been less receptive to foreign ideas and concepts.

Islamists, who are able to thrive since religion is often the "only uncensored public expression in most Arab countries", have become the only alternative to the government in many Arab states and thus the status quo has been perceived as the lesser of two evils.[271] Liberals who have attempted to make their mark have been branded as un-Islamic imperialist traitors. They

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[270] Rubin defines reformers as "people who support one or more of the following concepts: multiparty parliamentary democracy, human rights, a more tolerant interpretation of Islam, rapprochement with the West and peace with Israel". Barry Rubin, *The Long War for Freedom: The Arab Struggle for Democracy in the Middle East*, (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2006), 3
[271] Ibid. 32 and 34

have become social outcasts. In fact, governments often crackdown on reformers to curry favour with Islamists.

This dynamic is notably absent in Bahrain. Despite the fact that Bahrainis accord importance to religion, they live in a relatively secular society. Accordingly, radical Islamist organizations such as the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain have found it very difficult to gain public support even at the height of public discontent. The monarchy itself, although Sunni, does not claim to possess any religious affiliation or legitimacy, unlike its Saudi neighbours with Wahhabism. The availability of alcohol and the landmark rights accorded to women are the most obvious indication of the Al Khalifa's moderate religious stance. The muted sectarianism has removed an otherwise destructive obstacle in unifying the opposition movement, facilitating the creation of a political pact between Sunni and Shi'i opposition elites as envisioned by O'Donnell and Schmitter's theory. This has been a feature of the opposition movement ever since the late 1930s when sectarian infighting derailed the reform movement. Since that time, Bahraini opposition elites have proved to be capable of keeping their supporters among the general population under control and the movement has not outwardly provoked any violence. When clashes have occurred, they have resulted from the reaction to heavy handed police tactics.

A final feature of the opposition which bodes well for an eventual transition to democracy is the willingness of the opposition to work for reform within the existing political structure. At no point during the long history of the Bahraini opposition movement has any significant actor called for the removal of the Al Khalifa. Despite having been subjected to human rights abuses at the hands of the Al Khalifa throughout their history, the Shi'a do not appear to be vindictive. Instead, like all reform movements, Shi'i and Sunni opposition leaders seek to check the power of the executive without a purge of the regime's ruling elite.

There have been other encouraging developments along the parameters of the transitology paradigm which constitute progress in Bahrain. While elected institutions have been labelled as unsatisfactory by the opposition, the electoral process itself has been free of any irregularities. Freedom of expression and press are in large part respected. This tolerance has also extended to the internet which has played a large role in the opposition movement, acting both as a forum for discussion and a medium to disseminate information about upcoming events. Most Shi'i villages run their own websites and keynote opposition speeches are streamed live.[272] Peaceful demonstrations are for the most part tolerated and Bahrain's society "offers a complex matrix of interlinking social institutions".[273] This acceptance of public dialogue has resulted in a change in attitude from the government which has become more willing to negotiate with the opposition.

3.6 Conclusion

Despite the gradual top-down reforms implemented by the Al Khalifa, the monarchy has yet to relinquish its hold on executive power and Bahrain remains a liberal authoritarian regime. Due to the advanced state of the liberalization process, whether or not the new Emir's actions are aimed at eventual democratization may be less critical. As O'Donnell and Schmitter argued, once liberalization has reached an advanced stage it can take on a life of its own and spin out of the ruling regime's control. In addition, the Al Khalifa's diminished power makes it unlikely they could survive the backlash which would accompany the removal or curtailing of rights and reforms. Even if Saudi and American support remains steadfast, the example of Iran, once an

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[272] Niethammer, 6
[273] Ibid., 7

American-backed oil rich monarchy, and its collapse provides a cautionary reminder that such support alone does not guarantee survival.[274]

The Al Khalifa will soon reach a crucial crossroad. Due to the flexibility of monarchies as a regime type, political reform does not mean the disappearance of the ruling family. They can remain in power while slowly devolving power to eventually become a constitutional monarchy. If the population becomes increasingly annoyed by a lack of progress it is possible that more radical elements such as the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights could gain popularity. Moderate opposition leaders risk losing control of their followers. No longer backed up by British forces or by tremendous oil wealth, the regime cannot afford to backtrack on its liberalization initiatives as it did in 1975 when it dissolved the National Assembly. The moderate opposition movement represents a window of opportunity for the Al Khalifa which would allow them to preserve their influence on Bahrain for many years to come within the cadre of a constitutional monarchy. O'Donnell and Schmitter stress that the transition period is fraught with uncertainty and there is no fixed outcome. Thus while the stars seem to be aligning in Bahrain with a potent mix of advanced liberalization, a strong moderate opposition and a weak and divided ruling elite, democratization is not guaranteed. It does, however, allow us to be optimistic that the liberalization process in Bahrain will succeed and lead to democratization.

Bahrain is not the only Gulf country where demands for greater political participation have surfaced. The demands for reform and the government responses to them are the subject of the next chapter as we compare and contrast Bahrain with two Gulf States which have employed alternate strategies in responding to these challenges.

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[274] The Iranian revolution installed a theocracy which is not considered democratic. The reference made here is to the Shah's fall, which proved that foreign support alone is not sufficient for a regime to survive, and not to the events that followed.

Chapter 4: A Comparative Analysis of Liberalization in the Persian Gulf: The Cases of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia

4.1 Introduction

While Bahrain has made great strides with reforms enacted in recent years, the rest of the Gulf States have provided their own idiosyncratic response to demands for greater political participation. A homogeneous lot, the many similarities facilitate comparison among these states. Ruled by dynastic monarchies, their oil-based economies have generated wealthy welfare states geared towards relatively small populations, complimented by a large contingent of foreign nationals who represent a significant part of their labour force.

The following chapter examines two countries, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, which have adopted polar opposite regime strategies in dealing with political opposition. Kuwait's liberalization process is the most comparable, in terms of significant progress, to that of Bahrain. The opposition in Kuwait has been moderate and, like Bahrain, has sought to reform the political system without overhauling the monarchy. The Kuwaiti regime has been able to accommodate opposition demands for political reform without sharing any executive power, which has allowed them to consolidate an already strong government. The case of Saudi Arabia however, serves as an example of a regime where the ruling family has remained virtually impervious to demands for greater political participation and freedoms with only minor, mostly cosmetic liberalization. Their closed society has fostered radical opposition groups. The Saudi example provides a useful contrast to the developments in Bahrain and those in Kuwait which we believe are meritorious and worthy of optimism for eventual transition to democracy. While Kuwait is at an advanced stage of liberalization, transition is more likely to occur first in Bahrain because of the present-day economic and social pressures which face its regime and the fissure within its ruling elite, which the Al Sabah of Kuwait have yet to encounter.

4.2 Kuwait

4.2.1 Overview, History and Past Liberalization

The Persian Gulf State of Kuwait covers 17, 820 square kilometres and shares borders with neighbours Iraq and Saudi Arabia. The state is ruled by the dynastic Al Sabah monarchy, currently led by the Emir Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jabir al-Sabah. The Al Sabah are descendents of the Sunni Utub tribe. They rule over a population of 2.5 million, including an additional 1.29 million non-nationals.[275] Its population is 60% Sunni and also includes a sizeable 25% Shi'i minority.[276] Kuwait possesses 10% of the world's known oil supply, the driving force behind its economy. The unemployment rate in Kuwait is a marginal 2.2% and its population is highly educated with a literacy rate of 93.3%.[277]

Kuwait is the Gulf state with the longest tradition of parliamentarianism. Prior to the discovery of oil, its merchant class, through consultative councils (majlis), held the ruling Al Sabah monarchy in check. The Al Sabah provided the merchants with protection in exchange for recognition of the monarchy's authority and a share of their profits. The Al Sabah were financially dependent on the comparatively wealthy merchants.

Faced with the rise of Saudi Arabia as a regional power, the Al Sabah formed a partnership with the British in 1899. This relationship allowed the Al Sabah to consolidate is power like the Al Khalifa of Bahrain. The increased power under Sheikh Mubarak the Great strained relations between the monarchy and the merchant notables. The introduction of taxes was not well received and triggered demands for political participation.[278] Following the death of Mubarak, the merchants insisted on the creation of an elected legislative council. A council of

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[275] Central Intelligence Agency, "CIA – The World Factbook – Kuwait", June 12th 2007,
https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ku.html
[276] Nakash, 42
[277] Central Intelligence Agency, "CIA – The World Factbook – Kuwait"
https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ku.html
[278] Zahlan, 35

fourteen elected members chaired by the new Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jabir's cousin was reluctantly created in 1938.[279] While it only operated for six months prior to its dissolution by the King, the majlis was active during this period pushing through economic and social reforms. This constituted the first instance of political reform in the Gulf and 1938 is still referred to in Kuwait as the "Year of the majlis".[280]

The discovery of oil in Kuwait dramatically altered the political landscape and spurred substantial development of state infrastructure as had been the case in Bahrain. The massive windfall of oil revenues which had ballooned to $169 million by 1953 allowed the Al Sabah to become financially independent. Taxes were eliminated and universal education, health care, and subsidized housing were provided by the state. The creation of a sophisticated state apparatus and the large number of development projects led to the arrival of a large foreign worker population. These developments had a profound impact on the composition of the Kuwaiti reform movement which was no longer restricted to the members of the merchant class. It expanded to include two new groups: the intelligentsia composed of young educated, sometimes abroad, Kuwaitis and Arab nationalists, and the oil workers who formed the backbone of the country's labour force.[281]

In 1962, one year after gaining its independence, Kuwait adopted a constitution which created a unicameral National Assembly comprised of fifty elected members. Kuwaiti cabinet ministers, traditionally members of the ruling family, were also accorded votes in the legislature. The elections were fair and for the first time Shi'i and Bedouins candidates managed to get elected. The Assembly would not be dissolved for almost fifteen years despite the occasional clash with the government, usually over cabinet appointment and accusations of election rigging. In 1976, the Emir, fearful of civil strife in Lebanon spilling over into Kuwait, dissolved the

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[279] Voting and candidacy were restricted to male members of the merchant class.
[280] Zahlan, 38
[281] Ibid. 41

Assembly.[282] By 1981, it was reinstated by the Emir, Sheikh Jabir al-Ahmad, after repeated requests from the opposition.

Once again the Assembly was not intimidated by the government and sought to fulfill its responsibility as a check on its power. In 1985, it forced the resignation of Sheikh Salman al-Duaij Al Sabah, the Minister of Justice after it was discovered that he had stolen $7 million from a fund set up to compensate small investors in the aftermath of the crash of the Kuwaiti stock exchange.[283] A year later, in the wake of a campaign by saboteurs to target the Kuwaiti oil infrastructure, the Assembly called the Cabinet to appear before it. The Assembly was dissatisfied with the government's failure to adequately protect the country's oil infrastructure and demanded that the Cabinet take responsibility. As a result, the Cabinet resigned on July 1st 1986. The Emir was displeased by this development and, eager to reaffirm his authority, he dissolved the Assembly yet again.[284]

The Assembly remained suspended when Kuwait was invaded by Iraq in 1991. Saddam Hussein had miscalculated the reaction of the locals who remained staunchly loyal to the Al Sabah, in particular Kuwaiti Shi'a who formed the backbone of the Kuwaiti resistance. This was a reflection of the sharp contrast between the Al Sabah's relationship with the Shi'i community and those of the Al Khalifa and the Al Saud regimes. While Kuwaiti Shi'a have on occasion suffered occasional discrimination, the Al Sabah have had a very tolerant policy towards them and they play an important role in Kuwaiti society, occupying positions in parliament, the army and the police.[285] They therefore take pride in their Kuwaiti identity and view the Al Sabah as a unifying national symbol.[286]

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[282] Ibid., 51 Although they are not geographical neighbours, the potential of a spill-over effect from the turmoil in Lebanon undoubtedly fuelled fear on the part of the Kuwaiti regime that its own political situation could deteriorate into similar unrest.
[283] Ibid. 52
[284] Ibid. 53
[285] Nakash, 42
[286] Zahlan, 97

In the aftermath of Desert Storm in 1991, the opposition demanded that the Assembly be reopened. The demand was reinforced by pressure from the United States as the American public struggled with the notion of having come to the aid of an authoritarian regime.[287] The Emir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah agreed and elections were held in October of 1992. The Assembly has remained in session since that time, with regular elections. Notable reforms have included the extension of the right to vote and run for parliament to women in 2005, the right to public assembly and more expansive freedom of the press.

4.2.2 Assessing Kuwaiti Prospects for Democratization through the paradigms of Modernization, Political Culture and Transitology

There exist many parallels between Kuwait and Bahrain. Both the Al Sabah and the Al Khalifa benefited from striking a close relationship with the British at the turn of the 20th century to consolidate their power over their respective territory. The discovery of oil allowed both states to develop modern sophisticated infrastructures and build welfare states offering impressive social services without taxing their population. While wealth remains concentrated in the ruling family, Kuwait's per capita income is high like its Bahraini counterpart at $19,384.[288] As early as 1984, the industrial sector of the Kuwaiti economy accounted for 59.1% of the GDP.[289]

As it did in Bahrain, industrialization was also followed closely by rapid urbanization. By 1975, 89.4% of the Kuwaiti population was situated in urban centres. Today, urbanization has reached a remarkable 96%.[290] Kuwait's population is also highly educated as indicated by its 93.3% literacy rate which exceeds even Bahrain's already impressive score.[291] In addition, its

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[287] Ibid. 56

[288] Figures in US Dollars. United Nations Development Programme, "Human Development Report 2006 – Beyond Scarcity: Power, Poverty, and the Global Water Crisis – Kuwait", August 1 2007, http://hdr.undp.org/hdr2006/statistics/countries/data_sheets/cty_ds_KWT.html, August 1 2007

[289] World Bank, "Kuwait At a Glance", September 19 2005, http://devdata.worldbank.org/AAG/kwt_aag.pdf, July 27 2007

[290] Ibid.

[291] Statistic is taken from 2006. World Bank, "Kuwait Data Profile", July 31 2007, http://devdata.worldbank.org/external/CPProfile.asp?PTYPE=CP&CCODE=KWT, July 31 2007, Kuwait's youth

GPI of 1 is indicative of the equal access to education enjoyed by Kuwaitis regardless of gender.[292]

Kuwait's reform movement, like Bahrain's dates back to the beginning of the 20th century and throughout its existence has managed to secure concessions regarding freedoms and rights from the Al Sabah. Kuwait's opposition movement also shares with its Bahraini counterparts a willingness to reform the existing political system without purging the ruling family. The opposition has also shown on several occasions the ability to unite against the government, particularly with regards to the make-up of the cabinet. In both cases, the governments at times felt threatened and deliberalized: the Khalifa in 1975 when they closed the National Assembly and Al Sabah on several occasions when they dissolved the parliament. Undeterred, both the Kuwaiti and Bahraini opposition movements continued in their quest for reform which in retrospect appear to have paid off.

The social, economic and cultural prerequisites stipulated by the modernization and political culture paradigms have been satisfied for a number of years in Kuwait as they have in the case of Bahrain. Industrialization, urbanization, education and per capita income are all elevated. A developed civic culture is also present. These factors alone, however, have proved incapable of producing a transition to democracy. As in the case of Bahrain, the Kuwaiti political context and the persistence of authoritarianism is best explained though the prism of transitology.

While Kuwait and Bahrain share favourable economic indicators, geological circumstances differentiate the two states and their democratic outlooks. Kuwait's oil reserves are far from depleted. Combined with the recent surge in oil prices, the Al Sabah remain strong, united and awash with money. As such, transitology tells us that democratization under this

literacy rate is 99.7% . United Nations Development Programme, "Human Development Report 2006 – Beyond Scarcity: Power, Poverty, and the Global Water Crisis – Kuwait"
http://hdr.undp.org/hdr2006/statistics/countries/data_sheets/cty_ds_KWT.html
[292] World Bank, "Kuwait Data Profile", http://devdata.worldbank.org/AAG/kwt_aag.pdf

scenario is highly unlikely. Their limitless finances have allowed them to maintain their costly patronage networks and good relations with minority segments of their population, particularly the Shi'a. Despite the fact that foreign workers account for 80% of the Kuwaiti labour force, the country enjoys strong economic conditions and virtually non-existent unemployment. This is in sharp contrast to the worsening economic conditions in Bahrain. Popular grievances in Kuwait are therefore more muted as is dissatisfaction with the status quo. Government repression is rare.

In addition, like Bahrain, Kuwait is a major non-NATO ally of the United States and benefits from a strong bilateral relationship. There is therefore little American pressure for greater political reform. Reforms which have been accorded have been voluntary concessions by the Al Sabah which further enhance their legitimacy. The Assembly itself is said to be used as a tool to monitor and manage opposition by preventing the emergence of radical groups into the mainstream.[293] Nevertheless, the elections are held regularly and the Assembly has over time accrued more substantive legislative powers which allow it to influence the setting of a public agenda and even wield limited control over the cabinet.[294]

Since the Al Sabah regime is so secure, it is presently not confronted with any tough political policy choices. The lack of urgency makes it therefore unlikely that Kuwait will democratize any time soon. However, Kuwait's parliamentary tradition has become institutionalized within its society and it is therefore understandable why some experts remain optimistic that democratization through top-down reform and increased power-sharing arrangements could occur, albeit, at a very gradual and controlled rate. Herb cites the Kuwaiti example to support his argument that dynastic monarchies can be compatible with liberalization and parliamentarism. While it is certainly not a democracy and the franchise remains limited to the small percentage of individuals who possess Kuwaiti citizenship, the Kuwaiti regime

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[293] Nakash, 45
[294] Diamond, Plattner and Brumberg, 84

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constitutes a departure from absolutism and may represent the foundation of a more liberal political order in the future. From the perspective of transitology, Kuwait is currently at an advanced stage of liberalization and regime opposition, which has demonstrated a willingness and ability to work with the monarchy, can be characterized as moderate. However, the most important and precipitous variable according to transitology, the schism within the elite, remains absent. Hence, democratization is still not imminent.

4.3 Saudi Arabia

4.3.1 Overview, History and Past Liberalization

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, also located in the Persian Gulf, covers an area of 2,149,690 square kilometres. As a result of its central location and its relatively large size, it neighbours an extensive list of countries including Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, UAE, and Yemen and is attached to Bahrain by the King Fahd Causeway. It is also more populous than the other Gulf States with its population numbering 27.6 million, including an additional 5.5 million foreign nationals who constitute a major portion of the Saudi labour force. The population continues to expand at an annual rate of 2.06%.[295] Saudi Arabia is the world's largest exporter of petroleum and possesses 25% of the world's known oil reserves. As a result its economy is primarily oil-based. Various estimates have placed the unemployment level anywhere between 13% and as high as 25%.[296] The Saudi Arabian literacy is low in comparison to the other Gulf States at 78.8%. The majority of the population is Wahhabi, however there exists a Shi'i minority which accounts for 8% of the population.

The rise of the Al Saud dates back to the birth of Wahhabism. Its founder, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab formed an alliance with Muhammad ibn Saud, the ruler of a small desert

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[295] Central Intelligence Agency, "CIA – The World Factbook – Saudi Arabia", June 12th 2007
https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sa.html
[296] Ibid.

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oasis in central Arabia to create the Saudi state in 1744.[297] It was only at the turn of the 20th Century under Abd al-Aziz ibn Saud however that the current Saudi Arabian state began to take shape.[298] The religious establishment however remains a pillar of Saudi society to which the Al Saud have allied themselves to legitimize their rule.[299]

Present-day Saudi Arabia is one of the most totalitarian regimes in the world. A Saudi Prince was famously quoted as having proclaimed that "he who raises his head, his nose shall we hammer."[300]The consequences of dissent are such that public opposition in Saudi Arabia is understandably subdued. In such a closed society, as Rubin argues, the only area where public expression is tolerated is within the religious establishment. Thus, while the Al Saud have afforded the religious establishment significant clout within the Kingdom, the Wahhabi clerics have in recent years bitten the proverbial hand that feeds them.

In 1979, the Saudi government was blindsided when Juhayman al-Utaybi and his followers seized the Grand Mosque in Mecca.[301] The government ordered a military offensive to end the rebellion however it proved to be a complicated operation since a significant segment of the security force and the military shared the same tribal affiliations as the rebels. Thus, they either refused outright the orders to storm the mosque or did so reluctantly. While the Al Saud had undoubtedly played a role in the emergence and spread of Wahhabism within the state, this only served to reinforce the dedication of its followers to religion and did not translate to support of the Saudi state. Islamic piety did not translate into support for the ruling family or guard them against any religious opposition, something which the government had wrongly presumed. They could still be accused by Islamist radicals for not being Islamic enough.

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[297] Wahhabism is a Sunni sect which emphasizes a rededication and strict interpretation of the basic tenets of Islam.
[298] Nakash, 18
[299] Nazih Ayubi, *Over-Stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East* (London: IB Taurus, 1995), 230
[300] Herb, *All in the Family*, 168
[301] Ibid., 170. It is worth noting that the recent events which transpired at the Red Mosque in Islamabad, Pakistan in July 2007 bear a stunning resemblance to the 1979 seizure of the Grand Mosque. Utaybi also had the support of some members within the Saudi ruling family.

Another volley of public opposition towards the regime by Islamists occurred in 1991 when a group of Saudi Arabia's leading clerics (ulemas) sent a detailed petition to the government calling for the handover of the control of the state to the religious establishment. As in 1979, the government reacted quickly and dismissed the clerics. More recently, Islamic extremism has escalated into violence. The most severe event occurred in May of 2003, when a bomb was set off in a residential compound in Riyadh killing thirty-four and injuring several hundred. The American presence in Saudi Arabia has been a source of discontent for Islamic militants. Kéchichian argues that recent public declarations by high-ranking Al Saud family indicating a re-thinking of the Kingdom's close relationship with the United States is evidence that the Islamists are becoming stronger and that the government is trying to repair its "battered legitimacy".[302]

The Al Saud however have never hesitated to reprimand the country's clerics when they have become too critical and remind them of the domestic ruling hierarchy. Following the Riyadh bombings, King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz promised to " confront and destroy the threat posed by a deviant few."[303] A crack-down on militants, some with connections to al-Qaeda, ensued. They were rounded up and arrested. The King also obliged senior clerics to tone down their rhetoric and cease issuing fatwas (religious decrees) which fan the flames of domestic extremism. Kéchichian argues that the public denunciation of violence against non-Muslims by senior Saudi clerics was the result of pressure placed upon the religious establishment by the Al Saud.[304] Indeed, while the religious establishment has at times emerged as an opponent, the Al Saud have always remained firmly in control and their regime has never been in serious peril.

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[302] Joseph A. Kéchichian, "Democratization in Gulf Monarchies: A New Challenge to the GCC", *Middle East Policy*, vol. 11 no. 4 pp. 33-58. Winter 2004, 46
[303] Ibid. 46
[304] Ibid. 49

On the few occasions where Al Saud have felt mildly threatened and wished to shore up public support, it has implemented minor measures in an attempt to give the appearance of reform. These have usually consisted of the creation of majlis al-shuras, appointed consultative councils. Herb points out that the regime reacted in this manner following the revolution in Yemen in 1962, the accession of Khalid to the throne in 1975, the Grand Mosque crisis in 1979 and Fahd's accession in 1982.[305]After the petition of 1991, the government passed the Basic Law of Government in 1992 which created a national majlis al-shura first promised in 1927. The body is comprised of one hundred and fifty members appointed by the King for four year terms.[306] Herb argues that while the new majlis al-shura's influence on policy is marginal it is useful to the Al Saud in a number of ways. It enables the monarchy to receive feedback and maintain a dialogue with its population and it can be marketed to both Islamists and liberals as evidence of political change. In January of 2005, the government announced that the council would be increased from one hundred and twenty to one hundred and fifty members as part of the "dawn of a new political era." [307]

Another tactic which the Al Saud have gladly employed to appease discontent within the religious establishment is the repression of liberals, an approach employed by many other Arab authoritarian regimes.[308] The same tactic also explains their mistreatment of the Shi'a. Discrimination against the Shi'a has been a feature of Saudi rule since Ibn Saud defeated the Ottomans and conquered the mainly Shi'i areas of Hasa and Qatif in 1913. The Shi'a of Hasa and Qatif had an agreement with Ibn Saud which exchanged their acquiescence of Saudi rule for a guarantee of religious freedom. Ibn Saud however did not honour this commitment. The conquest of Hasa and Qatif has been recounted by the Al Saud as the "liberation" of Arabs,

[305] Herb, 169
[306] Kéchichian, 42
[307]Diamond, Plattner and Brumberg, 76
[308] Rubin, 58

another success in Ibn Saud's quest to unify Islam.[309] Ibn Saud is glorified by the Al Saud as an Arab hero in the line of the Prophet Muhammad and Saladin, and his conquest of Hasa and Qatif presented as "holy war against Shi'i heretics" in cahoots with "foreign imperialists".[310] The Wahhabi establishment's virulent hatred of the Shi'a derives from their belief that they are infidels.[311]

However, when oil was discovered in Saudi Arabia, the major reserves were located in the areas inhabited by the Shi'a. Like in Bahrain, the Shi'a became an integral part of the workforce in the oil industry. Their attempts to secure better working conditions through strikes in 1944, 1953, 1956 and 1967 did not pay any dividends but caused a change in hiring practices.[312] Overall, despite their location, the Shi'a of Saudi Arabia have not reaped any rewards from the oil boom. The Al Saud have excluded the Shi'a from both positions in society and their patronage network and continue to view them with suspicion as a security threat.

The Iranian revolution only made matters worse for the Saudi Shi'a. They faced a renewed wave of unprecedented discrimination. In a vicious attempt to destroy their identity and isolate them even further, the government outlawed certain common Shi'i names for newborns and the Wahhabi establishment decreed that Muslims should avoid contact with Shi'i individuals.[313] The status of Saudi Shi'a as second-class citizens and the religious character of the Saudi state has led them to support through the years the various different political ideologies which advocated change including communism, the Ba'th movement and Arab nationalism.[314]

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[309] Nakash, 20

[310] Ibid. 21

[311] Ibn Saud once declared "I should have no objection to taking to wife a Christian or a Jewish woman, and she would have full liberty of belief and conscience though her children would necessarily be brought up as Muslims. The Jews and Christians are both people of the book; but I would not marry a Shi'a...[who] have been guilty of backsliding and *shirk* [polytheism]". Nakash, 44

[312] Ibid. 48

[313] Ibid. 50

[314] Ibid. 12

Not surprisingly, Saudi Shi'a have been watching the developments in Iraq following the American intervention attentively.

Despite such systemic discrimination, the Saudi Shi'a may take solace in several recent minor political developments which provide reason for optimism. In 2003, after a series of petitions by Saudi reformers demanding an independent judiciary, human rights, constitutional reforms, the creation of an elected council and freedom of expression, King Abdallah announced the opening of a 'national dialogue".[315] At the behest of the crown prince, conferences were held in December 2003, June 2004 and September 2004 to discuss political issues and reform.

The debate during these conferences was productive and surprisingly open and frank and attendees represented all segments of the Saudi population including Shi'a and women.[316] While some reformers advocated power-sharing, none challenged the monarchy's legitimacy. This may have been the by product of a cautious and perhaps intelligent decision of a group of individuals wishing to avoid arrest; it may also represent a genuine desire to adopt reforms within the current political structure as has been the preference of the opposition movements in Bahrain and Kuwait. The participants for the most part also did not oppose the preservation of Saudi Arabia's religious affiliation although diminishing the power of the clerics was a recurring theme.[317] In the aftermath of the conference, the Saudi government announced that half of all municipal council members would be elected. The elections were held throughout 2005 across the country with the franchise restricted to males.

4.3.2 Assessing Saudi Prospects for Democratization through the paradigms of Modernization, Political Culture and Transitology

Saudi Arabia's economic indicators suggest a relatively modern society. While its per capita income of $13,825 is less than that of Bahrain and Kuwait, Hunter and Malik still consider

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[315] Kéchichian, 47
[316] Ibid. 43
[317] Herb, *All in the Family*, 133

it to be a "high income state".[318]Saudi Arabia like the majority of its Gulf counterparts industrialized following the discovery of vast oil resources. While its urbanization was not initially as rapid and pronounced as that of Bahrain and Kuwait's, it is still at 58.4% in 1975 and has since risen to 81%.[319] It falls only slightly behind both states in education although somewhat surprisingly scores a GPI of 1.[320]

However, despite these positive economic indicators, Saudi Arabia remains a totalitarian state. Reforms in Kuwait and Bahrain can therefore be comparatively viewed as significant accomplishments. There has been virtually no liberalization in Saudi Arabia and at most, the process is in its infancy as civil and human rights remain elusive and political participation does not extend past the local level. Saudi Arabia remains a closed society, its population is closely monitored and controlled and public dissent remains illegal.

The level of dissent in Saudi Arabia is hard to quantify, as is often the case in repressive states. The only vocal opposition to the Al Saud has come from the Wahhabi establishment which can hardly be classified as moderate. They do not seek liberal reforms but rather the installation of a more conservative order. While petitions and the reform conferences held in 2003 and 2004 have revealed that liberal reformers exist within Saudi Arabia, they are by no means an established group. They are attacked from both sides of the spectrum, by the government for expressing dissent and by the Islamists who view them as traitors with foreign imperialist ideas. Aside from the seizure of the Great Mosque, Islamist opposition to the government has not filtered through to other sectors of the population. Even the handful of

[318] Hunter and Malik, 3

[319] United Nations Development Programme, "Human Development Report 2006 – Beyond Scarcity: Power, Poverty, and the Global Water Crisis – Saudi Arabia", August 1 2007, http://hdr.undp.org/hdr2006/statistics/countries/data_sheets/cty_ds_SAU.html, August 1 2007 and World Bank, "Saudi Arabia At a Glance", September 19 2005, http://devdata.worldbank.org/AAG/sau_aag.pdf, July 27 2007

[320] World Bank, "Saudi Arabia At a Glance", http://devdata.worldbank.org/AAG/sau_aag.pdf

visible liberals has not challenged the monarchy in proposing their reforms. The fact that they've ended up in jail anyways is indicative of the strength of the Al Saud.

In the case of Saudi Arabia, economic modernization has not resulted in the emergence of new social structures. The absence of a developed civic culture is notable and appears to extend beyond the ruling elite to the general population. Thus, the modernization and political culture paradigms would appear to provide valid explanations for the failure of Saudi Arabia to democratize. In fact, Saudi Arabia's dual claim as the Gulf State with the closest association to Islam and the most totalitarian regime might lead academics such as Huntington and Kamrava to designate it as an example where Islam is the impediment to substantive liberalization. This however would be a faulty assumption in light of the pervasiveness of Islam throughout the region. The claim that Islam constitutes an impediment to social change is also belied by the advanced liberalization processes in Bahrain and Kuwait.

In the case of Saudi Arabia, the modernization and political culture models cannot be refuted as we have contended in the previous cases of Kuwait and Bahrain. One could reasonably argue that missing socio-cultural prerequisites explain the stability of the authoritarian regime in Saudi Arabia. The apparent usefulness of the modernization and political culture paradigms in analysing the Saudi case does not eliminate the applicability of transitology which retains its relevance and provides its own explanation for the endurance of the Saudi monarchy.

Unlike Bahrain there currently exists no schism within the ruling Al Saud family in Saudi Arabia.[321] Its oil resources remain vast and thus the Al Saud have retained their financial independence from society, keeping in touch with its population by using the majli al-shura system as a way of collecting information. The unity of the ruling family combined with its

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[321] After issues emerged around succession, the Al Saud created the Allegiance Institution, composed of Al Saud males to elect subsequent Kings through a majority. The body however will not gather until after the Crown Prince's reign ends, which considering it has yet to begin, will not happen for a while. While the Al Saud appears to presently be united, it can be argued that there was a schism at the time of King Faysal's assassination

expansive financial resources make the Saudi Arabian monarchy a strong political unit. The little opposition which it does face is easily crushed by the might of its sophisticated security apparatus. Similar to the Al Sabah, the current strength of the Al Saud means that it is not necessary for it to adopt any substantial changes in policy. Unlike Kuwait there exists no liberal tradition and the Al Saud have not proven to be very benevolent leaders. This explains the contrasting political climates of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

Nevertheless, authors such as Herb, Kéchichian and Nakash point out that while minimal, there has been political progress in Saudi Arabia. Continued high levels of unemployment and the population growth rate could alter the current political dynamics in Saudi Arabia. At this point however, democratization in Saudi Arabia, let alone liberalization remain long-term propositions. The Al Saud have changed very little over the years and remain firmly positioned as the leaders of the Kingdom and Custodians of the Two Holy Mosques. In Saudi Arabia the ruling elite remains united, there currently exists no moderate opposition and liberalization process is minimal. According to transitology, democracy at this juncture therefore appears unattainable.

4.4 Conclusion

The Kuwaiti and Saudi cases provide us with a good understanding of the varied spectrum of reform which has occurred within the Persian Gulf. In the case of Kuwait, persistent moderate pro-democracy opposition movements have achieved considerable gains through a measured dialogue with the Al Sabah, who have been willing partners. In both cases, early liberalization was rescinded on occasions when the monarchy felt threatened. Today, the freedoms which Kuwaiti citizens enjoy rival those achieved by the reform movement in Bahrain.

The main distinction between the Kuwaiti and Bahraini experiences are in relation to the strength of the current regime. Bahrain's oil-based economy has virtually dried up and the Al Khalifa have become heavily reliant on foreign aid. Unemployment, abuses of power and discriminatory practices have unified the population under a pro-democratic movement whose strength has created a rupture within the ruling elite and have led to far-reaching concessions. In the case of Kuwait, the monarchy remains strong and united, buoyed by its continued excessive oil revenues. Unemployment is very low and social services and subsidies have been maintained. The impetus for change is thus much weaker as the government is secure in its position and the population has no significant grievances against the regime. The rapidly developing situation unfolding in Bahrain could result in a sprint towards democracy. If Kuwait is to democratize, its journey will resemble more of a marathon.

In stark contrast to the advanced liberalization in Bahrain and Kuwait, autocracy in Saudi Arabia remains relatively unchanged. Its lucrative oil revenue has enabled the monarchy to maintain a tight grip on its population. Demands for reform have been stifled by strong-arm repressive tactics. The only challenge to the monarchy has come from Islamist radicals bent on installing a more conservative theocracy. While minimal gains have been achieved,

democratization remains an unlikely proposition. The Al Saud have shown no willingness or desire to make significant changes.

In between the two extremes we find the rest of the Gulf States. In Qatar, a liberalization process was initiated in 1996 and the freedom of the press, championed by Al-Jazeera, is unrivalled in the Arab world. Herb argues that these reforms represent an effort by the monarchy to consolidate its rule and guard against eventual opposition. Further reforms were undertaken in April 2003, as Qatari citizens voted and passed a new constitution which established a forty-five member parliament with thirty elected members. This marked the first time that Qatar had extended the franchise to women.

In the UAE, opposition is minimal and majlis provide sufficient participation to satiate its population's demands. Although the monarchy has not faced substantial opposition demanding reforms, they have nonetheless recently undertaken an economic liberalization process. In Oman, the regime is isolated from society and therefore less stable. It has until recently been mired in a power-sharing struggle within the ruling family, a pitfall which led to the fall of the Libyan monarchy. However, in recent years Oman has undertaken substantial reforms. It has created consultative assemblies and more remarkably adopted a Bill of Rights which guarantees freedom of press, religion, equality of race and gender and installed an independent judiciary.[322]

While Bahrain's prognosis is the most encouraging, regional developments suggest that the winds of change are stirring in the Gulf as a whole. No other state, however, responds to the postulates outlined in the theoretical paradigm of transitology like Bahrain which possesses the combination of a divided and weakened ruling elite with soft-liners and hard-liners, a moderate opposition capable of forming a pact with regime soft-liners and an advanced liberalization. An eventual transition however could help embolden reform movements throughout the region and result in certain states following the path blazed by Bahrain.

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[322] Kéchichian, 43

5. Conclusion

Academic literature addressing democratization has in the past dismissed the impact of liberalization efforts in the Middle East as effective significant precursors to democratization. Although authoritarian rule has remained the prevailing political model, long-term democratic transition through incremental reform in Middle East monarchies offer academics the prospect of applying the tenets of theoretical paradigms regarding democratization to political reforms in the region. We have argued that the theory of transitology offers the most comprehensive model for assessing the political changes implemented by and within the Gulf State monarchies. While the *sine qua non* for any significant political transition according to transitology is unpredictability, we have argued that such uncertainty is not culturally or temporally dependent and therefore can also apply to the Middle East.

We have seen that the family-based dynamics of monarchies offer sufficient stability to mitigate problems of successions and other internal difficulties including maintaining the legitimacy of the ruling elite over the populace. Indeed, the Gulf monarchies have shown themselves to be sufficiently flexible to act both as mediator and patron of their respective societies. Modernized state bureaucracies have allowed the incremental evolution of political reform while maintaining strong societal control, including a targeted welfare distribution system, made possible by abundant oil revenues.

Undoubtedly, the changing realities of the oil-based economies will impact the political imperatives faced by the Gulf monarchies and their complex patronage networks. Bahrain's experience highlights the policy dilemmas which accompany high unemployment and result in overextended budgets which no longer are capable of subsidizing the economy. Unable to easily fund the traditional subsidized economy, the regime may well have to resort to increasing revenues through taxation or risk losing its population's loyal acquiescence and support.

Rather than viewing the increased public discontent with the regimes simply as a path to eventual political collapse, the responding incremental reforms implemented in the Gulf state can be viewed as a strategic tactic to ensure that protest does not dispute the legitimacy of the monarchy itself. In fact, we believe that since monarchies elsewhere have evolved through gradual top-down liberalization and political reform processes without endangering their ruling elite, the Bahrain experience remains positive. Moreover, according to transitology theorists O'Donnell and Schmitter, liberalization can escape the ruling regime's control and take on its own momentum towards effective democratization.

Since their conquest of Bahrain, the Al Khalifa have displayed a flexible resilience to remain in power. Internationally, they staved off foreign advances through strategic alliances with countries willing to guarantee their safety. Domestically their strategy, like the other Gulf monarchies and Arab authoritarian regimes in general, has been to introduce political reform in times of unrest as a safety valve. The reforms prior to the late 1990s, in particular the 1973 parliamentary experiment, were intended to consolidate their rule and stabilize the country rather than actually move towards democracy. Once it was clear that the National Assembly would curtail the monarchy's power it was quickly dissolved. The impact of the Assembly's dissolution was softened considerably by the distraction provided by the oil boom and the Arab Israeli War. The government's current position is significantly weaker. No longer generating significant oil revenue, Bahrain today is heavily reliant on foreign aid from its neighbours. Popular discontent is simmering as a result of mounting unemployment, the rise in the cost of living and growing poverty.

The ascension of the new Emir, Sheikh Hamad, has revealed a division within the ruling elite. As has become customary in Bahrain as well as Jordan and Morocco, the new Emir's arrival coincided with a new set of reforms. The reforms have been significant and appear to indicate that the new Emir recognizes that his government can no longer stand idle and still survive. Since his ascension, he has negotiated concessions which his uncle and Prime Minister, a steadfast conservative, has staunchly opposed. Sheikh Hamad has also made a concerted effort to root out members of the "old guard" as much as possible and as a result a rupture appears to have developed within the ruling family.

While instances of government repression towards opposition members has diminished significantly, they have not ceased completely. Under the watchful eye of international human rights organizations the government appears more cautious. Its arrest of Almezel Abdul Hadi al-Khawaja, leader of the Bahraini Centre for Human Rights in October 2004 following a lecture in which he criticized the Prime Minister is a good illustration. He was arrested and sentenced to one year in prison. His arrest was condemned by human rights organizations and demonstrations were held in protests; he was pardoned and released within hours.[323] Even though Bahrain remains a liberal authoritarian regime, any dramatic curtailment of reforms already instituted regarding universal suffrage, public participation, freedom of speech and elected assembly would represent an even greater threat to the regime since its reduced power would be hard pressed to withstand the backlash of any such reversal.

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[323] Rubin, 78

Indeed through the prism of the theory of transitology, the current situation in Bahrain possesses the perfect storm of political circumstances for a democratic transition: a schism within the ruling elite between *duros* and *blandos*, an advanced liberalization process which has ushered in an extensive repertoire of rights and freedoms and a moderate opposition which has shown itself to be a capable partner for the *blandos* in order to reach a political pact based on a negotiated compromise. Detailed empirical evidence regarding tensions within ruling elites is often difficult to obtain before a transition occurs. Some would argue that this precludes transitology from making any conclusions with regards to democratization in a state such as Bahrain. However by examining the concessions of the ruling elite to demands made by the Bahraini reform movement, we can argue that they are wary of their survival. Since this tension has resulted in calculated policy changes we are therefore optimistic that Bahrain will succeed in making the transition to a constitutional monarchy.

In a globalized world, increasingly aware of regional developments, Bahrain's liberalization could embolden demands for greater political participation elsewhere in the Persian Gulf, as well as perhaps within the larger context of the Middle East. It could lead to greater pressure on their regimes to reform. While Bahrain is the first Gulf State to contemplate life after oil, its neighbours' resources are not unlimited and will one day expire and then they will be confronted with the same difficult choices. The ruling families of these states therefore also have a marked interest in the developments in Bahrain. Considering the climate of reform in the Persian Gulf states aimed at reinforcing the ruling monarchies' legitimacy, if successful, the path blazed by Bahrain could become the blueprint for other opposition movements in the region. In addition, a

successful transition could increase interest from academics to conduct further research as to the applicability of transitology to the efforts of liberalization in other states in the Middle East. Greater empirical research and insight of internal regime dynamics would strengthen the predictive utility of transitology within the context of the Middle East.

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