CHAPTER I

EDUCATION, LIBERALISATION AND DEMOCRATISATION IN ARAB WORLD

This chapter is principally concerned with the concepts of liberalization, democratization in Arab world. The concept of freedom we address here is to be understood in its narrow political sense, which is the value and goal of genuine democratic regimes. A survey of democratic freedom is often assumed to entail a survey of human rights. But these two concepts are distinct despite the considerable overlap between them. A free majority in a democratic system may very well deny basic human rights to a particular minority or some specific individuals or groups within society. Indeed it is this potential danger within a free democracy, which led de Tocqueville to warn against the "tyranny of the majority." For example, if politically active Muslim fundamentalists are arrested for their ideas and mistreated in prisons this would constitute a clear violation of their human rights, yet this, in a free democratic society, may be passively approved of by the majority of the population; nor does this violation necessarily impair freedom of expression or political democracy for the vast majority.

The core definition of freedom adopted in this section of the chapter is that people are free to the extent that they actually have a choice in determining the nature of their political and socio-economic systems. Thus a system that imposes a "social good," which may even be a factor that serves democratic values—such as, for example, reducing large inequalities in wealth—is in fact undemocratic, since the policy was not freely chosen through democratic mechanisms.

The successful elections in Kuwait and other Arab societies such as Egypt and Lebanon indicate that Arab political events can no longer be reduced to violent overthrow of governments, coups de'tat, assassinations and royal family feuds. Democratic elections, often marred with irregularities and/or partial under-representativeness, reflect popular choices, even if they do not conform with the interests and wishes of ruling elites. Those
elections, however, tend to express an expanded role of the public sphere, which has been limited— if not eliminated— ever since autocratic rule came into being in West Asia. There is a wide interest in the universal trends of democratisation and in the various schools of democratic theory. Free contested elections are the sine qua non of a democracy, but a focus on the characteristics of the voting process and the turnout at the polls is of little meaning without the civil liberties that must complement these elections. The purpose then is to give a general picture of the political rights and civil liberties in the Arab world with reference to Kuwait.

The realities of the West Asia are still obscured behind layers of ignorance about it, by people in the media and by people in government. The tide has been turning in favour of democratisation for sometime in the Arab world. In fact, it could be argued that post-independence regimes were aware of popular desires for freedom back in the 1950s when new regimes and political parties were promoting their own ideological visions. Not that those regimes and parties satisfied in any way the desires and aspirations of the people. Far from that, Jamal 'Abd-un-Nasir, for example, knowing the centrality of the notion of freedom among his audience, equated legal independence with freedom. 'Freedom' of the nation superseded individual freedoms which were seen as bourgeois values meant to perpetuate the rule of the capitalist elite. The ability of regimes to distort the meanings of freedom, democracy, and equality was not a result of the naiveté of the public but of brute force utilised by the various governments to impose their will, and their definitions.

The literature on civil society and democratisation has concentrated on simultaneous process of democratic transition and consolidation. Amid the seemingly global democratic euphoria, the Arab world remains an authoritarian strong hold, where various

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3 Adam Przeworski. (1992). "The Games of Transition," in Scott Mainwaring et al., eds., Issues in Democratic Consolidation: The New South American Democracies in Comparative Perspective. Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, p. 109. Przeworski argues that "what normally happens is . . . a melting of the iceberg of civil society which overflows the dams of the authoritarian regime." While he later observes that "liberalization could substitute for genuine democratization, thereby maintaining the political exclusion of subaltern groups", p. 111, the thrust of his conceptualization is that transitions move forward or back to reach a new equilibrium.
non-democratic political systems cling on to power with unsurpassed tenacity and remarkable power. What accounts for this seeming lack of desire on the part of Arab world to actively seek after democratic political systems, particularly now that democracy is a tangible political reality in so many previously undemocratic places? This section of the chapter examines the question of democratisation and different patterns of political rule and evolution in the course of the past few decades. Democratic transitions require two developments; one involving the state, the other society. The masses looked for societal alternatives, and an increasingly democratic civil society emerged as a result. In the Arab world, however, the collapse of the state has not been nearly as total, with Arab world leaders retaining enough political, economic and cultural sources of legitimacy to be able to supplant much of the potential appeal that burgeoning civil society organisations might have. Invariably all Arab world states, however, have been able to maintain those corporatist arrangements through which they keep key social groups beholden to them, thus discouraging them from indirectly undermining their own interests.  

CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE ARAB WORLD

In the Arab world, there have historically been three civil society organizations (CSOs) that have enjoyed considerable autonomy and independence from the state. They are the clergy (ulema), tribes and tribal confederacies, and traditional merchants known as the bazaaris. Despite their historical longevity, however, the circumstances within which these and other CSOs have interacted with the state in the Arab world have rendered them largely ineffective as forums for the emergence and spread of democratic ideals. The Arab world state has had a pattern of evolution, especially since the Second World War, the Arab world state had and continues to have real and tangible enemies outside its borders. The Arab world has gone directly after culture, manipulating its every aspect— from Islam to charisma, clientalism and patronage— to enhance its own source of legitimacy. Finally, the Arab world state instituted a mixed economy, supported by an ever-expanding bureaucracy, that enabled it to retain considerable economic leverage.

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4 See Chapter IV of the thesis, which attempts to extensively deal with these issues.
over social actors and other potentially autonomous groups. The end result has been a depoliticisation of CSOs in the Arab world. CSOs remain largely independent of the state, but the state's own active social and political agendas have given the CSOs little reason even to become political, much less agents for democratisation.

An analysis of the Arab world reveals two general types of economies in the region: those of the conservative sheikdoms of the Arabian peninsula, whose incredible oil wealth has prompted one observer to label them as 'oil monarchies'; and the less wealthy, more differentiated economies found in the rest of the region. Because of their different capacities and sources of legitimacy in relation to society, these two groups of states have gone about dealing with CSOs in quite different ways. One group, namely the oil monarchies, has used petrodollars to establish an extensive welfare apparatus through which it has sought to placate and buy off, rather successfully, most independent CSOs. In fact, as far back as the 1950s, in order to address the growing disquiet of the population in Kuwait caused by profound changes in economic and social relations, the states of the Arabian Peninsula began to utilise economic planning and development as a form of institutionalised social control. For their part, the states with less affluent economies have resorted to a mixture of populism and repression to emasculate independent or oppositional groups. In either case, the historical development and current predicament of CSOs do not bode well for transition to democracy.

Democratic institution-building must match the (re)development of civil society, nourishing a political civic culture that helps all segments of society recognize the benefits of democratization – in the form of more equitable, accountable, transparent, and good governance by all and for all.

STATE-SOCIETY RELATIONS

Formal independence came rather late to the Arab world, from the 1920s to the 1940s, and was soon followed by a host of radical and transformative revolutions throughout the 1950s and 1960s. The Nasserist revolution of 1952 in Egypt inspired similar events in Iraq in 1958, in Syria in 1963, in Sudan in 1964 and in Libya in 1969. Invariably, the incoming inclusionary states launched massive industrialization and modernisation campaigns and sought to enhance their control over society by building up a mammoth, modern bureaucracy. The economic and political developments only reinforced the historically urban character of politics in the Arab world, and, consequently, tribal and other bedouin groups increasingly lost any political significance they once might have had. Nevertheless, as Cantori points out, the state has legitimised some (urban) groups, permitting them to play social roles, while prohibiting others from doing so. Politically largely innocuous, most of these groups consist of associations of physicians, journalists, lawyers and engineers, most of whose members are reluctant to engage in overtly oppositional activities against the state for fear of losing the few privileges that the state has granted them. This corporatist arrangement, and with it the implicit understanding that has emerged between the various social groups and the state, has come under pressure in recent years. In any event, ‘these groups do not compete with one another horizontally as in the pluralist model but rather have a vertical relationship to the state’.

Equally consequential for the CSOs has been the emergence of two reinforcing political developments, one domestic and the other international. Domestically, a number of Arab world states have at some point had highly charismatic leaders- Muhammad V in Morocco, Nasser in Egypt, Ben Bella in Algeria, Qaddafi in Libya, and Bourguiba in Tunisia, to name a few- who at least initially instituted inclusionary regimes that combined repression with charismatic populism. The goal of the state was (and in places like Libya and Iraq continues to be) to mobilise mass participation in pursuit of one

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9 L Cantori, 'Civil society, liberalism and the corporatist alternative in the Middle East', p 37.
emotionally-laden project or another (the destruction of the 'Israeli enemy' has long been a favourite). Severely sacrificed in the process was societal autonomy, and even those urban groups with a history of independence from the state- of which the clergy and the bazaaris were the most notable- have often found it necessary to toe the state’s line. Reinforcing the domestic omnipotence and repressive nature of the state was the volatile international environment of the post-WWII era, fuelled in the Arab world by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which has ultimately benefited the region’s authoritarian regimes in their pursuit of hegemony over domestic actors. Under the mantle of the Palestinian cause, some of the Arab world leaders have long solidified their own power bases internally, branded domestic opponents as Zionist collaborators, and built up the edifice of the state to unprecedented proportions.

Two official power centres emerged in the process. The first was the military, the central fount of official power and the primary institution that supplied the leaders and top officials of the state. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s almost all Republics of the Arab world, with the exception of Lebanon, had ‘revolutionary command councils’ that ran the state. The second power centre was the official party- often the only party allowed to operate- which was designed to balance the repression of the military with popular mobilisation and mass political inclusion. Urban social classes were either repressed and depoliticised, or forcibly or voluntarily mobilised in support of the state’s anti-Israeli projects. By the 1970s, the powerful mixture of inclusionary policies on the one hand and brute repression and intolerance on the other had made the state’s domination of society nearly complete.

The economic ramifications of authoritarianism were equally significant. State capitalism left little room for the growth of a sizeable, autonomous capitalist class. Instead, the numbers of state employees in the bureaucratic and industrial sectors mushroomed, there being no tolerance of independent unions or syndicates of any kind. Much of the private sector activity, meanwhile, took place through relatively small shops and stores (a phenomenon which still continues today), the few employees of which are often drawn from relatives, neighbours and other acquaintances. Apart from a brief period in the
1940s and 1950s therefore, a sense of workers' solidarity has not fully developed in the Arab world. Industrialists similarly found themselves curtailed by the intrusive reaches of the state, even after the initiation of economic liberalisation policies (known as the infiath, or open door) in the mid 1970s and 1980s. Most states simply redefined their economic roles and continued to remain the largest business "corporation" within the country.\textsuperscript{10}

The record of most Arab world states on divestiture has been modest. The limited economic reforms implemented have primarily been designed with tactical political considerations in mind and have not changed the overall nature of the state's involvement in the economy.\textsuperscript{11} Nowhere in the Arab world has there been the wholesale implementation of neoliberal market reforms. Nevertheless, although the infiath improved the lot of many in the upper and upper middle classes, their essentially dependent relationship with the state remained intact.

An overwhelming majority of these wealthy industrialists are import-export merchants who continue to rely on the state for securing contracts and acquiring the necessary permits and licences. Even if the risks were not as severe as they are now, few industrialists have much incentive to act against the state. The relationship of the state to society is based on a somewhat different premise in the oil monarchies. But the outcome—lack of societal pressure for change— is essentially the same. The corporatist arrangement in the oil monarchies has four central axioms. At the top sits the Royal family, which dominates and is often indistinguishable from the state (especially in Kuwait). The Royal family is, in turn, supported by three key social groups: the clergy, whose close association with the state has resulted in the emergence of a so-called 'Official Islam' (al-Islam al-rasmi); chiefs and notables from other tribes; and wealthy merchants and industrialists. None of these three groups is willing to challenge an implicit understanding with the state that has long ensured their economic prosperity, social affluence, political inclusion (or acceptance) and physical security. Those openly opposing the regime


invariably come from outside these corporatist groups, with many being Islamist activists who question the credentials of the Royal family.

Formal independence came to the oil monarchies even later than in the rest of the Arab world (Kuwait in 1961). Nevertheless, the Royal families that eventually dominated the state had already achieved local control and prominence long before the departing British recognised them as the rulers of the region. Upon the assumption of formal power, the Royal families based their control of the state on two powerful principles, one economic and the other historical. Historically, the Royal families used the apparatus of the state to present themselves as the 'natural' outgrowth of tribal forces in society, the true representatives of the essence of their nation. By so doing, they nullified any potential claims to rulership that other tribal chieftains or local notables might have had, thus eliminating an important source of possible opposition or, for that matter, societal independence. With varying degrees of success, they also sought to cultivate additional legitimacy on religious grounds, presenting themselves as the embodiment of religious piety and righteousness. Formal independence meant transferring the oil industry to the control of the Royal family, by which time other traditional sources of wealth—pearl diving and overseas trade—had run their course and exhausted themselves. It was only in the 1950s and 1960s, after would-be Royal families had already started dominating the oil sector, that economic growth set in and wealthy merchants and industrialists began appearing in the cities. Economic patronage, in fact, can be traced to pre-independence days, although the evolution of the modern state gave it institutional sanction and legitimacy. Currently, throughout the Arabian Peninsula the second most affluent echelon of society after the Royal family is made-up of a class of wealthy, urban-based merchants, followed by Chiefs and other notables from non-Royal tribes. While the merchants owe their economic livelihood to receiving state contracts and maintaining close relations with the Royal family, tribal leaders seek various types of patronage for

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their tribe and Royal recognition and acceptance. As a result, the dependence of the upper and middle classes—both civil service employees and import-export merchants—is much more direct and acute in the oil monarchies than in most other Arab world states. What of the lower classes? Again, it is in the treatment of those in the lower rungs of the economic ladder that the oil monarchies and the other Arab world states differ radically. In inclusionary authoritarian states, it is those in the lower classes—the rural immigrants, seasonal workers, others in low-wage jobs in the informal sector—which are most susceptible either to the manipulations of the state or the message of the opposition. This is the group which the state wishes it could ignore but cannot afford to do so because of its inherent volatility. In the Gulf, in short, the lower classes do not matter politically. The pulling back of the regime from efforts at overall control of society, already evident by the late 1980s, gained further impetus in the wake of the Gulf War, which revealed the broad chasm separating Arab political elites (who tended to oppose Saddam or be ambivalent toward him) from the common people. In order to bridge this gap, the government of Kuwait among other Arab countries declared democracy a major policy objective. In all those countries, elections have indeed been held amid conditions of pluralism and (relative) probity. It is now clear, both within and far beyond the Arab world, that liberalized monarchy has proven far more durable than once imagined. The trademark mixture of guided pluralism, controlled elections, and selective repression in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Algeria, and Kuwait is not just a “survival strategy” adopted by authoritarian regimes, but rather a type of political system whose institutions, rules, and logic defy any linear model of democratization. By 1992, the year after the Gulf War’s close, even conservative Saudi Arabia had promulgated edicts on decentralization and instituted an Advisory Council. While such policies are still tentative almost everywhere in the Arab world, there is no denying the growing independent participation of the

15 Thomas Carothers. (2002). 'The End of the Transition Paradigm,' Journal of Democracy, Vol. 13, January, pp. 5–21. Carothers (p. 9) notes that “of the nearly 100 countries considered as ‘transitional’ in recent years, only a relatively small number—probably fewer than 20—are clearly en route to becoming successful, well-functioning democracies or at least have made some democratic progress and still enjoy a positive dynamic of democratization.”

16 For several discussions of this phenomenon see the essays in the section on ‘Elections Without Democracy?’ by Larry Diamond, Andreas Schedler, and Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way in the April 2002 issue of the Journal of Democracy. These articles highlight the exceptional character of democratic transitions.
masses in politics. From Kuwait to other countries, large political demonstrations have become far more frequent. Often they protest policies (such as the abolition of subsidies) adopted to deal with the decline in state revenues. These policies stand in stark contrast to the populism of the past, and the pain that they cause is exacerbated by the contraction of state spending in areas such as health, education, and welfare.\(^{17}\)

According to Emmanuel Sivan, there is a partial and uneven application of the principle of equality before the law. Bedouins and Palestinians are held to be outside the ambit of full-fledged citizenship in Kuwait, as are Shi'ite Muslims in Saudi Arabia. Even human rights groups have become targets of particularly heavy-handed harassment in Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia.\(^{18}\) Conflict, violence, and repression, particularly in this era of globalization, produce economic and social stagnation that will marginalize these countries, and the region overall, even further in an environment in which peace and political stability are the basic foundations for economic competitiveness in the global economy. This is not to speak of the immense human suffering produced by internally and externally initiated, supported, and manipulated violence and instability.\(^{19}\) There are many reasons for the region's political instability, economic plight, and human suffering. However, the lack of open political systems, heavy-handed authoritarian rule by autocratic governments, and most governments' violent and repressive struggles with opposition movements and groups are key factors in limiting these societies' potential for human, economic, and social development.\(^{20}\) Genuine democratization, if successful and sustained, can produce accountable, transparent, participatory, inclusive governance, instead of exclusive and repressive rule. Liberalization of political and economic systems throughout the region could support domestic peace and, by extension, strengthen

\(^{17}\) Mass public demonstrations protesting austerity measures have occurred in Kuwait during 1989, 1990.


\(^{19}\) For an estimate of the human and material costs of the various armed interstate and intrastate conflicts in the Arab world between 1948 and 1992, see Saad Eddin Ibrahim, 'Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World: An Overview,' in Baghat Korany, Rex Brynen, and Paul Noble, eds., *Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World: Theoretical Perspectives*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1995, p. 35.

regional peace and stability. Of course, a transition from autocratic and closed systems to open and democratic ones cannot be realized without pain.

Transition pains, however, can be reduced if the society is in general receptive to political, economic, and cultural opening, and if it already displays a civic political culture that has been carefully promoted and groomed by civil society throughout the years and decades preceding the official initiation of a democratization process. Few authoritarian governments in the region allow, let alone encourage, civil society to thrive and prepare the population, political parties, and movements to contribute constructively to eventual democratization. Despite the acknowledged (and experienced) problems of intermittent democratization pains, some authors believe that, certainly in the long term, democratization is a positive and worthwhile endeavor for all societies of the region. What is required is not the immediate (or even eventual) adoption of full-fledged Western-style liberal democracy, but a gradual process toward more participation in the political and economic life and governance of the country, in harmony with religious norms and teachings respected throughout society. The question is not whether democracy would be an asset for peace and justice in the Arab world, but which path toward a more participatory and accountable, political system should be embraced as one that would suit each society.

There are only few or, as some would argue, no established democracies in the region, and, at best, some fledgling experimentation with democratization, driven – as well as hindered – by cautious steps toward political liberalization. In this context, discussions about the utility of democratization in preventing structural and direct violence within and between the societies of the Arab world can as yet be only an academic exercise. However, in the long run there is a possibility for democracy to unfold in the region. A number of main challenges need to be overcome to make this happen: the negative role of external great powers; the legacy of a long history of violence; and clashes between Western and local/regional political and spiritual norms and values.21

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21 For previous studies on prospects for, trends in, and obstacles to democratization in the Arab world, see the two-volume series edited by Baghat Korany, Rex Brynen, and Paul Noble. (1998). *Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World: Theoretical Perspectives*, and *Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World: Comparative Experiences*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.
There is hope for progress if the countries in the region become more prosperous, more cooperative, less influenced by the preferences of external powers, and supported and assisted by the international community, which would in turn be represented by a restructured, reformed, and neutral United Nations. Of course, meeting these conditions represents a formidable, possibly insurmountable, challenge. However, some progress is taking place: there is evidence that secularization and religiosity can exist in harmony, that political leaders are able to balance tradition and modernity, and that both spirituality and physical life can prosper in the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-religious societies of the Arab world. Democracy, if based on a solid civic culture, can provide the glue for the functioning of such multi-faceted societies. Democracy can provide opportunities to address and resolve inevitable frictions in non-violent and constructive ways. All the while, constructive problem solving at the domestic level may then spill over to interstate relations as well. There is reason to believe (however faint it may be) that the societies of the Arab world are not condemned or cursed to endure violence, injustice, and marginalization in the global economy forever. Solutions to these problems exist. Democratization is part and parcel of any serious strategy to liberate the region from the scourges of war and injustice and from the highly politicized interpretation and distortion of religious teachings that, in their original meaning, are meant to encourage, not undermine, the construction of tolerant, just, and inclusive societies.

David Potter et al.'s definition of democratization, describes it as a movement "from less accountable to more accountable government, from less competitive (or non-existent) elections to freer and fairer competitive elections; from severely restricted to better protected civil and political rights, and from weak (or non-existent) autonomous associations in civil society to more autonomous and more numerous associations."[^22]

Democratization can be defined as a progressive evolution of these components (accountability, elections, civil and political rights, and autonomous associations) in the context of, and conditioned by, state and political institutions, economic development, social divisions, civil society, political culture and ideas, and transnational and

international engagements. The end product is a minimalist definition of democracy, which, according to Bruce Russett, “[i]n the contemporary era . . . denotes a country in which nearly everyone can vote, elections are freely contested, the chief executive is chosen by popular vote or by an elected parliament, and civil rights and civil liberties are substantially guaranteed.”

Universal suffrage and free elections are only rudimentary components of a democracy. These must be enhanced by constitutional limitations on the government, the rule of law, and the protection of human rights. Some forms of popular representation and electoral legitimacy are far from sufficient to proclaim democratic governance and are often simply used to practice what is no more than concealed authoritarianism. A minimalist definition of democracy, based on popular power and popular sovereignty, must be the beginning, not the end, of a democratization process. Only when supplemented with constitutionally enshrined separation of powers, political pluralism, and individual rights and freedoms can a minimalist concept serve as the basis for the development of a liberal, pluralist, tolerant, and stable society.

Robert Dahl’s more inclusive concept of “polyarchy,” with the following seven pillars: elected officials; free and fair elections; inclusive suffrage; right to run for office; freedom of expression; alternative information protected by law; and associational autonomy are pertinent in terms of processes of democratization. This definition is still very limited and focuses mainly on structures. Moreover, these requirements are relatively easy to meet, even without significant loss of power for political leaders, and they also do not extend democracy to the economic, social, and cultural aspects of political life.

Democratization, thus can be a journey, a journey toward, as Lincoln put it, “government of the people, by the people, and for the people.” The four main elements of this advanced, and much more comprehensive, notion: political, economic, social, and

24 Dahl, Democracy and Its Critics, p. 221.
cultural democracy. Political democracy consists of popular sovereignty; universal suffrage; protection of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; majority rule and minority rights; fair representation and periodic elections; peaceful succession; direct voting (referenda) on critical issues such as rule of law, habeas corpus, bill of rights, and responsibilities of citizenship. Economic democracy features protection of property; free markets; free competition; government regulation of trade and investment to ensure the absence of monopolies and the presence of fair standards in trade, competition, health, and environment. Social democracy means social security for the unemployed, the retired, pregnant women, and children; and provision of public health, education, and welfare. Finally, cultural democracy requires universal education; access to means of communication; and freedom of identity, including speech, assembly, religion, language, privacy, and lifestyle. This is a very comprehensive, but also very demanding, slate of key components that must be met by true democracies to qualify as such.

In times, wherein religion is an important factor, one needs to focus on a socio-religious interpretation of democracy. Religious democracy recognizes the supremacy of religious teachings and writings. Leaders make rulings based on scriptures and receive authority from religious institutions, while the populace expects rulings and policies to be in harmony with religious principles. Although this approach seems to clash with the broader, seemingly more inclusive, definitions mentioned above, a number of contributors argue that most religious teachings, particularly those of Islam and Christianity, embrace, support, and in fact demand obedience to values and norms that resemble modern concepts of democracy. If properly interpreted, religious authority can be reconciled with secular democracy; on the other hand, narrow or abusive interpretations of religious teachings may create the perception of supposed incompatibility and conflict.

To return to Schmitter, “no single set of institutions and rules – and, above all, no single institution or rule – defines political democracy. Not even such fundamental characteristics as majority rule, territorial representation, competitive elections, parliamentary sovereignty, a popularly elected executive, or a ‘responsible party system’
can be taken as its distinctive hallmark."^25 Democracy is a composite of rules, freedoms, and relationships, in each and every case defining a certain stage of evolution in the relationship between the rulers and the ruled – gradually bringing both closer together in continuous evolution until they overlap in near perfect congruence. This journey toward "good governance" inevitably takes different paths, at different speeds, in different political, economic, cultural, and social contexts.

Sustainable democratization can be achieved only if the following conditions are met. Democratization has to come from below and from above. Although top–down gradualism is crucial in preventing abrupt dislocations and crises during transition periods, parallel efforts to support civil society are crucial in creating sustainable democracies that can withstand occasional regression from above. Moreover, democratization processes are sustainable only if minorities are protected; democratization will fail if the majority rules through the oppression of minority populations. In addition, successful democratization efforts have to go hand in hand with solid economic performance, political stability, and the unimpeded development of civil society. Ultimately, the region as a whole will prosper in the age of increasing economic globalization only if it can rid itself of war and persistent violence. So far the region has not done well in bridging its differences and in coming to terms with post–World War II (let alone post–Cold War) realities. Even if domestic stability improves and democratization progresses, the countries of the region need to settle their differences and struggles over contested territories before interstate cooperation can succeed. Although contested borders and territories are at the moment the key issues of international conflict, they will eventually be superseded by competition over access to water and other scarce natural resources. The region must create a solid foundation for regional cooperation and trust before it can embark on solving such future problems. If current struggles over land and borders are not resolved, future problems will only compound regional instability, and further conflicts over old and new security issues will be unavoidable.

^25 Schmitter. 'Some Basic Assumptions,' p. 33.
Moreover, periods of peaceful relations between former antagonists in the region cannot be explained by successful democratization processes – democratization is in its nascent stage throughout much of the region. Other factors, such as economic liberalization or the unpredictable emergence of enlightened or moderate leaders, have so far been more potent factors in explaining why former foes have opted for cooperation instead of confrontation. Nevertheless, because democratization offers an avenue for more active participation in national decision-making processes, further entrenchment of popular participation in the political process and public demands for fair, legitimate, and representative governance will strengthen democracies. This will limit unpredictable and arbitrary rule, which triggers domestic and international instability and conflict.

The fear of violence and instability in transition processes clearly pose threats to regional stability. In fact, interaction between weak and battered transitional democracies may be more fragile and conflict prone than that between stable autocracies. Democratization processes, where they have taken place, happened top down not bottom up. Although this process offers less opportunity for public initiative and participation, it prevents the dramatic (and traumatic) consequences of often violent struggles between the various groups competing for power, influence, and public support. Slower but gradual progress toward democratization, initiated and controlled from above, even if accompanied by undemocratic measures to neutralize spoilers of the democratization process (such as radical religious or nationalist movements), can in the long run lead to functioning democracies. The Islamic forces may in the long run be “co-opted” or enticed into democratic processes. This is the case when governments successfully respond to the needs of minority populations, and when all political movements have opportunities to participate in the political process. When democratization is paralleled by economic development, rising standards of living, and increased domestic and international peace, rank-and-file allegiance to radical movements has proved to be quite volatile, further improving chances for successful transitions. Democratization in individual countries would presumably benefit from the resolution of interstate conflicts in the region.
The need is for a more effective role of the United Nations in stabilizing the Arab world. For this to happen, three steps have to be taken: Western powers have yet to agree on a post–Cold War international order (and the United States’ role in it); the United Nations has to undergo structural reforms to adjust the organization and its activities to post–Cold War realities; and the United Nations has to be provided with adequate resources and mandates enabling it to perform the tasks currently performed by the United States. Unfortunately, these three points are at the heart of the United Nations’ limited capacity, even in fulfilling the tasks entrusted to it by the Security Council. The United Nations is by design an instrument in the hands of the international community or, more accurately, in the hands of a few powerful actors that, in different constellations, at different times, dominate and determine international politics. These limitations apply to the United Nations’ activities not only in the Arab world but anywhere in the world. New agreements on a post–Cold War order, UN reform, and increased funding are of course desirable and would alleviate some of the United Nations’ current inadequacies, but in the short run they are unrealistic goals. The United Nations’ role in the Arab world will likely continue to be muted by American willingness (or absence thereof) to pressure Israel into cooperation with its Arab neighbors, the Palestinians in particular. In that case, the United Nations will remain relegated to play second fiddle to American regional strategic policies and preferences. The relationship between Islam, education, secularization, and prospects for democratization. Is the embrace of Islamic religion and culture throughout the Arab world an obstacle to justice, stability, development, and democracy in the region, as often assumed? Islamic teachings based on the premise of education (Iqra), originally envisioned the unity of state and religion (whereas Christianity did not), but periods of unison eventually gave way to periods of separation between mosque and state. The colonial powers’ preference for top-down political rule in their colonies limited democratization processes. Democratization and liberalization were driven from above, by a small elite who had studied abroad and decided that economic liberalization was inevitable if state and nation were to survive in a competitive regional and international industrial economy. However, little was done to create a broad-based civic political culture. The results are now visible: with the recent advent of modernity and the communications revolution, it is now the lower strata of the population, marked
by allegiance to traditional Islam, that threaten to uproot the secularized elite. The suppressed masses are the main force in slowing down, halting, or even reversing secularization – by utilizing democratic processes. Moreover, top-down democratization has not resulted in the creation of a broad-based civic culture and democratic political institutions and processes. Although some Arab world societies have made halting progress toward political democracy, most of them have failed to make any significant strides toward social or cultural democracy. In countries where rulers continue to buy the population’s allegiance and loyalty by providing social services and low taxes (financed through exports of mostly oil or gas), calls for further participation in the political and economic life of the country become louder nevertheless. However, this does not necessarily mean that these societies embrace secularization, which has been tainted by former elites’ embrace of Western customs and cultural, political, and economic attitudes.

In the name of secularization and the search for pre-Islamic identities, these societies have experienced a roller-coaster ride in their search for cultural identity. Coexistence, along with confessional systems and constitutional regimes, seems most promising in the context of the multi-ethnic, multireligious, quasi-secularist societies of the region. Most importantly, political democratization must give rise to economic and cultural democratization based on strengthened educational processes. Only then will democratic structures offer opportunities to all for political, cultural, and economic participation, while preventing majority rule of either secularized or ultra-conservative groups.

But the point is what do public attitudes tell us about the linkage between Islam and democracy? Are public attitudes toward more democratization and political openness influenced by religiosity and adherence to Islamic belief? Popular perceptions in Western societies, often resembling anecdotal stereotypes, hold that Islam and democracy are mutually exclusive concepts, and that levels of piety and acceptance of democratic principles are inversely correlated; that is, the more religious a person is, the less likely it is that he or she will embrace democratic principles. Such perceptions of the relationship between piety and democracy in the region may be misinformed by Western experiences. In West European and American societies, more religious people indeed tend to hold more conservative views and attitudes toward governance and domestic and foreign
policies. If one assumes that the embrace of and commitment to civic virtues are key requirements for the creation and maintenance of stable democracies, it is crucially important to study, monitor, and access public attitudes toward democratic principles and policies that support secularization and democratization. There have been very few attempts systematically to study the impact of Islamic religious attachments on individuals’ attitudes toward democracy and governance. Islam is not necessarily an obstacle to democracy. Islamic attachments do not seem to obstruct the emergence of an open political culture, and thus eventually of sustainable democracy. Interestingly, the only significant correlation between piety and political conservatism was found among women, who seem to fear greater economic inequality between the sexes as an indirect consequence of a liberal political and economic order.

The Western-style liberal democracy may not be suitable for many countries in the region. On the contrary, regional leaders have used Western models to create sham democracies that are in reality forms of veiled authoritarianism, created to maintain an appearance of commitment toward the democratization process and intended for internal and external consumption. More recognition and credit should be granted to indigenous attempts to develop local versions of civil society and democracy, based on the conditions and traditions of each country. Iran’s attempts to create an Islamic version of civil society and democracy, with the participation and protection of minority groups, may serve as a model for other local attempts to develop democracies that go beyond minimalist definitions of democratic governance (popular power and popular sovereignty) and facilitate gradual and non-violent reforms of internal and external political processes. There is a need for a commitment to move beyond minimalist forms of democracy. Systems that are democratic in form and authoritarian in substance produce violence through the exclusion of some parts of the population. Overly enthusiastic attempts to embark on Western-style democratization, as experienced during the Shah’s reign in Iran, will lead to violence if no effort is made to integrate religious forces that have for a long time defined a society’s political, social, and cultural life. If radical religious and secular groups are persecuted rather than integrated in the transition process, counter-revolutions and violence will result, particularly when reform processes
Khomeini’s ability to appease both Jihadis and Ijtihadis created a basic level of coexistence between modernizers and traditionalists. After the war, however, continuing socio-economic problems and efforts by Ijtihadis to portray Islam as compatible with democracy, along with a solid electoral process, brought Khatami to power in July 1997. Khatami’s embrace of Islamic civil society and democracy and his commitment to dialogue between civilizations have produced a version of democracy that is different from, but not necessarily in opposition to, Western concepts and expectations. An inclusive approach that pursues progress in the context of freedom of thought and expression (and thus supports a vibrant civil society) offers opportunities to respect Islamic traditions within a more open, participatory society. Jihadis feel that the principles and aims of the revolution are being undermined. Balancing their interests with reforms certainly slows down the democratization process, but it keeps it on track and – most importantly – non-violent.

The combination of the political rights and civil liberties clearly lie at the heart of democracy, but a genuine functioning democratic system requires additional institutional elements and conditions: The first is a democratic constitution that is adhered to. For no matter how fair and free the elections, and no matter how large the government’s majority, democracy must have a constitution that itself is democratic—in that it respects fundamental liberties—and the elected government must rule within the confines of that constitution, and in conjunction with a complex set of other institutions, within both the state and civil society, that help to ensure accountability. The second is the Opportunity for the development of a robust and critical civil society that helps check the state and constantly generate alternatives. For such civil society alternatives to be aggregated and implemented Political society, especially political parties, should be allowed unfettered relations with civil society.

An authoritarian system was defined by Linz as “one in which there is limited political pluralism—without elaborate and guiding ideology (but with distinctive mentalities), without intensive or extensive political mobilization and in which the leader (or a small
group) exercises power within formally ill-defined limits, but actually quite predictable ones.” Although the literature is replete with other definitions, this one serves our purpose well enough.

Authoritarian regimes come in a variety of types: military, single party, dominant party, personal or traditional or some combination of features from these various types. Authoritarian regimes are not necessarily resented by their people. Indeed, some are deeply populist—they cultivate the sentiments of and are much admired by the mass of citizens. In varying degrees all authoritarian regimes seek to exercise a very tight control over both the direction of governmental policy and the expression of free opinions by citizens. The defining feature of all authoritarian regimes is that the ruling party, be it a group or an individual (monarch, president or sultan) dominates the political arena while allowing a margin of freedom—defined as the degree of liberalization—which might be small or relatively large, within civil society. While no doubt liberalization improves the quality of life, and might be the handmaiden of democracy, the two concepts are quite different. While both are desirable, and are indeed twin features of the democratic West, yet they should not be conflated.

To note the presence of a process of democratisation in the Arab world is not to claim that the political apparatuses of power in the region have transformed overnight into representative bodies. Furthermore, strong Arab temptations can lead one to dismiss the differences between Middle Eastern political systems and their counterparts in the West as the product of different historical and cultural factors. According to this formula, traditional, informal bodies are equated with democratic-style parliaments: “The existence of an informal assembly (the majlis) in the traditional Arab world enabled individuals from all walks of life to approach their leaders directly and personally for assistance and aid.”

Thus, for instance, several Arab monarchs—all of whom exercise enormous executive power—have taken significant steps to liberalize their regimes. This degree of

liberalization is often taken—erroneously indicate a measure of democracy. But only titular monarchs can preside over a democracy. Monarchs who wield executive power—not to mention also at least some legislative powers, as all Arab monarchs do—may go a long way towards liberalizing their country but they can never establish a democracy since a democratic regime must entail the possibility of replacing the government, including the supreme executive – i.e. in this case, the King. It also involves the necessity of placing Supreme power in the hands of the people and their representatives a situation that the present Arab monarchs and presidents cannot of course contemplate. Moreover, a democracy holds no one immune—as are Arab monarchs and presidents and their families from public criticism. In short, democracy is based on certain types of institutions and political practices that permit constitutional change of government via popular elections.\(^{27}\)

And thus all that can be said of Arab rulers who liberalize is that at best they are enlightened autocrats. Noteworthy, is that the regimes of Arab Presidents, as the present survey indicates, are by and large mostly less liberal than those of the monarchies (barring Saudi Arabia). The pressing issue with such regimes is whether the liberal steps they take do in fact move them towards a transition to durable stable democratic forms of rule, or are they merely a tactical retreat under internal and/or international pressures which can be reversed once the pressures are lifted, or once the liberal opening proves ineffective in dealing with the intractable problems they face. If Arab countries are to democratize then the first and most fundamental step is to establish the rules of the democratic game which must begin with establishing a constitution that strictly limits the power of the executive especially that of monarchs and presidents, and transfer ultimate power to the people and their representatives in national legislatures and local councils. We cannot begin to speak of a democratic change so long as the supreme seat of power remains in the hand of an all-powerful monarch or president, as is the case so far in all Arab countries.\(^{28}\)

\(^{27}\) Ibid.

\(^{28}\) Ibid.
The second basic step to the establishment of democracy is that the norm should be rule of law rather than rule by law where the ruler through informal mechanisms and pressures influences court rulings. Also, to speak of constitutional guarantees in the presence of conditional clauses—as in the case of all Arab constitutions—which grant broad political freedoms and civil rights then qualify them with vague restrictive phrases—that are always subject to the interpretation of the ruler—like “provided they don’t violate generally accepted moral or societal values” is to nullify all guarantees, and perpetuate authoritarian rule.

While all reform must spring in the first instance from the efforts of the people of each Arab country and be motivated by their determined will to strive and sacrifice in order to force the change on their reluctant rulers, yet the developed democracies of America and Europe have also a vital role to play if local efforts are to succeed: that of providing an enabling international environment that would support and enhance the local efforts. Such external support needs to be carefully measured. Direct overt intervention will be counterproductive, for not only will it be resented by the people, but it will also undermine the efforts of the pro-democratic elements in society who will be branded as mere agents promoting a Western agenda.

Political regimes vary in the degree to which they enable voters to participate meaningfully in the system. This predominately means offering voters a choice between competing candidates for public office, and a workable democratic mechanism by which they may change their government. At the antidemocratic extreme of the spectrum are the kind of inherited monarchies that wield absolute unchecked executive power which dominates all aspects of the system (This applies to all the Gulf States, but Saudi Arabia is the supreme example). Not much better are the republican systems in which the voter is offered no realistic choice but to affirm, in a referendum, a single candidate for the presidency, who invariably claims a sweeping victory that approaches unanimity, and then proceeds to rule with near absolute power and without the possibility of his removal by any democratic means (Egypt, Libya, Syria). In effect such rulers behave very much like the inherited monarchies, and frequently far less liberally. Indeed, some are
assiduously seeking (and in the case of Syria managed) to have their sons succeed 'them as presidents (Syria, Libya, Yemen, Egypt). Somewhat better are the dominant party systems (Tunis, Algeria, Yemen, Egypt, Sudan). “Dominant Party” structures permit a margin of freedom for the opposition to campaign, gain seats in legislative bodies, articulate alternative policies, and criticize the government’s performance—but all this only to the extent that stops short of their constituting any real threat or challenge to the group in power. Thus, legislatures are dominated overwhelmingly by the President’s party. While in countries such as Jordan, Kuwait and other Gulf States, alliances between the ruling monarchs and traditional tribal chiefs frustrate the efforts of pro-liberal forces to democratize the system. Consequently, in such regimes, there is not the slightest chance that the Opposition can come to power, or even gain an effective weight in legislatures to meaningfully influence executive decisions on major public policies.

Important indicators of democratic elections is the existence of a mechanism that would reduce flagrant cheating, and the absence of restrictions placed on campaigning, which authoritarian governments impose ostensibly to reduce the risk of violence. Free and fair elections by themselves have little meaning if those elected do not in practice have the major power in the state to make laws and determine policies—as is the case in all the Arab states, barring none. While no Arab parliament has the major power in the state—that being invariably in the hands of the ruler who wields supreme power—yet in some countries (notably Morocco, Kuwait and Yemen) parliament does play a significant role in modifying legislation proposed by the government and constraining to some degree ministerial power.29

Some Arab countries—specifically, Libya and the Gulf States—ban political parties altogether. This might lead one to conclude—erroneously that a fundamental pillar of democracy is missing and hence cannot possibly be established. But in truth there is nothing in democratic theory that mandates the existence of political parties. Indeed the founding fathers of American democracy not only thought that political parties were unnecessary, but strongly believed that they are to be avoided because of the adversarial

29 Ibid.
Spirit they give rise to, and their possible corrupting influence on public life on account of their dedication to the acquisition of power.\textsuperscript{30}

Historical evidence has shown, however, that very small countries—such as most of the Gulf states—may still function democratically without political parties through politically oriented associations within civil society. But this is not possible for states with larger populations. However, for the development of a modern state, regardless of size, political parties are essential to permit the necessary aggregation of a large number of votes and the articulation of societal interests, in order to legitimate the proposed alternative policies to those of the ruling group. Public demonstrations and assemblies are essential rights in a free society. Though, there may be occasions when large gatherings could pose a real danger to law and order, yet the ruling elite in the authoritarian Arab regimes usually feel threatened by organized public expressions and use the pretext of their hypothetical danger to suppress them. Lebanon comes first among Arab countries with respect to these freedoms. At the lower end come Egypt, Libya, Syria and Tunis; and worst of all is Saudi Arabia.

One cannot begin to speak of a liberal, let alone a democratic, system unless there is an independent judiciary that can be relied on to observe a defendant’s right to due process and a fair trial, and render verdicts with a reasonable degree of impartiality. No Arab regime has a truly independent Judiciary. Most, however, observe a reasonable measure of procedural safeguards in trial cases, except when the charges against the defendant are political in nature.

The right to free association is fundamental to democracy. A measure of the liberalization of a regime is the degree to which free association is permitted without hindrance or restrictions, or control by the government. A dynamic civil society is essential as a bulwark against the natural tendency of governments to accumulate power and their great propensity to encroach on the rights and freedoms of individuals. Here again Lebanon is the freest, and the worst is Saudi Arabia. If religious freedom is essential for the well

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
being of many in the world, it is much more so for the Arab people who, whatever their faith or sect, are generally extremely religious. Moreover, strong religious institutions provide a protective barrier around individuals which governments are usually reluctant to breach. Thus religious organizations represent countervailing power to that of the state. The greatest religious freedoms and least discriminations against religious minorities is in Lebanon, followed by Morocco, Algeria, Syria and Tunis. Ranking poorly are Egypt and Sudan; but the very worst again is Saudi Arabia, which prohibits all non-Muslim faiths, and even within Islam tolerates only the Wahhabi version.

The status of democracy in the Arab world varies from country to country. However, they all share common socio-political features that impact and are reflected in their score on the democracy index. All Arab countries, as succinctly stated by Saliba Sarsar, are ruled by authoritarian regimes, their societies are “saturated with patriarchal values, religious dogma, ideological and political extremism, and narrow economic interests.” These factors constitute an enormous impediment to the development of a true full-fledged democracy. While all Arab leaders advocate democracy and claim that they have indeed embarked since long on the road of democratic reforms, yet in fact the actual results are meager. Arab rulers are far more concerned with retaining rather than sharing power. Thus they continue to wield near-absolute power, and often substitute the rhetoric of democratic discourse for real tangible political reforms that would liberalize their regimes. Nonetheless, very modest improvements did occur in most Arab countries, and the regimes in most have oscillated between opening up (in modest steps) and closing down political reform depending on changes within the climate created by the interaction of domestic and external factors.

Most Arab countries have been living in a state of crisis for at least the last two decades, under authoritarian regimes that precluded any real participation by the people. But in the last three years or so, the Arab world is witnessing the beginnings of a notable change, characterized by an increasing effort at introspection to determine the causes of their failure.

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31 'Quantifying Arab Democracy, Democracy in the Arab world' in Arab world Quarterly, Summer 2006.
malaise.\(^{32}\) The Arab Human Development Report published annually since 2002 under the auspices of the UNDP is a singularly frank and perceptive example that analyzes the failings, and points the way to overcome them. Although the Report goes into considerable detail in dealing with each problem, the preponderance of the evidence it marshals clearly point that the fundamental cause of the Arab predicament is the failure to establish the institutions of a genuine liberal democracy. Over the last five decades, none of the Arab regimes faced a serious challenge. Rulers continued in office indefinitely, many more than 25 years. These regimes managed through an interlocking system of restrictive laws and several security apparatuses that monitor and pervade every aspect of social life to keep all potential opposition forces weak and fragmented. Opposition groups are prevented from holding mass meetings or demonstrations in order to prevent them from getting their message across and developing a constituency. This security grip, as noted by political analyst Amr Hamzawy, “creates a structural bias within the Arab elite” that functions to resist reforming movements, and maintain the status quo.

But with the surfacing of the new generation, who unlike the old-guard, are more educated and exposed to the democratic values and lifestyle, cracks are beginning to show in the authoritarian structure of most of the Arab states, as people in many Arab countries came out into the streets, in defiance of emergency laws, calling for freedom and reform. Citizens’ pressures are therefore mounting on the incumbent autocrats to open up their system to greater participation by the various opposition forces. In the last five years or so a sea change seems to be taking place in the region. The most dominant issue now in almost all Arab countries concerns political reform in particular and freedom in general. The entire region is presently witnessing a marked democratic stirring. This is most notable in Lebanon, Egypt, Palestine, and Iraq, but is also significant in many of the Gulf States, particularly in Kuwait and Bahrain. Although the authoritarian Arab regimes—both republics and monarchies—continue to wield supreme

\(^{32}\) Ibid.
political power, the increased public demand for reform and greater participation, backed by a now sharply critical and outspoken press, is developing into a genuine counterforce that the ruling elite can no longer ignore or lightly dismiss.

This development is due to the confluence of two forces: American pressure and rising discontent within the Arab world. The democratic movement is nevertheless still in its nascent stage and it is not inconceivable that the vicissitudes of power politics in the region and shifts in American foreign policy could present opportunities for the region's autocrats to recover lost ground and stifle the budding democratic domestic forces. American credibility in the Arab world will be strengthened if it stays the course and continues to pressure Arab governments quietly but firmly for significant steps along the democratic path. But despite these encouraging stirrings it cannot be denied that in all Arab countries semi-authoritarianism still remains firmly entrenched and resilient. Although multiparty competitive parliamentary elections have taken place their effectiveness in terms of leading to regime change is practically nil. Nevertheless, these elections have opened a space for expression by opposition forces and democracy activists. But the basic structures of the Arab regimes remain unchanged. With the notable exception of the Islamists, political parties are weak, fragile, and fragmented and the broad masses of voters are politically apathetic, except in Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon where the state in these countries is weak, and the polity unstable. The heads of state, whether monarchs or presidents, continue to dominate the entire political arena, wielding near-absolute power.³³

High barriers obstruct the formation and activities of political parties, and winner-takes-all electoral systems and campaign restrictions strongly favor the incumbent regimes, thus preventing opposition parties from developing significant strength to constitute a challenge to the ruling elites. There can be no doubt that the weakness and fragility of political parties - except the Islamist - in all Arab countries is a major obstacle to any democratic transition no matter the laudable liberalizing steps taken by several Arab regimes. Therefore, to build up a democratizing momentum the constraints on the

³³Ibid.
formation and activities of political parties must be diminished in order to allow secular liberal parties to develop in strength and create real constituencies. As things stand now, wherever elections were relatively free Islamist parties and movements have registered striking gains despite governmental constraints. Clearly, in most Arab countries, the Islamists have the potential to gain a very strong presence in parliament, yet in most cases they have adopted a precautionary strategy of contesting only a limited number of parliamentary seats in order to avoid provocation that would trigger regime repression should the latter feel threatened by the possibility of an undesirable election outcome which could threaten the regime’s hegemony. This strategy is most evident in the cases of Morocco and Egypt, in which the Islamists competed in Morocco for only half the seats, and in Egypt for only one third.

Of great importance to the development of domestic pro-democracy pressures is the necessity that its forces negotiate coalitions that would garner their collective strength vis-à-vis the ruling regimes. Of equal importance is Western support to the indigenous liberal forces. But for external support to be effective, the West must maintain a coherent and consistent set of policies towards the Arab countries they wish to help democratize. These policies must strike the proper balance between the two important—and interdependent—goals of stability and the mobilization of civil society to effect democratic reform. Until the tragedy of 9/11, the West had favored the first goal to the detriment of the second, with the consequence that many in the Arab world have tended to discount, and to distrust, the democratic rhetoric of the West as merely a vehicle for cynically pursuing its own interests which involve supporting and maintaining the autocratic regimes that have oppressed them for decades.

Of late, however, the West, led by the United States, has tended to correct this imbalance (between stability and change) by giving greater importance to promoting democracy and exerting greater pressures—coupled with both positive and negative incentives—on Arab governments to undertake meaningful political reform. No longer are the worn-out

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excuses of autocratic regimes to delay reform indefinitely acceptable. The claim of exceptionalism of each Arab society, warranting reforms at a glacial pace, and the bogeyman of Islamist fundamentalists coming to power in the wake of significant democratic reform are rejected by both domestic opposition forces and the democratic West.35

Indeed, in the case of the U.S. in particular, this stress on the implementation of democracy at a reasonable pace within the Arab world seemed to be—at least up till 2005—a cornerstone of American foreign policy. There can be no denying that this U.S. stance and its close monitoring of the governments of the region with respect to democratization and respect for individual freedoms has been a major cause for the present vigorous demands for democratic reform within many Arab societies. While all local societal forces disclaim that external pressures have anything to do with their newfound dynamism and outspokenness in the face of their autocratic rulers, yet there can be no doubt that the existence of that external pressure and the close scrutiny of the behavior of Arab governments by the West has provided for local pro-democratic activists—although unacknowledged by them—what may be called a “safety net.” They now know, albeit often unconsciously, that their dictatorial governments can no longer afford to defy the democratic international community and brazenly suppress their people ruthlessly as they have been doing until lately. This new reality has pervaded the consciousness of opposition forces calling for democracy, and thus helped break down the barrier of fear that has long kept them subdued in the face of outrageously dictatorial regimes.

Thus a new political reality began to take shape in many Arab countries. Pro-democracy activists are becoming more aggressive, speaking more openly and taking to the streets in demonstrations demanding radical changes in terms of democracy and individual freedoms. Thus between 2004 and 2006 some democratic gains were made in most Arab countries, that were reflected largely in a greater measure of liberalization that involved

greater freedoms of speech and association. But, on the other hand little has changed in terms of creating stable democratic institutions that would allow the rule of law and the implementation of the will of the people, including that of changing their government. It is true that U.S. President Bush sharply denounced previous American policy that supported authoritarian regimes in the world in the name of maintaining stability, and admitted that sacrificing freedom to stability brought neither to the peoples of the Arab countries, and moreover fostered an environment of resentment and violence that spilled out beyond their region. Yet one crucial question posed by Arabs remains unanswered and underlies, at least partially, the lack of credibility among the Arab masses towards the American claim that it seeks to promote democracy in the region for no ulterior motives. That question is: “if you wanted to support democracy in the Arab world, why did you begin with your enemies instead of your friends? Why Iraq and Iran? Why not us?”

Despite President Bush’s forcefully articulated strategy of pushing forward freedom in the Arab world, the United States did little beyond carefully worded official pronouncements against the anti-democratic abuses of its Arab allies, while continuing to retain strong close partnerships with these authoritarian regimes. The cases of Egypt, Tunisia, and Saudi Arabia are the most striking examples. Some skeptics of U.S. credibility go further and point to America’s refusal to engage with Islamic opposition parties and movements in these countries despite the latter’s vehement declarations that they uphold the core principles of democratic government, repudiate all forms of violence and are actually observing the rules of democratic participation. Thus American diplomacy intercedes on behalf of secular pro-democracy activists imprisoned by America’s authoritarian Arab allies, but remains silent with regard to similar abuses suffered by members of the Islamic opposition. Moreover, no word of protest was heard from the American, or for that matter from any of the Western democracies, when Islamic opposition groups were either entirely legally barred—as a group—from political participation or even as individuals subjected to arbitrary arrests and harassment by state


37The example of the secularist Ayman Nour and the Islamist Essam El-Erian in Egypt is a case in point. Both were imprisoned at the same time on trumped up charges to silence their pro-democracy activism. But while US officials and senators repeatedly urged the Egyptian government to free Nour, they totally ignored the case of El-Erian.
security forces. Furthermore, America’s refusal to recognize or deal with the Hamas-controlled Palestinian government, which came to power in completely free and fair elections, has brought into question the sincerity of the US call for democratic change in the Arab world. Of course the free choice of the Palestinians legitimizes Hamas’ rule but this does not compel the United States to engage in any way with the government chosen by the Palestinians. Nevertheless, the average (Arab) person, who is not expected to readily make this distinction, will be hard put to perceive this US stance as consistent with its declared support for democracy.

This US predicament that undermines its credibility could be largely avoided if it clarified and stressed that a free election is but the procedural element of a democracy—necessary, but by itself insufficient to classify a regime as democratic. The US should, besides elections, strongly uphold the core principle values of a democracy, which include the rule of law, political and civic freedoms, rights of women and minorities, religious freedoms, and the recognized standards of democratic governance. In Arab countries there are Islamic activists and movements besides Hamas and other radical groups such as Hizbullah. A nuanced analysis of the Islamic movement in the Arab world will readily show that there is a plethora of Islamic parties and groups with diverse political agendas. Barring a fringe militant faction all repudiate violence, and wherever allowed to participate have done so peacefully and abided by the rules of the democratic game. Moreover, while some, (like the Muslim Brothers in Egypt, the Party of Justice and Development in Morocco, Al-Wasat Al-Islami in Jordan, and the Tagammu Al-Watani lil-Islah party in Yemen) advocate a traditional conservative ideology that would not be quite compatible with secular Western-style liberal freedoms, they are not too different in basic orientation from the ideas propagated by the conservative Bible-quoting evangelical movement that appeals to millions of the American people, and has no doubt played a significant role in electing President Bush, in 2000 and re-electing him in 2004. Other Islamic groups, however, like the (would-be) Wasat party in Egypt, stand on a political and social platform that goes a long way in satisfying most of the demands of the mainstream Arab liberals. Their aspirations with regard to political freedom is no less than their secular Western counterparts although their social orientation remains much
more conservative. Clearly, the Islamic movement is organically rooted in the political and cultural life of the Arab people, and Islamic parties are now generally acknowledged, even by their adversaries, as the most potent opposition force in almost all Arab countries. Thus, ironically, despite their intensely negative image in the West—mainly because of their heavy anti-Israeli stance on the Palestinian issue, and their anti-American position on Iraq (standpoints that are dismissed by the United States as irrelevant and insincere)—they are effectively the major force calling for political reform, and pressuring the region's authoritarian regimes to democratize.

It is not expected, nor should the West seek, that the Muslim worlds establish democracies that exactly mimic those of the western world. Democracy in the Muslim countries should take into account local traditions, and in order to take hold and develop must draw heavily upon values in the Qur'an that extol plurality and tolerance. Hence, the urgent need for an Islamic reformation that would debunk the ossified, narrow doctrines of medieval scholars and show that Islam's holy text easily lends itself to liberal interpretations that are not compatible with democratic values. This would also preempt the standard argument of the Arab autocratic regimes for resisting democratization by disingenuously propagating the myth that should the Islamists come to power the door to democracy will be permanently closed for the foreseeable future. In a keen analysis of U.S. policy vis-à-vis the Islamic movements, Ken Silverstein pointed out that America and the West need not subscribe to any of the ideologies of the various Islamic parties, but this should not lead to maintaining a hostile attitude towards them. After all, he asked "How is it possible to promote democracy and fight terrorism when movements deemed by the United States to be terrorist and extremist are the most politically popular in the region?" Of course this immediately raises a set-of crucial questions: such as what kind of democracy would the Islamists establish if they come to power? Is the West justified in its present policy of supporting the incumbent so-called secular authoritarian regimes in frustrating the will of the Arab masses if they choose to vote the Islamists to power?

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Under such a state of affairs can one wonder why the credibility of the United States as a champion of democracy is called into question by most people in the Arab countries?³⁹

The initial American vigorous support to the promotion of democracy in the Arab world, which reached its zenith in President Bush's ringing declaration in his 2004 inaugural speech that in their struggle for democracy and freedom the people in the Middle East will "not stand alone," soon abated when his democratic drive brought the unsalubrious result of striking electoral gains for Islamist parties in Egypt and Palestine, with indications that the same outcome is likely to occur in the forthcoming 2007 parliamentary elections in Morocco and Algeria. The US classification of Arab countries along a democratic continuum has now given way to a simple dichotomous differentiation: the radicals (eg. Syria, Hamas and Hizbullah) and the moderates (eg. Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia). Now it looks that the ceiling of Western democratic aspirations for the Arab countries is simply to maintain stability in the region while discouraging their autocratic ruling allies from flagrant human rights abuses.

On their part the Arab leaders have sought to mute the highly vocal and popular Islamic opposition by allowing them limited power. This has meant allowing them to form legally recognized political parties and run for national elections advocating an explicit Islamic platform, and in some cases even hold minor cabinet posts. This tactic is adopted in Jordan, Morocco, Yemen and Algeria. However, in all these countries the ruling regimes, through a mixture of covert suppression, co-optation and alliances with tribal chiefs, have so far managed to limit the gains of the Islamists. In Egypt, while the Muslim Brothers are denied party status, they were lately permitted to run as independents and campaign openly under their own slogan "Islam is the solution." The

Egyptian regime, however, was rudely surprised when the Muslim Brothers, despite brutal suppression and vote rigging in numerous districts, gained 20% of the parliamentary seats though they competed in only one third of the districts.40

Combined transatlantic disagreement over democratizing strategy towards the Arab countries has weakened the reform momentum which gathered strength following the U.S. drive to democratize the region in the wake of 9/11. While the Bush administration pursued an aggressive campaign in the belief that freedom and democracy are priority goals for the Arab people, and political reform can and should be pushed without regard to any other considerations, the European policymakers largely believed that no radical reforms can be expected so long as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to obsess the minds of most Arab intellectuals and the overwhelming majority of the politically active segment of Arab societies. On the other hand the European Union's policy itself lacks both direction and consistency. The large size of the Union has led to consensus only at the lowest possible denominator. Though the 1995 Euro-Med Barcelona Accords spoke of "a comprehensive partnership through strengthened political dialogue," and did include some conditionality clauses linking economic assistance to progress in the area of democratic reform, yet in practice the political component of the Euro-Med agreement was relegated to a distinctly marginal concern. The reason, in part, is that the EU perceived the entire political reform issue as a very slow evolutionary process that is largely driven by economic development. Thus it encouraged bilateral economic and trade agreements between European Union member States and Arab countries, in the belief that economic development will lead to a better standard of living and foster a respect for human dignity and human civic and political rights. Moreover, as noted by Roberto Menotti: "The Euro-Med initiative downplayed democratization and evolved to mirror the Social Cohesion Strategy upon which the EU's own political and economic integration is based. In this vision, based on the European experience, only when threat perceptions change is a cooperative system viable."41 Hence, in the EU's view, the crucial pre-condition to the fostering of democracy in the Arab countries requires first

40 Ibid.
41 'Democratize but Stabilize'. (2006) in Middle East Quarterly. Summer.
addressing the security issues emanating from the regional conflicts, particularly the Israeli-Palestinian conflict which has bedeviled Arab politics for three quarters of a century, and, more recently, the Iraq war that threatens to destabilize the entire Middle East. The European stress on stability and security rather than democracy stems from a geographic reality that cannot be ignored. The proximity of Europe to the Arab world raises very real European security concerns stemming from the threat which an unstable Arab world poses in the form of widespread illegal immigration, drug trafficking, and terrorist activities.

However, the G8 declaration of June 9, 2005 has shown a measure of convergence between U.S. and European strategies by stating that "regional conflicts must not be an obstacle for reforms. Indeed, reforms may make a significant contribution toward resolving them." This in effect was a rejection of the region's autocratic rulers' argument that wide democratic openings will open the door to extremist activities and destabilize the social order. But even as the Arab autocrats argue against rapid serious reforms they nevertheless claim that they are indeed democratizing, albeit at a gradual and measured pace. And indeed it cannot be denied that certain modest liberalizing steps are being taken in many Arab countries. But two problems remain: the first is that it is not clear, and hence hard to evaluate, whether these steps are indeed part of a genuine commitment to a long range plan that aims at eventually establishing a full-fledged democracy, or merely token gestures intended to placate the international community, in particular the United States, and the rest of the industrialized Western democracies. Two recent examples highlight this difficulty: the first is the new constitutional electoral amendment in Egypt which, despite its serious flaws, nevertheless allowed for the first time direct contested presidential elections. The second example is the first ever municipal elections in Saudi Arabia, which though highly defective is yet a landmark step in the history of the Kingdom.

The second problem resides in the risk that free and fair contested elections might bring to power popular non-democratic movements. The "Algerian Syndrome" cannot be entirely guarded against, but there are other encouraging, albeit limited, experiences in Lebanon, Mauritania, and yes even in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. The wisest strategy to
adopt to limit the risk appears to be a kind of "balancing act" best expressed in the words of Alvero Vasconcelos: "The challenge is to combine support for reform processes 'from above' with backing for political movements pressing for democratic change 'from below', such that liberalizing authoritarianism becomes not an end in itself but a stepping stone toward full democratization." Hence the great dilemma in which substantive democratization and genuine pluralism become at once more urgently needed and more gravely risky. While this two-pronged strategy is no doubt, theoretically, very sound, in practice it is most difficult to implement in the Arab context which is characterized by a weak, largely unincorporated, civil society constrained by state laws that severely restrict the freedoms of political parties and non-governmental organizations, buttressed by a battery of laws that criminalize all attempts by the former to seek any form of external support.

On the other hand, empirical evidence suggests that outside support to empower civil society with the aim of enabling it to force an opening of the system and check the arbitrariness of the authoritarian state can be effective only if there already exists a sufficiently robust civil society to begin with. This indeed is also the gist of the testimony given by U.S. State Department officials and other experts at the Congressional hearings held in May 2006 on the subject of U.S. aid to promote democracy. The evidence presented in the hearings showed that successes like those of Georgia and the Ukraine were possible only because civil society associations in these countries had reached a level of political maturity and organizational competence that made external assistance an effective element in their confrontation with the autocratic state. Where civil society was extremely weak, as is the case in most Arab countries, external assistance proved of little avail, and only succeeded in antagonizing the ruling regimes. Thus the conclusion was that though discreet assistance could be provided by the West to the fledgling forces of civil society in the Arab world, these latter must first predominantly rely on themselves to develop. That process, of course, will be long and painful, but there are already hopeful signs that in the not too distant future a critical mass of pro-democracy organizations and

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activists will be reached in several Arab countries, as indicated in the country reports of this volume. At that point concerted massive external help could very well tip the balance of forces leading to a democratic breakthrough. The argument in this section has so far avoided the dichotomous model of framing the issue in terms of whether a robust civil society is a precursor for democracy, or, vice versa, that democracy is the prerequisite for the development of civil society. An acceptance of the latter view necessarily implies that democracy can only come about by a top-down process in which the people play no role or at most an insignificant one. It is difficult to accept this view since it flies in the face of abundant evidence to the contrary. The Cedar revolution in Lebanon, and the Orange revolution in Georgia are but the latest examples; and even more striking examples from the 1980s are the cases of Solidarity in Poland and the Group of 77 in Czechoslovakia, all of which attest to the possibility of an indigenous development of civil society under authoritarian rule, and even, as in the last two cases, under crushing totalitarian regimes.

On the other hand if one precondition the forward progress of democracy only on the forces of civil society we would be hard put to explain the liberalizing steps taken recently in several Arab countries despite their weak civil society. Moreover, if a robust civil society must precede democracy, how could we ever hope to develop civil society in the face of an authoritarian regime that leaves no opening for civil organizations and ruthlessly crushes any possible autonomous civil growth at its inception. Fortunately, however, all authoritarian regimes in the Arab world, largely due to their geopolitical and military weakness and their interlocking economic and political relations with the United States and the West in general, cannot maintain the stark totalitarianism that would render the forces of civil society non-existent, as for example is the case in North Korea and Myanmar (Burma previously). Thus in all Arab countries, despite their general authoritarianism, there is a significant margin of freedoms for civil society, which enables it to develop and thus increasingly be able to impact state policy and force ever greater openings of the system.

Despite the denials of the American administration there is no contesting that a major impediment that prevents domestic democratic forces from full utilization of Western
pressures on Arab governments to effect reform is America’s total support of Israel in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. This has led to the perception among many in the Arab world that the conflict is in essence between Muslims and a largely hostile Judeo-Christian West. This perception has driven a wedge between large segments of the Arab Muslim people and the West, and has cast doubt on the credibility of the West’s, particularly America’s, vehement proclamations of its dedication to the goal of democracy in the Arab world. Unfortunately, this total U.S. bias in favor of Israel has played into the hands of the Islamists—whose commitment to democracy is not above suspicion—who have used this as a rallying cause against the West and its motives in the region. Worse still, the plight of the Palestinians, coupled with the humiliating developmental failures of many Arab regimes, fuel the recruitment of militant Islamic jihadists. While the Palestinian problem does not in any way justify the delaying of democracy in the Arab countries, as many of its rulers have tried to argue, yet no doubt the settlement of this festering problem, that has lasted for more than three quarters of a century, will go a long way to stemming an important source of anti-Western anti-democratic feelings in the Arab world. Such a settlement will thus open the door for America and Europe to play a vitally effective role in the battle for the hearts and minds of the Arab people in the interest of democracy. In this context, education as a factor in democratization and liberalization bears important testimony.

ARAB EDUCATION: TRADITION, GROWTH AND REFORM

The countries of the Arab world share with one another, and with Third World countries in general, certain common problems and aspirations. Following political independence, which for many of them was achieved in the aftermath of World War II, all of these countries exhibited a strong desire to industrialize, elevate their standard of living, raise their per capita income, improve sanitation and health facilities, provide the masses with better housing, improve and universalize education—in short, effect social and economic development. From the beginning, leaders in developing countries had a steadfast faith in
education.\textsuperscript{43} It was viewed as "the master determinant of all aspects of change," as "the key that unlocks the door to modernization."\textsuperscript{44}

There are several practical and theoretical reasons for the appeal of educational improvements to nation builders and policymakers. At the practical level, education was a Western institution that could be grafted, with relative ease, onto the institutional structure of an otherwise traditional society. In many Third World countries, the process of grafting was begun by missionaries and colonial administrators long before national leaders assumed the reins of power. Second, for those in political power, increasingly mass-based education ways (and still is) a visible accomplishment having direct, if not fully understood, impact on the lives of people. Third, the examples of industrialized countries, where educational changes were linked with technological elaboration and scientific advancement, served as both a stimulus and justification for educational improvements. At the theoretical level, the justification for education had its first impetus from postwar economists who found that economic growth could not be explained solely in terms of investment in the physical plant in accordance with the capital/output ratio model. Accordingly, they expanded the concept of investment to include education, that is, "investment in man."\textsuperscript{45} Subsequent contributions by social scientists led to the differentiation of two major approaches to social change and development: the individual and the structural.\textsuperscript{46} Individual modernity theorists in general agree that education assists not only in imparting new skills and knowledge, but also in rationalizing (modernizing) attitudes.\textsuperscript{47} Structuralists argue that education serves the goal of social justice by


providing equal opportunities for lower-class children, thus improving their chances for upward social mobility. This, in turn, facilitates not only the development of an egalitarian system, but also the upgrading of the labor force. These divergent approaches have in common an emphasis on the importance of the role of education in social and economic development. Notwithstanding the practical and theoretical justifications for education, as well as the high priority it has received, leaders in developing countries are facing stubborn obstacles to social and economic development.

In his excellent study of modernization in South Asian countries, Gunnar Myrdal, for example, notes that "the economic and social conditions of South Asian countries today are not very different from those existing before the disintegration of the colonial power system. The only major change has been the recent rapid acceleration of the rate of population increase. . . . On the whole, the masses in South Asia in pre-war times were as poor and their lives as miserable as they are today." A motivating factor, leading in varying degrees to this change, is the move toward greater egalitarianism and the assumption that formal education is a major vehicle toward this end. Egalitarian orientations are tied to, or in some instances hidden by, an assumption which is more overriding for most Arab governments, namely, that development, modernity, and international prestige accompany educational growth. Hence, the educational sector is usually a major consideration in national development plans. There have occurred other noteworthy developments in the social, economic, and political sectors in many parts of the Arab world. For example, the face of many cities has changed not only in terms of modern building construction, but also through the increasingly powerful role of financial institutions, elaborate commercial activities, and complex networks of communication. Additionally, industry and agriculture have been "revolutionized" as a result of the increasing mechanization and application of modern technology. At the socio-political level, most Arab cities have witnessed democratization—a high degree of political mobilization resulting in an active political role for the urban

49 Myrdal, Asian Drama, p. 4
worker and the expanding middle class. There has also been a decline in traditional orientations in virtually all institutional spheres. One may well ask why other developments appear to lag behind? Obviously, a comprehensive answer to this question would be complex and multifaceted. For the researcher, as for the political leader and the planner, a feasible first step in the evaluation is to examine the entire educational system and to identify obstacles to the realization of education's potential for economic and social development. Quantitative results and expenditures, however large, can no longer serve as an adequate index of educational efficacy. A series of high-level meetings and conferences in the Arab world have tried, among other things, to identify issues confronting education and to find ways of resolving them. The first major meeting was the UNESCO-sponsored Regional Conference of Ministers and Directors of Education of Arab States, held in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1960. This was followed by the 1966 and the 1970 UNESCO-sponsored regional conferences of the ministers of education and ministers responsible for economic planning in the Arab states, held in Tripoli, Libya, and Marrakesh, Morocco, respectively. Although the latter conference acknowledged the remarkable progress achieved in the educational field in the span of ten years (i.e., since the Beirut conference), the issues confronting education in the Arab countries not only remained, but had become more elaborate, pressing, and numerous. For example, the 1966 Tripoli conference passed a resolution to encourage "the planning of education; compulsory primary education by 1980; diversified secondary and higher education and a better balance between the components of the educational system; incorporating adult literacy plans and programmes in educational plans; promotion of the education of women and provisions for the handicapped."^51


Significantly, the issues and problems noted are very similar to those commonly identified in other developing countries. In the opinion of many experts the role of education as a change agent can be enhanced if sufficient attention is paid to these issues. While basically in agreement with this view, we wish to stress the importance of other, perhaps less salient, issues which need to be considered in evaluating the efficacy of education as an instrument of economic and social development. Specifically, these include issues regarding (1) societal goals, (2) balance in institutional change, and (3) cautionary observations regarding realistic expectations for education and democratization, liberalization, development.

In recent decades, Arab education has achieved substantial growth in quantitative terms, with enrollments and other indicators expanding dramatically, including for females. Arab students can choose from different educational systems. Yet a lively discussion about quality is taking place throughout the Arab world. Business leaders worry that university graduates are unprepared for the private sector, and that universities are not doing relevant research. Observers are questioning traditional role learning and the absence of accreditation and objective evaluation, and considering reform measures. There is a lively discussion taking place throughout the Arab world about several aspects of education and reform measures that are needed. This discussion, which has gone largely unnoticed in the West, has been generated by several developments in the region. Those developments include strong demand for education at all levels, the resulting pressure on educational facilities and budgets, and concern on the part of the private sector that the education system is not providing graduates with appropriate skills to deal with the challenge of globalization. Arab students have a variety of opportunities now, including private educational institutions, English-medium schools, religious-curriculum institutions, and study abroad. This section of the chapter attempts to describe the fundamental attributes of educational systems in the Arab world and then it will review

the main issues that are being discussed by Arab leaders in the private sector, government and academia, about areas that need reform.

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF ARAB EDUCATION

The new awareness that there is no one-to-one relationship between education and democratization, liberalization and development is posing challenges to some traditional assumptions. Following an examination of the process of educational change in the Arab world, we will critically examine the role of education in democratization, liberalization and development, attempting to identify factors in the societal context which appear to influence formal education's potential as an agent of social and economic development.

Educational Change in the Arab world since World War II, education in the Arab world in general has come to acquire three main characteristics: (1) secularization, as evidenced by the demise of the Koranic school, the kuttab; (2) formalization, resulting from the need for expansion, curriculum development, standardization, and Arab-ization—particularly in the North African Arab states; and (3) universalization, particularly at the primary level, in response to a growing, albeit nebulous, egalitarian ideology which sought to equalize opportunities through education.54

Presently, many Arab states appear to view educational growth as an important condition of socioeconomic development, democratization, liberalization and modernization. Although the rates of educational growth have varied from one country to another, the trend toward increasing emphasis on education has been a dominant force in the region in the past quarter of a century. Although there are differences among Arab countries in their educational systems, just as there are differences in their political systems, economic circumstances, and social customs, some common characteristics can be identified that apply for the most part. They are: a rapid growth of access to educational institutions, and significant growth in literacy, for females as well as males; governmental control and financing of most education, with a new trend to some privatization; the emergence of some Western-style educational institutions, and continuation of some religious-based ones; and limited study abroad. Each of these will be examined before looking at the

reform debate. Just as there has been little study of the impact of curricula, so also it
should be noted that one of the problems in understanding Arab education generally is
that fully reliable and up to date information on Arab schools and educational systems is
not readily available for all countries.

ACCESS AND LITERACY

Arab education generally is characterized, first of all, by a dramatic increase in access to
education during the past four decades. The numbers of schools, teachers and students
have grown very rapidly. For example, school enrollment in Saudi Arabia increased more
than 160 times since 1952, from 25 thousand to over 4 million, and in Oman, since 1970
school enrollment has grown from 907 (all boys) to about 600,000 today. Primary
education is compulsory almost everywhere and primary enrollment ratios are generally
very good. Every Arab state has at least one university, and most have more than one.
Generally, education for females has grown along with that for males. While female
enrollment tends to be lower, in most Arab countries it is 85%-95% of male enrollment,
and in some cases it is higher. In Oman, 65% of the students at Sultan Qabus University
are women. Moreover female students often get better grades on average than males. One
of the reasons for relatively high female enrollments in universities is that many young
men leave school early to work. It should be noted that coeducation is widespread,
especially in primary schools and universities, although in the Gulf states, there tends to
be gender segregation in the classroom, reflecting local social custom. Enrollments in
higher education in the Arab world by 1997 had reached 15% of the total age cohort,
which was only slightly below the world average of 17%. Average enrollment in the
Arab region was higher than the average for less developed nations as a whole (10%) but
only one quarter of the rate in the most developed countries (61%). Arab female
enrollment in higher education in 1997 was further behind at only 12.4% compared to the
world total of 16.7%, but it was growing rapidly, having risen from 8.6% in 1990
compared to the world female total then of 13%. One measure of educational growth is
improvements in literacy, which show substantial gains in all Arab countries. The over-

55 1952 Saudi figures from Alfred Thomas Jr. (1968). *Saudi Arabia, A Study of the Educational System of
the Kingdom*, Tempe Arizona: American Association of Collegiate Registrars, 1968, p.40; recent figures
from Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency; Omani figures from Ministry of Higher Education, Sultanate of
56 UNESCO Regional Office for Education in the Arab States. (2002). Beirut, *Higher Education in the
Arab States*, Beirut, February, p. 6.
illiteracy rate for the Arab world as a whole is still nearly 40%, and the female illiteracy rate is higher than that. Yet, in a number of Arab states, such as Kuwait along with Lebanon, Jordan, Bahrain, adult and even female illiteracy has been reduced to below 20%.

**TABLE I: HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS IN THE ARAB COUNTRIES: ENROLMENT RATE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRIES</th>
<th>NET PRIMARY ENROLMENT RATE (%)</th>
<th>MDG NET SECONDARY ENROLMENT RATE (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KUWAIT</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.A.E</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAHRAIN</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OMAN</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAUDI ARABIA</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The prospects of free party politics as part of liberalization and democratization under fundamentalist rule does not look promising given the distrust that fundamentalist leaders express towards any facets of western democratic life, and given their tendency to dismiss their enemies as ‘infidels’ and/or ‘traitors’. There are also some other less apparent reasons for the increasing role of political parties in the Arab world. The education revolution in the Middle East and success in slowly raising the literacy rates among females (despite the preservation of the gap between male and female literacy rates in all Arab countries) have increased expectations for modern means of political expression and representation in most Arab countries. No longer will a large section of the Arab population allow traditional family and tribal leaders- many of whom have been increasingly marginalised over the years- to articulate political interests and demands. Table II shows some figures of literacy rates for some Arab countries. Political parties have allowed members of the educated, urban middle and lower middle class to organise

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themselves away from those political associations that have been under the dominance of the rural and/or urban elites.

**TABLE II: LITERACY RATES IN THE ARAB WORLD, 1990 (%)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bahrain</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**GOVERNMENTAL CONTROL AND FUNDING**

The national government plays a dominant role in education, for most schools and universities. It typically controls curricula even at private schools. Most teachers are government employees, and most education is publicly financed. Most Arab countries have two or more separate governmental agencies that manage education: one for K-12, another for post-secondary, and often others for technical, military, or (in Saudi Arabia until very recently) for girls' education. Relatedly, most education is free or at minimal cost. As a World Bank study put it, "Free education, publicly provided, has been a central tenet of the social contract in every MENA [Middle East and North African] country since independence."\(^{59}\) Government spending in the Arab world on education is relatively high, while private spending is low. As a whole, the Arab states devote between 5.4% of their Gross National Product to education, which is equal to the level in North America, higher than the global average of 4.9%, and higher than levels in all other areas of the world (South Asia is 3.3%, East Asia 2.9%, Latin America 4.6%, and Europe 5.3%).

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Education takes between 13 and 25% of national budgets in almost every Arab country; only Lebanon, where private education is very strong, is lower at 8.2%.

### TABLE III: PUBLIC EXPENDITURE ON EDUCATION (% OF THE GDP)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRIES</th>
<th>1991</th>
<th>2002-05</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KUWAIT</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.A.E</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAHRAIN</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OMAN</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAUDI ARABIA</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given their very high average income per capita, the oil states, such as Bahrain, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia, all seem to provide, on average, lower quality education than most other Middle East and North African (MENA) countries. These differences influence the role of human capital in achieving economic growth and the distribution of its benefits in each country. Nevertheless, the region on the whole also exhibits a number of similarities. These include high levels of commitment to investment in education and gender parity, and frequently a policy of guaranteed employment in government.

A fundamental social change in the contemporary Persian Gulf is the emergence of women into the previously exclusively male world of public affairs. The expectation of same-sex doctors creates an opportunity for women physicians in some Muslim countries that exceeds women's share of medical positions in many western countries. The rapid rise of women's education in the oil-producing countries may be interpreted by some as evidence that traditional constraints on women can be overcome by modernization. Put in economic terms, culture acts as a drag on rational allocation of resources, but this lag is overcome more or less easily as incomes rise. Traditional cultures are assumed to be

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static, acting only as a lag on the forces of modernization and universalism. But cultures can be dynamic as well as static. Cultural change often occurs with the formation of a nation state. Ramirez and Weiss stress the importance of political centralization in educational diffusion for women at the elementary and secondary levels in developing countries. Their approach follows Meyer et al's (1979) emphasis on educational expansion as a key step in nation building. Education serves many gods: It can be used to pursue salvation, vocation, civilization, participation, and recreation. The relative importance of these goals is a matter of history, politics, and culture in Arab world.

Modern education is the first and most visible component of this change. In addition, the availability of abundant financial resources and the strong drive to implement social and economic modernization paved the road for tremendous progress in the expansion of female education, particularly at the primary level. First, in just a quarter of a century the proportion of women in the labor force more than doubled in every state. Second, in spite of this significant achievement, all six monarchies still lag far behind the rest of the world. They still have a long way to go in order to achieve equality between men and women in the work place. Two important obstacles have contributed to this outcome. First, there has been very little change in the attitude of Gulf societies towards the idea of men and women working together at the same place. A large proportion of women work in occupations which preserve a highly segregated atmosphere and permit the least possibility of mixing the two sexes (e.g. teaching). Second, women are discouraged from joining vocational training programs such as electrical or mechanical engineering. These occupations are preserved almost exclusively for men and are considered "men's jobs". Instead, women are encouraged to study subjects such as sewing and hairstyling. To sum up, in spite of social and cultural barriers the personal and professional status of women in the Gulf has tremendously improved over the last few decades. Certainly, education

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has played a pivotal role in promoting this change. Indeed, Kuwait and Bahrain (with the largest proportion of women in the labor force) were the first Gulf states to open modern schools for girls. While Saudi Arabia, opened only women university in 2009.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION
There are several types of post-secondary institutions in the Arab world. According to a recent UNESCO count, the 22 Arab League member countries had 175 universities, 140 university colleges, 13 Islamic universities, and a number of "technical colleges." The distinctions are as follows. A university offers degrees in several disciplines and usually offers graduate studies, while university colleges focus on one major discipline and are mostly for bachelor degrees. Technical institutes, which are sometimes called community colleges or intermediate colleges, offer a two-year or three-year diploma. Technical institutes are common throughout most of the region, accounting for one-third of all post-secondary students, although in Saudi Arabia they account for only 5% of students.

PRIVATIZATION OF EDUCATION
While education is mostly in the hands of the government, recently there has been a small but growing trend toward privatization of Arab education as some new educational institutions have emerged which are privately owned and funded. The emergence of new private Arab institutions follows a trend that has existed in the developing world since the 1960s, particularly in the Far East. Limits on governmental funding for education have been one impetus for privatization. Tight budgets have also encouraged a number of Arab governments to study the question of whether the traditional government-funded free system can be modified by adding substantial fees to pay for courses. Of the 175 Arab universities existing in the year 2000, 47 (27%) were non-governmental. These non-governmental institutions existed only in 9 Arab states, and over half were in Lebanon (9 of its 10), Palestine (7 of its 8) and Jordan (10 of its 17). This trend is fairly recent. Of the 108 Arab universities established since 1980, 33 were private. In Jordan, the government in 1986 authorized the establishment of private universities, and today there are nine of

them which enroll more than one-third of university students; several of these are English-medium. In Saudi Arabia, the private Effat College for women is only a recent phenomenon, and plans for Dar al-Faysal, a private university for men in Riyadh, have been announced.68

ENGLISH AND WESTERN CURRICULA

Some of the new institutions are English-medium schools and universities. One of the motivations for using English is to give students easier access to the latest publications and research in the sciences, medicine and other subjects. On the other hand, some people argue that Arabic should be the medium of instruction because students should be thoroughly versed in their own native language, and that studying in a foreign language is too high a price to pay in terms of cultural education. There is a debate among Arab academics and officials as to which language of instruction is best, and some have tried to bridge the gap by creating "hybrid" institutions, teaching in English and Arabic, which utilize English in the classroom plus Western textbooks on some secular subjects while using Arabic for Islamic studies, Arab history, culture, and the Arabic language. Behind these attempts to combine both the traditional cultural and the modern Western-style learning with solid traditional cultural education, is a belief that the former is necessary for the 21st century economy while the latter is important for traditional Arab civil society, and both are therefore important for distinct reasons. Business leaders recognize that "productivity and knowledge are linked in the private sector" and that especially "higher education increases income growth and productivity," and the global economy requires a knowledge of English.69 There is now, also, a modest trend in post-secondary education to adopt the American semester and credit hour system, in both English-medium and Arabic-medium institutions. This has already happened in almost all Jordanian universities in most fields of study, and in some Saudi universities, partly because of the pressures of globalization.

68 Plans for Dar al Faisal were reported in Gulf News, February 5, 2002.
Over the past few decades, the study of Islam has remained a strong element in the curriculum throughout the region. In some Arab countries, the first schools established were Qur'anic, but then in the third quarter of the 20th century the very rapid growth in education was mostly in secular schools, where the curriculum roughly resembled public schools in the West. Simultaneously, however, there was an expansion in some Arab countries of schools and universities whose curricula were primarily religious subjects and Arabic, with minimal attention to science, math, and other "secular" subjects. To some extent, the persistence of Islamic education is a reaction to the growth of secular education by conservatives who want to foster Arab and Muslim civil society in the face of Westernization. In most Arab states, the regular curriculum of the public schools, which the majority of students attend, has a considerable amount of Islamic religious instruction. Generally speaking, Islam is a required subject at every grade level from one through twelve. The amount of time given to Islamic instruction varies. In Kuwait, for example, an average of about 10% of total class hours are devoted to it each year. In Saudi Arabia it consumes 32% of class time for grades 1-3, 30% in grades 4-6, 24% in grades 7-9, and then 15% or more for grades 10-12. These statistics do not give the whole picture, however, because other parts of the curriculum, such as history, social studies, and Arabic, have a fair amount of Islamic content. Saudi Arabia is somewhat of a special case, since it has secondary school level Islamic Institutes which are managed by Imam Sa'ud University and the Islamic University, and enrollment is substantial. In Saudi Arabia, three of the country's seven universities, with about one-third of all of the country's nearly 200,000 university students, offer a primarily religious education. At the same time, many educational institutions in the Arab world, especially in Saudi Arabia and other states, have a high proportion of religious content in their curricula, from primary school up through the university. These institutes follow the basic public

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72 For example, for curricula in Saudi Arabia see Salloum, op. cit., p.44, and for several other countries see. Nucho, Ed., Education in the Arab World, op. cit.
school curriculum but add onto it a number of Islamic religious subjects, and require students to memorize the Qur'an and take annual tests on Islam.

STUDY ABROAD
The number of Arab students studying abroad had reached 175 thousand by the mid-1990s, of which 21% were in other Arab states. Study abroad rises steeply with level of education. Almost all Arabs studying abroad are post-secondary students and most of those are in graduate school. Fewer than 6% of bachelor's degree candidates are studying abroad, but 13% of master's candidates and over 34% of Arab doctoral candidates are studying outside their home countries. Over the past three decades, there has been a steady stream of students from all Arab countries coming to the United States to study. Their numbers have, however, been relatively modest. Only in the second half of the 1970s did the number go higher. In 1979 it peaked at 34,000 but that was still only 12% of the world total. It has declined ever since. For example, in 1979 there were 10,000 Saudi students and 5,000 Jordanian students in the US; and today there are half those numbers. Lebanon had 6,000 and today has 1,300. Only for a few countries like the UAE, Bahrain, and Oman have the numbers increased, due mainly to the fact that they were under British control until 1970, when the British ended their colonial relationship, and after that many Gulf Arabs began coming to the US instead of Britain. Today the total number of Arab students in the United States is only around 25,000, which is under 6% of the foreign student total of 450,000. The largest numbers come from Saudi Arabia, with over 5,000, Kuwait and the UAE, with over 3,000 students each. Most students go abroad to acquire skills to help them with their careers. Most tend to study science, engineering and business. There are however several factors impeding study abroad for Arabs. First is cost. US education is expensive and beyond the reach of many. Secondly, the growth of local universities has allowed more to study at home. Third, the decline of scholarships given by Arab governments and the US government. Fourth, distance: the US is regarded by many Arab parents as too far away to send their children to study.

Fifth: many parents are reluctant to have their children, especially their daughters, exposed to American society and culture. Sixth: political factors: for example students whose countries have poor relations with the US, or who live under strict regimes at home, have more difficulty coming to the United States. Finally, since September 11, many Arab parents have been reluctant to send their children to America, fearing they might be harassed by US law enforcement authorities or bigoted individuals.

QUALITY ISSUES AND EDUCATION REFORM
Several aspects of education are being discussed today by Arab businessmen, educators, and government officials. According to Amre Moussa, Secretary-General of the Arab League, a major revision of the educational system is therefore urgently needed in order to identify the challenges, to formulate effective strategies and mechanisms that will enable us to overcome all encountered impediments and to upgrade the educational systems in the Arab World to international standards. This discussion has received impetus from several different factors. One factor motivating the discussion is that Arab business leaders are concerned that Arab educational institutions are not providing graduates with the skills needed to work effectively in the private sector. At an international conference on Arab higher education held in March 2002, a leading Arab businessman stated that the West Asia would not achieve its full economic potential "unless we revolutionize our educational system and adopt a total change to our mindset." He said that in analyzing Arab economic problems, including low capital investment and a low ratio of economically active to inactive population, "one thing that lies at the heart of all of this is education." He explained that he did not mean the number of schools or the amount of money governments were spending to expand educational facilities, but rather the quality of education, where he found "the most alarming discrepancies." He said that in the industrial revolution, those nations which changed their educational systems ended up at the forefront economically, and that today the technology revolution and globalization are presenting a new challenge: "The countries that will end up as winners and generate wealth and prosperity are those that will have the most advanced

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74 Promoting Educational Excellence in the Arab World, Arab Quality Assurance and Accreditation Network, www.arqaane.org
and therefore the most competitive talent and skills..." He added that the quality of the education Arab university graduates were getting was not allowing them to create wealth and generate economic value. "Most of them would like to work for governments which are...already over-expanded and over-staffed." He deplored the fact that many Arab university graduates were unable to find adequate jobs because they were not properly educated. At the same conference, another leading Arab businessman said the fact that only about 10% of the private sector workforce in Saudi Arabia were Saudi nationals, was a "tremendous problem" which would get worse since 60% of the population was under 18. He said, "This disconnect between the private sector, the job holders and the kids looking for a job is a time bomb". What are the shortcomings? A World Bank report on Arab education put it this way: "Education will need to impart skills enabling workers to be flexible, to analyze problems, and to synthesize information gained in different contexts. This requires focusing students on the process of learning - on learning how to learn - as well as on particular subject content. By all indications, education systems in MENA [the Middle East and North Africa] do not reward these skills. One knowledgeable Saudi observer echoed this, describing Arab university graduates this way: "typically they have high technical knowledge... (but) they are very weak in communication skills, they cannot write not only in English but in Arabic too. They cannot communicate verbally as well as they should. They cannot make a presentation, their computer skills are also very weak, and there is a major issue... which is weak analytical skills." Another observer of Arab education says that education reform in that region should promote critical thinking and creativity, a flexible curriculum and lifelong learning. Pedagogy in most Arab schools and universities is typically based more on rote learning than it is on critical thinking, problem solving skills, analysis and synthesis of information, and learning how to learn. The World Bank and others have warned that such an approach does not prepare students well for the modern workforce. A recent World Bank study says, "What is known about the quality of education - defined as

75 Abdelaziz Sugair, Chairman, Advanced Electronics Company (Saudi Arabia), speech March 13, 2002 at an AMIDEAST-sponsored conference in Marrakech on Arab education.
76 Abdelaziz Sugair, speech March 13, 2002 at an AMIDEAST-sponsored conference in Marrakech on Arab education.
77 Abdullah Mograby (1999), Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, Education in the Arab World, Abu Dhabi, pp.303-306.
learning and achievement - is not encouraging," adding: "Most importantly, education in the [West Asia] region does not impart the higher-order cognitive skills such as flexibility, problem solving and judgment needed by workers who will face frequently changing tasks and challenges in increasingly competitive export markets. Instead, the systems teach students how to learn and retain 'answers to fairly fixed questions in problem situations with little or no meaningful context' and thus reward those who are skilled at being passive knowledge recipients." This chapter concludes that the quality of Arab education and learning has suffered due to expanding enrollments and falling teacher compensation levels.78 A Harvard study of Arab higher education also found that "widespread practices of rote learning and memorization exercises are incapable of developing capacities in students for problem solving and application of theory to practical concepts."79 The numbers of Arab unemployed or underemployed school and university graduates are growing. They may still find government jobs but they have difficulty finding work in the private sector where productivity requirements may be higher. In the Gulf states, this question has become entangled with the issues related to foreign workers, who make up a large share of the workforce. Many thoughtful observers in the Arab world recognize this problem but there are few serious studies that have dealt with the issue in a systematic way.

A second area of concern is the question of an under-supply of students in science and engineering and related technical fields compared with students in humanities and social sciences. On the post-secondary level, data from 1996 showed that fewer than 29% of students in the Arab world were studying sciences and engineering, with 71% studying humanities and social sciences, and that the bias in favor of the latter had increased from 65% in 1991. The 29% included 9% each in basic science and engineering, 7% in medicine and 3% in agriculture. Officials of the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development say that the growing Arab awareness of the need to improve the quality of

education is especially focused on the area of science and technology.' A third area of concern relates to the lack of research and knowledge production by the educational system, especially by universities. Numbers of universities and enrollments have increased substantially but most of the increase has been at the bachelors level and the growth has been on teaching but not on research or knowledge production. A UNESCO study declared, "In terms of population sizes, economic sources, and growth potential, the Arab states vary considerably, but in terms of their present possession of tools and skills of knowledge, particularly in aspects related to modern technology, they are still very much behind." One measurable indicator of knowledge production is the number of academic papers produced by a country as compared to other countries, and the number of citations by others of such papers. The following Table IV shows that the papers produced in science and social sciences in the Kuwait are relatively few.

**TABLE IV: RESEARCH IN THE SCIENCES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Number of papers</th>
<th>Number of citations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>1,576</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>1,409</td>
<td>7,826</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

A new UNESCO study says the number of research centers at Arab universities is "not impressive" and their budgets are "meager," without which there is "little renewal of production of knowledge, but merely transmission of what is already known." It says that "the early spirit of Arab researchers, flowering during the Abbassid time in the Middle Ages, which has greatly contributed to the advancement of human learning ... has almost disappeared." UNESCO recommends that this be remedied, and calls for "a stronger political will to revive research spirit, and provide researchers with proper support and means." A fourth area of concern is quality assurance. There is no accreditation or other external evaluation system for Arab education, and even self-evaluation by educational

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80 UNESCO Beirut, *Higher Education in the Arab States*, p. 17.
institutions is rare. One reason for this is that most education institutions are government controlled, so the governments make decisions on curriculum and other matters and they have not been interested in independent evaluations. UNESCO has concluded that "The present system of centralization ... has not led to continuous improvement of higher education but may have contributed to its stagnation," adding that "healthy competition is constrained." One close observer of Arab education calls for an area-wide accreditation system for universities, and area-wide testing standards for the Arab world, saying new means of assessment and evaluation are needed. The Arab ministers responsible for higher education have begun to focus on quality assurance, reportedly because of the increasing demand for private colleges and universities. In the year 2000, they asked the Association of Arab Universities to establish a regional committee to advise Arab governments on ways to evaluate quality and establish some kind of accreditation system. But as a UNESCO report stressed, there is still a long way to tangible achievements in quality assessment, and what it calls the "culture of evaluation" in higher education is nearly absent.

One further issue being discussed among Arab educators is that shortcomings in education in grades 1 through 12 place an additional burden on the universities because incoming freshmen are not always sufficiently prepared. One study reported that in some Arab countries, "as much as 35-40% of instructional resources in higher education are spent on remediation of skill deficiencies of college entrants." A final area of concern that affects primarily the Gulf states is the issue of expatriate teachers. Most teachers at all levels are nationals of the country they are teaching in, but in the Gulf states, large percentages of teachers - one-third to one-half or more - are expatriates, mostly from Egypt and other Arab countries. The importation of large numbers of such teachers has been the result of the rapid growth in demand for education and the limited supply of local teachers. Since most of the expatriate teachers are from Arab countries they know Arabic and Arab history and culture, but they tend not to be familiar with local history and culture in the Gulf, and may even be disdainful of it, so they may not be the best.

teachers from a local perspective. Gulf governments are seeking to increase the number of local teachers and reduce dependence on foreigners, but that dependence is likely to continue for some time. Arab officials who are responsible for education candidly admit that there are quality problems.

Arab Government officials also respond to criticism by arguing that the huge growth in demand for education has been a major cause of the problems now being discussed, because this demand has put such great pressure on the system. A senior official of the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, recognizing this problem, argues that the Arab world should move away from such heavy dependence on government funding for education and involve other "stakeholders", such as the private sector and foundations. But the vast majority of resources for education still come from the governments in the region. Why has private funding played such a small part in Arab education? Part of the reason is the unwillingness of governments to relinquish control. One knowledgeable observer explains that the lack of private foundation financing for Arab education is attributable in part to a fear by officials and others that the private organizations would become too powerful. Another reason is the absence of laws in most of the region permitting private institutions, or encouraging them, for example, by making support of private institutions tax deductible. Although there is considerable charitable giving in the Arab world, most of it is for religious purposes, endowing mosques and other religious institutions rather than education or science.84 The forces that determine whether or not civil society organisations can emerge and act as agents of democratisation are varied and diverse, often differing according to the particular characteristics of a region or country. Class composition and the nature of economic development, specific societal characteristics and cultural preferences, and the pursuit of certain state policies as opposed to others all appear to be determining factors in the widespread absence, or the emergence and growth, of a dense and democratic civil society. In the Arab world, all these factors eventually boil down to the structural features and policy agendas of the state. In the Arab world, the politics of clientelistic paternalism

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84 Dr. Mervat Badawi, Technical Director, Arab Fund, speaking March 15, 2002 at the AMIDEAST Conference.
are still alive and well, having recently experienced what amount to no more than mere cosmetic adjustments. In both the economic and political realms, dangerously high levels of functional paralysis are still a long way away. On the other hand, most of the emerging autonomous CSOs have yet to fully embrace democracy. Most, in fact, continue to adhere to dogmatic and uncompromising ideological blueprints—religious or otherwise—that are antithetical to democracy.

For the past several decades, Kuwait has made great strides in their efforts to develop their societies. These included creating a modern economic infrastructure and upgrading their educational system. This can be explained, to a great extent, by the introduction of modern schooling and the opening of several universities all over the countries. This "revolution" in the quantitative levels of education however, suffers from qualitative deficiencies. The types of academic learning and technical training are not geared toward the requirements of the job market. In other words, there is a mismatch between the educational system, where the main focus is on arts, humanities and religious studies in order to preserve traditional culture, and the labor force, where the need is for technical and managerial skills in order to achieve a higher level of integration in the international economic system. This contradiction between the desire to preserve traditional culture and at the same time aspire to be part of the global revolution in information technology is likely to endure for some time. It is further complicated by the slow change in societies' attitude toward women's status and role. There have been significant achievements but much more is still desired. There is a fundamental need to change the quality of education, to accommodate technical training and focus more on science and less on humanities.