Review Article

Low Tide after the Third Wave

Exploring Politics under Authoritarianism

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The investigation of democracy's "third wave" fueled a large political science research agenda.¹ When the spread of democratization slowed down, research turned to examine the consolidation of existing democracies.² But studies of neither transition nor consolidation are suitable in exploring politics in contemporary authoritarian states, those states that survived the reordering of political power in eastern Europe, Latin America, and other regions. Original approaches that explicitly target the function and maintenance of authoritarianism can provide the means to understand the resilient systems left standing at the third wave's low tide. The four books reviewed here chart a new research area that complements the study of transitions away from authoritarianism with an exploration of why many contemporary authoritarian regimes last. They approach authoritarianism as a system of control and power that can be addressed distinctly from discussions of transition or regime change but that will naturally inform them.

In the decade since the fall of the Soviet Union and Huntington's *The Third Wave*, scholars looking at nondemocratizing states in the Middle East, Central Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, East Asia, and elsewhere have tended to focus on a new democratic surge that would sweep up the cases they studied. The bulk of current political science research addresses politics through the narrowly defined frame of modern
political institutions: parties, legislatures, and most prominently elections. States that lack them seem to lack significant researchable politics. Consequently, students of authoritarian regimes have struggled to determine what theoretical contributions they could draw. For example, a scholar of Uzbekistan would face the dilemma of having to frame that country as a democratizing regime in order to contribute to the debate on political development. Indeed, the initial burst of studies of democratization and liberalization in authoritarian regions offered admirable attempts to join the democratization discourse but often produced empirically thick but theoretically thin case studies that were not picked up by scholars outside of area specialists. In mainstream political science works on Africa and the Middle East have been absent not only among the canonical books, but also in leading journals.

Today’s nondemocratic regimes, those lasting dictatorships that survived the dramatic changes of the past three decades, offer their own insights into questions of power and government. Ten years after Lucian Pye spoke to the American Political Science Association of a “crisis of authoritarianism,” the number of states that are governed by leaders unaccountable to competitive elections matches the number that are. Thus, to understand the politics of half the world’s countries it is necessary to examine autocracies for generalizable statements about political and social life under authoritarianism. It is also necessary to develop concepts and approaches that make it possible to study these phenomena without reducing theory to democracy forecasting.

Chehabi and Linz’s Sultanistic Regimes builds on transition studies while addressing the institutions of arbitrary and personalistic authoritarianism. The contributors to it consider the function and collapse of patrimonial rule across an array of cases. However, they approach these regimes primarily through the lens of transition and thus fall short of a full consideration of sustained sultanism. Their typology and hypotheses will certainly be useful to students of politics in the Middle East, Africa, Central Asia, East Asia, and other regions where authoritarianism persists. But, ironically, these geographic areas are peripheral to the book’s case studies. It suffers from a regional bias for cases in the western hemisphere and leaves out key cases of sultanism, for example, from the Arab Middle East. In fact, this neglect may be due to the success of these latter cases in sustaining patrimonial dictatorships and avoiding regime transitions. A critical look at recent developments in the Middle East shows that it offers one testing ground for the book’s framework.

Probing more deeply into the kinds of political systems examined by Linz and Chehabi, Dirk Vandewalle, Michael Herb, and Lisa Wedeen take up the study of authoritarian persistence and stability by looking at Libya, the Middle Eastern monarchies, and Syria. In Libya since Independence Vandewalle expands upon rentier theory to explain Muammar Qadhafi’s success in constructing a socially demobilizing oil-rich state. In contrast, Herb’s All in the Family offers a critique of traditional political economy explanations of regime stability in the Persian Gulf monarchies;
he looks instead at power distribution practices among the royal families. Finally, *Ambiguities of Domination* explores the popular cult surrounding the late president Asad of Syria; Wedeen examines the system through which the regime cultivates public compliance despite private dissent.

These books not only explore the politics of authoritarian systems; they also use distinct approaches and assign different weights to structural and agency variables and to ideological and material factors. Consequently, they contribute not only through their methods and choice of subject, but also through their original answers to the core question of much comparative research. Why do some regimes persist while others collapse or change? The resulting gain in understanding regime change and stability indicates that regions dominated by authoritarian regimes can assume a more prominent place in research and discussion. They enrich our understanding of contemporary politics.

**Unbureaucratic Authoritarianism: Sultanism and Its Opponents**

In the 1960s Juan Linz’s seminal study distinguished authoritarianism from totalitarianism and democracy. While at the time this distinction marked an important step in studying political regimes, authoritarianism evolved into a residual category defined more by the characteristics it lacked than by those it exhibited. “Authoritarian regimes are political systems with limited, not responsible, political pluralism: without elaborate and guiding ideology...without intensive or extensive political mobilization...and in which a leader exercises power within formally ill-defined limits but actually quite predictable ones.” Later works broadened authoritarian regimes to include “absolute monarchies, bureaucratic empires, oligarchies, aristocracies, constitutional regimes with limited suffrage, personal despotisms, fascist and communist governments, military dictatorships” and other nondemocratic governments. In *Sultanistic Regimes* Linz, Chehabi, and the contributors consider one subset of authoritarianism, a regime revolving around the ruler and characterized by corruption, lack of political ideology, and above all arbitrariness. Consequently, they offer a conceptual frame for analyzing politics in some of the countries that have not developed democracy and present different political challenges than those of the well-studied bureaucratic-authoritarian governments of Latin America and southern Europe.

Although their typology draws on Weber’s Orientalist sultanism, Chehabi and Linz go beyond regional culture to discuss how this strain of authoritarianism developed across a range of historical contexts. Contributors to the project then provide six case studies of sultanism: Rafael Trujillo (Dominican Republic), Fulgencio Batista (Cuba), Anastasio Somoza Garcia and Anastasio Somoza Debayle (Nicaragua), François and Jean-Claude Duvalier (Haiti), Reza Shah Pahlavi and...
Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi (Iran), and Ferdinand Marcos (Philippines). Ceaucescu’s Romania is discussed briefly and receives explicit attention in a separate work.9

Chehabi and Linz detail their theory of sultanism in two introductory chapters. Building upon Weber, their typology is narrower and more empirically focused than Weber’s theory. Weber wrote that patrimonialism “arise[s] whenever traditional domination develops an administration and a military force which are purely personal instruments of the master.” “Where [domination] operates primarily on the basis of discretion, it will be called sultanism (p. 4).” Thus, sultanistic states do not routinize governmental procedures or develop a merit-based bureaucracy.

According to Chehabi and Linz, sultanistic regimes (or, in their modern form, neosultanistic regimes) share the following characteristics, albeit in different combinations and to different degrees. First, regime (patterns of power allocation) and state overlap or meld. Second, legal-rational norms are discarded or distorted, and no serious ideological project is pursued. Third, the leader builds a cult of personality around himself and, in a dynastic manner, often passes power to immediate family members. Fourth, leaders engage in constitutional hypocrisy, using plebiscitarian institutions to cloak dictatorship under a veneer of popular legitimacy. Fifth, the ruling clique cuts out support from beneath itself as it severs ties with political coalitions and civil society. Finally, the regime disregards property rights, concentrating wealth in its own hands as corruption spreads through the highest levels of government. Specifically acknowledging that no case perfectly matches the sultanistic ideal type, Chehabi and Linz discuss specific regimes in terms of their sultanistic tendencies.

Chehabi and Linz also distinguish sultanistic regimes from totalitarian systems that are guided by a mobilizing ideology that seeks support both within and beyond the state’s borders. Totalitarian rulers follow their ideological mission, while sultanistic leaders seek personal enrichment through the capricious abuse of power. Finally, sultanistic regimes penetrate their societies “very unevenly” and thus do not achieve the deep control over domestic populations that archtypical totalitarian regimes (for example, Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia) approached (p. 24).

Another critical difference arises between sultanistic and bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes. Guillermo O’Donnell used the latter term to categorize the Brazilian and Argentinian regimes of the mid 1960s. The modifier “bureaucratic” denoted “the crucial features that are specific to authoritarian systems of high modernization: the growth of organizational strength of many social sectors, the governmental attempts at control by ‘encapsulation,’ the career patterns and power-bases of most incumbents of technocratic roles, and the pivotal role played by large (public and private) bureaucracies.”10 A key characteristic of this regime type is collusion between “the public bureaucracy and the propertied sectors...against the peasantry and an emerg-
ing urban proletariat.”11 In contrast, Chehabi and Linz (as well as Weber) consider sultanism a system in which the instruments of state are not shared among a coalition of interests but rather rest completely in the ruler’s grasp. Where bureaucratic institutions exist they are governed by the sultan’s whim. In contrast to O’Donnell’s type, the system emerges as a distinctly unbureaucratic authoritarianism.

This difference affects a country’s ability to develop democratic government. Sultanistic leaders use power arbitrarily and brutally, as evidenced by Trujillo’s and Ceausescu’s repression. They follow no fixed ideology but often garb themselves in sham republican institutions and a democratic masquerade. Yet this façade hardly distracts attention from the regime’s rampant corruption and nepotism, as the ruler and his family enrich themselves and treat governmental positions as personal property. The resulting inculcation of fear amid personalized institutions under sultanism tears at the political landscape. Consequently, sultanistic regimes seem destined for eventual breakdown but ill-suited for democratic development.

This analysis certainly applies to the countries covered in the case studies. Their regimes disintegrated before new governments were installed, and only the Philippines moved directly from the ancien régime to democracy. But since the theoretical chapters and case studies examine only patrimonial regimes that fell, the book strongly implies that sultanistic regimes must inevitably collapse. It offers no framework to explain when they will end and when they will persist.

This omission limits the contemporary use of sultanism in explaining many of today’s most tenacious authoritarian governments. To analyze political development in states like Mubarak’s Egypt and Nazarbayev’s Kazakhstan, where a presidential figure uses democratic forms to ward off its substance, social scientists need a framework that addresses paths of both continuity and change. While Chehabi and Linz successfully differentiate the characteristics of sultanistic regimes from those of other authoritarian states, their deterministic focus on the fall of patrimonial systems stops short of this broader application.12

The book’s most comparative chapter, “Paths Out of Sultanism” by Richard Snyder, also suffers from this constraint. Snyder addresses postsultanist pathways using many of the same cases studied by the other contributors. His approach balances Skocpolian structural factors with the “contingent choices of elite actors during processes of regime change” (p. 50). Snyder argues persuasively that by undermining institutions and applying patronage as a selective tool for social control the
regime makes enemies, as newly excluded groups dissent from the leader’s arbitrary and nepotistic abuse of state resources. He contends that transitions from sultanism depend on both the “strategic postures” of regime soft-liners, the moderate opposition, and the maximalist opposition and the regime’s structural constraints, penetration of state and society plus dependence on a foreign superpower (p. 51). It follows that the best situation for democracy is one similar to the Philippines under Marcos, which Snyder sees as low state penetration of society and strong opposition by all three groups: soft-liners, the moderate opposition, and the maximalist opposition. But Snyder does not specify the dependent variable that he is trying to explain. Is it the nature of transition, the timing of transition, or regime stability versus regime collapse? The problem is compounded by case selection problems, which limit the conclusions.

Snyder seeks to “account for the varied paths of political development traversed by sultanistic regimes” (p. 50). But if the dependent variable is transition, full variation would require cases of nontransition as well. He tries to vary outcomes by coding the cases of Zaire before 1991 (not a case study in the book), François Duvalier’s Haiti, and Somoza Garcia’s Nicaragua as stable, because they survived for long periods. Yet he does not actually show the range of outcomes he purports to explain. Snyder looks at two different dependent variables, nature of transition (revolution, coup, democratization) and regime survival (longevity, stasis). He then applies the same set of independent variables to account for paths of both patrimonial regimes that fell and regimes that remained in power at the point he chose (Zaire in 1990, Haiti at the end of François Duvalier’s tenure). But no rationale is given for designating these cutoff points. Consequently, the transition variable does not vary.

Variation of the dependent variable for a transition analysis like Snyder’s requires the operationalization of political stability as regimes that survive challenges to their rule rather than simply maintain the status quo. The puzzle lies not in Zaire’s or Haiti’s characteristics during periods of stasis, but rather in the structural constraints and array of opposition forces during times of unrest when a potential transition was successfully avoided. The real puzzle can be clarified through a counterfactual question. What would it have taken Iran, the Philippines, or Romania to survive the challenges raised against them? If history were rewound and played back, what conditions would need to obtain for a sultanistic regime’s crisis to result in stability rather than revolution or coup? Under what circumstances, under what array of variables, might the revolt against the shah in 1979 have failed? All of Snyder’s cases collapsed during the specified crisis periods, and thus the explanatory utility of the model is crippled by this selection on the dependent variable, the fall of sultanistic regimes. The necessary and sufficient conditions for a transition can not be determined if authoritarian regimes that survived potential transitions are not also examined.

Although Chehabi and Linz have assembled an important and interesting set of
dictatorships, limited variety also inhibits the contribution of the book’s remaining chapters. The six country studies address three main relationships from Snyder’s framework: between rulers and military, between rulers and society, and between domestic actors and foreign powers. Of these three the link to a foreign superpower (in all cases, except Romania, the United States) looms large in the analyses of the regimes’ rise and fall. In fact, if these cases are representative of modern sultanism, the reader is left pondering whether United States involvement is a necessary condition for sultanism.

In Iran the CIA orchestrated the overthrow of Mossadegh’s government (1951–1953) and the start of Mohammed Reza Shah’s authoritarian state. Similarly, Mobutu’s installation as president of the Congo came at the hands of the CIA. The U.S. military occupied the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, and Haiti and created the military institutions that Trujillo and Somoza used to rise to power. Finally, the U.S. imposed protectorate status on Cuba and the Philippines, and later both Batista and Marcos turned to the U.S. as a patron and ally.

Ceaucescu’s Communist Romania aside, all of the book’s regimes drew extensively upon and sometimes fell victim to their ties with the United States. Have there been sultanistic regimes that developed without the United States, or are these modern dictatorships dependent on American involvement? Unfortunately, the U.S. role is so present in the cases studied that the reader can not discern whether sultanism was simply a product of Cold War superpower rivalry or a modern reincarnation of Weber’s original concept. Since Transitions from Authoritarian Rule devoted no chapter to a Latin American sultanate, the four Latin American case studies make important and original contributions. But they are not counterbalanced geographically or analytically. A richer empirical choice of cases would have included more countries outside the scope of direct U.S. involvement. Finally, ten years have passed since the original conference that produced Sultanistic Regimes, and attention could now be paid to regimes that outlasted the Cold War and U.S.-Soviet geopolitics.

Chehabi, Linz, and the book’s contributors have opened a new door for those studying transitions by turning attention from outcomes (democracies consolidated or otherwise) toward the diversity of origins. But the resulting implications are understated, as the editors pay great attention to past regime turnover but do not address current authoritarian regimes. Consequently, they overlook the possibility that many authoritarian states that avoided democratization may represent a class of more resilient sultanistic regimes, ones that have not collapsed and thus have been overlooked for their lack of transition. The contributors to Sultanistic Regimes have accepted too easily the earlier contention that “in the contemporary world sultanistic dictatorships are exceptional cases.”13 Among existing dictatorships they may now outnumber bureaucratic-authoritarian states.

A look at several contemporary Arab regimes supports just such a conclusion. In fact, the neglect of Arab politics in Sultanistic Regimes may strike many readers as
ironic because Weber drew his theory of sultanism from the Middle East (p. 6). It was also a missed opportunity because the book's typology and framework illuminate contemporary Middle East politics and because the Arab Middle East contains some of the most resilient and most sultanistic dictatorships of the world. Inclusion of two or three such regimes (for example, Libya under Muammar Qadhafi since 1969, Syria under Hafez al-Assad from 1970 to 2000, Iraq under Saddam Hussein since 1973) would have ameliorated the case selection problems that constrain the book's conceptual reach and expanded the range for Snyder's independent variables and outcomes (the dependent variables of transitions and stability).

The utility of Chehabi and Linz's book should not be limited by its selection of cases. To realize the full potential of sultanism as a concept, comparativists can build upon this work by applying sultanistic theory to new cases in other regions and circumstances. The Middle East, currently marked by persistent dictatorships and weak opposition, offers one such area.

The Middle East in the 1990s: Authoritarian Strengthening and Institutional Decline

A sober assessment of Middle East regimes over the last decade requires the exchange of a transitions focus for critical attention to the survival strategies of authoritarian regimes. Attempts to bring the Middle East into the study of transitions have argued that, while regimes have not democratized, they are making steps toward liberal politics. Yet current evidence contradicts even this modest claim. Many regimes have grown more restrictive while maintaining a mask of liberalization consisting of parliamentary elections and controlled openings for civil society organizations, what Chehabi and Linz call constitutional hypocrisy. Such strategies of political manipulation merit scholarly attention, not because they signal progress toward electoral democracy, but rather because they pose a method for perpetuating authoritarianism.

Table 1 provides Freedom House scores for twenty Middle East countries during the beginning and end of the 1990s. These data summarize the dominant trend of authoritarian persistence and strengthening. The most repressive regimes (Sudan, Syria, Iraq, Libya) remain at the far end of the freedom scale or, in the case of Saudi Arabia, reach it. While Freedom House describes Jordan, Kuwait, and Oman as having opened up, more than twice as many states appear more authoritarian after the same period. This data set places fifteen of the twenty Middle Eastern states in the category of “not free,” meaning a composite freedom score of 5.5 or above. Political developments are taking place in the Middle East, but in most cases they involve neither democratization nor authentic liberalization.

Accounts, much less analyses, of this restriction of liberties and bolstering of authoritarianism are rare in recent studies of Middle East politics. The tendency has
Table 1  Comparative Survey of Freedom: Middle East, 1990–1991/2000–2001

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<td>Algeria</td>
<td>4.4 (4)</td>
<td>6.5 (5.5)</td>
<td>Less free</td>
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<td>Bahrain</td>
<td>6.5 (5.5)</td>
<td>7.6 (6.5)</td>
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<td>Egypt</td>
<td>5.4 (4.5)</td>
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<td>Iran</td>
<td>6.5 (5.5)</td>
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<td>Iraq</td>
<td>7.7 (7)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>2.2 (2)</td>
<td>1.3 (2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>5.5 (5)</td>
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<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>6.5 (5.5)</td>
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<td>Lebanon</td>
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<td>Libya</td>
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<td>Morocco</td>
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<td>Oman</td>
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<td>Qatar</td>
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<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>7.6 (6.5)</td>
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<td>Sudan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>2.4 (3)</td>
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<tr>
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Scores are for political rights and civil liberties with a composite score averaging both in parentheses. Scale is 1 to 7, where 1=most free and 7=least free.


been instead to consider elections, political parties, and civil society as engines of democratization rather than to view them as instruments of state control. Recent developments in Egypt, one of the states that suffered both political and civil liberties setbacks according to Freedom House, demonstrate the inaccuracy of this approach. Egypt has long been considered to have one of the most progressive regimes in the Middle East. Egypt's tradition of political parties, including a liberal experiment in the 1920s and 1930s, and its relatively free press seemed to position it for an eventual transit to full democracy. Some scholars have even called Egypt a democratizing state experiencing "occasional stagnation." But such optimism no longer reflects the reality of institutional decline and steady dominance by President Hosni Mubarak and the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP).
One of the first to point to this shift, Eberhard Kienle, has analyzed how Egypt deliberalized in recent years. He found that the Egyptian polity’s turn away from pluralism and political freedoms represents neither a case of temporary slowdown nor a halt to liberalization. On the contrary, “opportunities for formal representation and participation have been restricted rather than simply stopped from expanding.” The more recent record only strengthens his argument. The highly irregular and fraud-ridden elections of 1995 yielded the largest parliamentary majority the NDP had ever achieved, 94 percent of the seats. That same parliament passed legislation (subsequently signed by the president) that reinforced the regime’s grip over civil society organizations. President Mubarak, who has ruled longer than any Egyptian leader since Muhammad Ali (1805–1849), received the endorsement of even the leading opposition party for a fourth term of office and won the 1999 presidential referendum with over 95 percent of the vote. In February 2000 Mubarak extended emergency rule (martial law) for an additional three years. Finally, elections in the fall of 2000 reduced the NDP’s parliamentary majority only somewhat to 84 percent.

The study of recent trends in authoritarian strengthening and deliberalization, rather than limited democracy or slow liberalization, has barely begun. Libya since Independence, All in the Family, and Ambiguities of Domination take up this challenge with very different explanations of the extraordinary stability their authors observe in Libya, the Gulf monarchies, and Syria. They address how these states have sustained closed regimes with sultanistic characteristics yet have lasted for decades. Through different methodologies and perspectives, Vandewalle, Herb, and Wedeen explore the frontiers of empirically rich, theory-driven work on contemporary authoritarianism.

**Patrimonialism and the Distributive State: Libyan Politics under Qadhafi**

Foremost among theories of Middle East authoritarianism is the rentier state thesis of no representation without taxation. H. Mahdavy first used the term rentier state to describe Mohammad Reza Pahlavi’s government and the domestic benefits it reaped from oil revenue. Mahdavy contended that countries drawing heavily upon external rents have less need for an extractive taxation system. Rather than collecting revenue through conventional taxation, rentier states share oil income with their citizens. Consequently, by distributing wealth rather than collecting capital through taxes, they gain an “independence from the people seldom found in other countries.” In political terms, the power of the government to bribe pressure groups or coerce dissenters may be greater than otherwise.” At the same time, the government remains vulnerable to a drop in rent income and a weakening of its externally dependent strength. Dirk Vandewalle applies rentier theory to modern Libyan politics, elaborating on the relationship between the distribution of oil wealth and the maintenance of a deeply personalistic regime.
In *Libya since Independence* Vandewalle shows how Muammar Qadhafi has used oil revenues to sustain an unpredictable and demobilizing system for the past thirty years. The author applies an impressive array of primary source materials, including interviews of Libyan political leaders (from Qadhafi down), and cogently portrays the inner workings of a regime that combines rentierism with arbitrary nonideological personalism. Contending that late developers dependent on external revenues are confined by preexisting structural constraints, Vandewalle depicts how Libya dug itself into an uninstitutionalized economic hole vulnerable to exogenous shocks. The story he tells is particularly compelling because he captures a logic of individual action embedded in a rent-seeking environment where corporate interests give way to individual demands. Further, the story includes the unconventional element of Qadhafist ideology, the Third Universal Theory, and Vandewalle enriches an economic tale with a detailed account of sham ideology in action.

Since 1973 the Third Universal Theory has provided the political infrastructure for Libyan state and society. Qadhafi’s alternative to capitalism and socialism, the Third Universal Theory declares that “representation is deception” and the only true democracy is one in which the people rule directly. As part of this “massocracy” (juma‘ hiriya) Qadhafi organized a system of people’s congresses that allegedly created direct governance by Libyans. In practice, the congresses kept popular demands unorganized rather than effectively articulated. Although Vandewalle’s account of Libya’s nonrepresentative, “consultative” system seems dizzying at times, he conveys the potential disorientation experienced by Libyans working in the system.

In many ways, most of the delegates at the annual GPC (General People’s Congress) were...inadequately trained to provide answers, or even suggestions, to the increasing technocratic problems the country and its economy faced—a difficulty the regime attempted to solve after 1978 by adding “technocrat advisory groups” that delegates could consult.... (pp. 98–99)

Eventually even these mock participatory organs were overshadowed by the regime’s revolutionary committees: “[S]tarting in 1977, the appearance of revolutionary committees in the country’s political system, and their growing political power thereafter, clearly showed that popular rule was being supplemented by a rival system of revolutionary rule that was more agile and more responsive to Qadhafi’s rhetoric” (p. 99). Contrary to the argument of *Sultanistic Regimes* that the undermining of institutions weakens a regime’s grip on society, Vandewalle shows how autonomous and arbitrary governance has helped the regime maintain power and keep the opposition off-balance. The Libyan state totally circumvented “the creation of requisite legal and regulatory institutions that define the way markets work” (p. 16). Consequently, Qadhafi’s tenure depends on a constructed “statelessness,” supposedly devoid of hierarchy or bureaucracy, which demobilizes popular demands and fortifies his per-
sonal authority. Oil revenue is distributed directly to Libyans, and "citizens themselves remain rent takers and engage in unproductive economic activities" (p. 26). Consequently, to the extent that struggles for resources occur, they are individual rather than group or class-based. Thus, life under the Libyan distributive system evokes an exchange of power for wealth as citizens relinquish any popular authority over the state in return for access to its largesse (p. 42).

Yet discussions of violence and attempted revolts, like that of October 1994, during the postboom period hint that politics are developing despite rentierism, although the book does not investigate the mechanisms behind this dynamic. Unlike Snyder's hybrid structure-agency approach, Vandewalle's argument privileges the Libyan political economy in explaining the country's course under Qadhafi. The resources of the distributive state enable it to control territory without building a system of taxation or the requisite bureaucratic structures. Instead, Qadhafi uses oil to buy off Libyan citizens directly, depoliticizing them by turning them into isolated rent seekers. Whereas moderate and maximalist opposition forces struggle against the modern sultanistic states in Chehabi and Linz's book, they receive little attention in Vandewalle's analysis, as Libyans trade wealth for politics.

Accordingly, the extent to which Qadhafi's regime has erased the drive for dissent and collective action seems less complete in Libya than Vandewalle's structural account can explain. Recent coup attempts against Qadhafi demonstrate that control over the state's resources remains an area of contestation among Libya's military leaders. Meanwhile, rivals from outside the regime have also emerged. In particular, the challenge of Islamist movements, such as the Militant Islamic Group (MIG) and the Islamic Martyr's Movement, move the stakes of dissident action from purely material claims to an ideational battle over the nature of government.

Although this area of political engagement merits further attention, Vandewalle's insightful and deliberate analysis of the Libyan state offers an important and satisfying contribution. Future research on the distributive state can expand upon Vandewalle's work by exploring the uneven character of natural resource patronage in reducing both incentives and opportunities for organized resistance. This line of research may find in Libya the same contingent struggles between soft-liners and opposition movements that Sultanistic Regimes discusses.

In many respects, Libya since Independence could fit seamlessly into Sultanistic Regimes. Echoing Linz and Chehabi's typology, Vandewalle depicts how Libyan politics disrupt citizens' lives. "[P]opular rule and popular management were meant deliberately to introduce and perpetuate uncertainty among the country's citizens, to keep them off-balance, and to destroy intentionally all social, economic, and political mechanisms so that what had traditionally provided structure in their lives disappeared" (p. 137). Because of Qadhafi's ideological hypocrisy, Libya conforms more closely to the sultanistic model than Middle Eastern monarchies such as Saudi Arabia or Iran.
As a result, the political legitimacy of distributive states often remains quite low and is inextricably bound to the rulers or to their ability to continue the state’s welfare functions. Although the political system may be portrayed as representing the interests of citizens—a distinct part of Libya’s strategy but unknown in Saudi Arabia or Kuwait—it is unlikely to have significance beyond window dressing and lip service. (p. 27)

Overall, Qadhafi’s Libya stands out as an exemplar of sultanistic tendencies. Qadhafi’s strategy of statelessness avoided both routinization of procedures and “institutions that provide continuity and predictability and that form a buffer and a locus of interaction between the state and society” (p. 37). While Qadhafi’s Third Universal Theory prepared to mobilize all citizens so that government would run by consultation rather than representation, the result was confusion and only the most superficial form of popular participation. Setting “consultative” façades aside, one finds in Libya a radical departure from a Weberian rational-legal order, a state distinct from the bureaucratic-authoritarian model.

Still, further work on Libya in this vein would challenge some of the postulates of Linz and Chehabi’s book. For example, although Libya epitomizes the traits described in Sultanistic Regimes, it stands apart in its independence from foreign support. With regard to U.S. aid, the outcast state of Libya contrasts with American regional allies such as Saudi Arabia. Inclusion of Libya would help balance the study of sultanism against America’s local sultanates of Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba, while also varying outcomes by providing a case of sustained stability.

Dynastic Monarchism in the Gulf: The Modern Persistence of Traditional Authority

In 1968 Huntington questioned whether monarchies would long survive the challenges of modernization and social change. Writing three decades later, Michael Herb reflects on the surprising resilience of Middle Eastern kingdoms. In All in the Family Herb departs from the rentier explanations of Vandewalle and many other Middle Eastern specialists. Instead, he examines institutions of familial rule to explain the endurance of the Persian Gulf monarchies, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. Why have these kingdoms survived, while their regional peers in Afghanistan, Egypt, Iran, and Libya fell during the mid to late twentieth century? Through an intraregional comparison that includes Jordan and Morocco as mid-range cases Herb develops a theory of dynastic monarchism (rule by family consensus) and argues that the monarchies that filled top government institutions with their family members successfully stabilized their systems.

In dynastic monarchism the family “monopolizes the top posts in the regime” (p. 3). By occupying not just the throne but also the major ministerial positions of gov-
ernment, the survival of individual nobles is not dependent on the rise of a particular prince to the throne. Accordingly, royal families prefer to manage succession disputes rather than be torn apart by them. Princes are willing to accept ministerial positions and forego a protracted struggle for the crown, since such conflict would threaten the entire monarchy. When the king rules alone, however, the system succumbs to internal division and external threats. Thus, by keeping top cabinet positions in the family a dynastic monarchical regime inculcates a collective preference for sustaining the existing system.

The incentives for dynastic monarchism follow a prisoner's dilemma model, in which members of the royal family prefer maintenance of the system and power sharing to the risk of revolution. They cooperate and accept a second-best outcome (holding a position in the monarchy’s government without heading it) rather than defect and face greater loss (the collapse of the whole regime). “In the dynastic monarchies...those who fail to win the succession receive compensation prizes, if they want them” (p. 49). During succession disputes royal family members “bandwagon” together in a winning coalition, rather than risk a divisive conflict that threatens the entire system. “Without these incentives to bandwagon, the endgames of family disputes would feature pitched battles between wings of the family, not the exile of a prince or two. The former threatens the institution of dynastic rule; the latter does not” (p. 47).

Herb first traces this dynamic in Kuwait through the course of the twentieth century. Since instituting dynastic monarchism in 1938, Kuwait has weathered internal disputes during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s and survived beyond Saddam Hussein’s short-lived occupation in 1990–1991. The practice of bandwagoning plays out through internal family “elections” for the crown prince, a position that has more or less alternated between two familial lines within the monarchy (the Jabir and Salim branches of the Al Sabah family, p. 80). Because even the losers maintain control of government ministries, their continued prosperity is not threatened by this tradition.

When Jabir al-Ali Al Sabah failed to win his bid for the heir apparenty of Kuwait in 1978 he remained in his cabinet post for several more years, then retired. He remained, thereafter, one of the more prominent shaykhs of the Al Sabah, consulted weekly by the emir, and enjoyed considerable status prestige, and a measure of power. The situation did not compel him to fight to the death for power....(p. 50)

Although Herb wants to explain continuity and the absence of revolution, he examines a full range of outcomes, exploring both stability and collapse. Showing variation in both explanatory factors and outcomes, Herb considers nondynastic monarchies and considers their failure in Libya, Afghanistan, Egypt, Iraq, and Iran. For example, in Libya’s Sanusi monarchy the king refused to share power in his family and thus triggered a chaotic “scramble for power among the leaders of the
"regime" in 1969. "It also led to a fatal relaxation of monitoring the military for political reliability. Both created the conditions for Qadhafi's rise to power...." (p. 189). But in the fall of the Egyptian, Iraqi, and Iranian monarchies, Herb turns to nonfamilial factors to explain political upheaval: in Egypt the corrupt and discredited leadership of King Faruq, in Iraq the ill-suited alliance of elites with the landowning class, and in Iran the shah's miscalculations on the use of repression against the first Islamic uprisings. While adeptly challenging the rentier thesis by charting record high oil income in Libya, Iraq, and Iran just as their monarchies fell, the argument loses some of its coherence as other factors enter the story.

Herb is strongest in arguing the sufficiency, not necessity, of the link between dynastic monarchism and regime stability. Succinctly stated, "no Middle Eastern dynastic monarchies have fallen to revolution" (pp. 188–89). This particular practice of sharing power and resolving disputes internally thus seems sufficient to prevent revolutionary collapse. However, to argue that dynastic rule is necessary for survival, Herb extends his analysis to the nondynastic kingdoms of Jordan, Morocco, and Bahrain and attempts to depict them as vulnerable systems. For example, Bahrain has not followed the pattern of its neighbors. "The system of succession by family consensus is the glue that holds the dynastic monarchies together, and that glue is missing in Bahrain" (p. 132). Rather, Bahrain has adopted the rule of succession to the king's eldest son. For Herb the institution of primogeniture encourages the kinds of divisions that undermine rather than bolster a monarchy. Yet the regime persists.

Herb also shifts his concept for Jordan and Morocco. He classifies these countries as nondynastic regimes that survive tenuously. For example, Herb interprets assassination attempts against the Moroccan King Hassan II as evidence that the regime is unstable. "Dynastic monarchies do not suffer close calls of this sort" (p. 222). But it is hard to judge assassination attempts in themselves as regime instability since they do not require mass-based opposition. For Jordan, Herb contends that domestic unrest shows the weakness of the Hashemite monarchy.

These sections seem to stretch the theory too far, as though all nondynastic monarchies must fall in order to prove the resilience of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the other power-sharing regimes. Herb's theory of dynastic monarchism and intraelite bandwagoning already provides a useful tool for understanding regime stability in six regimes. Even if one places Bahrain, Jordan, and Morocco with the shah's Iran and King Farouk's Egypt, instead of in a separate middle range category, nondynastic monarchies still appear more fragile than their dynastic peers (less than half remain, while all the dynastic monarchies still stand today). Thus, the institutional arrangement elucidated by Herb explains a large portion of monarchical continuation and collapse in the Middle East. Concentration of royal power in a single figure makes a monarchy's overthrow much more likely, while family rule by consensus appears to sustain decades of dynastic authority.

In addition to explaining regime stability, Herb also argues that monarchism
offers "a sound institutional base for the incremental emergence of democratic institutions" (p. 15). These discussions of political opening are less compelling than the analysis of elite conflict resolution. Herb presents little evidence and drifts toward optimistic conjectures. He contends, for instance, that monarchies that introduce parliaments, such as in Kuwait, are especially well-suited for democratic change.

Indeed, monarchical political institutions prove more amenable to power-sharing compromises than virtually any other sort of authoritarian regime. Liberal monarchism has a genius for satisfying Dahl's requirement that authoritarian elites and their oppositions work out a system of "mutual security" that lessens the risks of liberalization. (p. 262, emphasis in original)

Herb proceeds to argue that, since kings are not required to submit to a popular vote for their legitimacy, their position is more insulated than "rulers of single-party or military regimes" who "are rarely so bold as to hold free parliamentary elections, but at the same time assert their permanent right to retain control of executive authority regardless of the outcome of the elections" (p. 263).

Herb may underestimate the audacity of contemporary autocrats. He certainly constrains the meaning of liberalization by identifying it with parliamentary elections that do not threaten the king's position as ultimate leader of the state. Moreover, on the slippery issue of power sharing between parliament and the monarch Herb writes that constitutional monarchy can encourage a meaningful reordering of authority. He sets an appropriately high bar that the "bargaining positions of the monarch and his opposition must be in rough balance" for the regime to adopt parliamentary institutions (p. 260). Yet this same standard logically implies that truly parliamentary monarchies will develop infrequently, since opposition movements in these states rarely make demands from a position of parity. Earlier, Herb explicitly notes the weakness of social opposition when he describes the improbability that a renegade family wing will ally itself with nonroyal challengers. "Today no domestic actors of such influence exist in the dynastic monarchies" (p. 49).

Finally, Herb does not consider the potential for parliament to shift influence back to the monarch rather than solidify a division of power between crown and society. Can not the carrot of inclusion appease opposition leaders, while giving them a mainly consultative role over government decisions, as has happened in republican-style regimes like Egypt? The Freedom House reports on Jordan and Kuwait suggest that monarchies have been more flexible at broadening political space than the region's republican autocracies. But since these steps are tentative and distant from an institutionalized division of power, it is hard to ascertain from Herb's analysis why this tightly managed opening would produce gradual and meaningful democratization. Instead, the likely result seems to be a continuation of monarchical authoritarianism without a substantial division of governmental powers.
Despite a less empirically grounded prediction of constitutional monarchy, Herb's analysis of sixteen Middle Eastern monarchies offers a rich and original contribution. While he stretches his theory to explain mid-range cases, his discussions of the negotiation of internal conflict and regime maintenance are engaging and broadly applicable. His argument can be extended to republican-style authoritarian regimes as well as other monarchies, all of which face comparable challenges of leadership continuity. Even nonroyal governments sometimes assume a dynastic character (for example, Haiti and Nicaragua of the cases in *Sultanistic Regimes*, plus present-day North Korea, Syria, and the Congo). In other presidential regimes the succession question may not be confined to the leader's sons but may instead involve deals and maneuvering among leading members of the ruling party or the military. Indeed, recent discussions in Egypt over a successor to Mubarak illustrate the contemporary import of Herb's theory.

**Cultivating Compliance in Asad's Syria**

While Herb finds that broad familial governance preserves the Persian Gulf monarchies, Lisa Wedeen examines how Syrians, in their daily practices and languages, reinforced the cult of authority surrounding President Hafez al-Asad (1970–2000). Drawing on years of field research, interviews, and analysis of government newspapers, Wedeen skilfully conveys how Syrians interact with, challenge, and ultimately enable the system under which they live, a regime built around "disciplinary-symbolic power," rather than legitimacy or coercion (p. 30).

Distinct from popular acceptance (legitimacy) and the use or threat of force (coercion), disciplinary-symbolic power is the method of gaining mass compliance by nurturing popular use of the regime's own mythology and praise about the president, "habituating people to perform the gestures and pronounce the slogans constitutive of their obedience" (p. 145). Thus, disciplinary-symbolic power made citizens practice in their daily lives the language and behavior that publicly reinforced the centralization of authority in Hafez al-Asad. Public glorification of the state's leader, which *Sultanistic Regimes* treats as a characteristic of extreme personalism, takes center stage in Wedeen's argument. "The cult of Asad does not depend for its efficacy on other mechanisms of enforcement; rather, the cult is itself such a mechanism" (p. 145, emphasis in original).

Fundamental to this inculcation of obedience is the intriguing demand that Syrians were not expected to believe the statements they made in support of the regime. Rather, they had only to act as if they accepted the cult's claims. Among numerous accounts of public allegiance to the system's glorification of Asad, Wedeen relates how Syrian soldiers once replied to an officer's request to describe their dreams of the previous night. The young men answered with preposterous descriptions of Asad as a mythical and superhuman figure. For example, one said: "I saw the leader holding the sun in his
hands, and he squeezed it, crushing it until it crumbled. Darkness blanketed the earth. And then his face illuminated the sky, spreading light and warmth in all directions” (p. 67). This and other examples show how Syrians, through grandiose declarations and public displays of allegiance, became both “participants...and...daily consumers of Asad’s cult” (p. 69). They also demarcate the boundaries that some Syrians consciously transgressed through both overt and subtle acts of resistance.

Because the cult of Asad’s glorification depended upon formal and public acceptance of the regime’s most absurd claims, divergence from the official rhetoric exposed “the gap between compliance and belief” (p. 130) and thus defied the cult’s central aim: to reinforce an internal censorship independent of the threat of physical reprisal. In the tradition of James Scott’s work on hidden transcripts and disguised resistance, Wedeen describes how Syrians’ opinions toward Asad’s regime were subversively aired through the widely accessible media of plays, films, jokes, and political cartoons, of which a particularly striking set is reprinted in the text (p. 87). In these forums Syrian artists and intellectuals proposed an alternate version of the regime’s story by showing individuals struggling skilfully to navigate the required model of public behavior. For example, one skit writer portrayed a Syrian interviewed on the street who was then told by the reporter that his words were being broadcast live. The character’s careful self-censorship to sensitive queries like “Are you interested in politics?” acknowledged the dissimulation required by the regime. Thus, this scene and other parodies were not subversive for the information they transmitted, but rather for the connection they made with their audience to join, in the most private sense, an unspoken conspiracy of disbelief toward the cult’s claims.

In the final chapter Wedeen briskly places the success of Asad’s rule in perspective against the regimes that preceded it—a series of coups and active yet precarious parliamentary rule in which parties rarely won governing majorities (p. 144). In contrast, Asad, through public glorification of the president that required Syrians to display their allegiance even if they did not truly internalize it, demobilized opposition and reduced the potential for collective resistance. To explain how individual support for the cult generates widespread quiescence, Wedeen draws upon Timur Kuran’s recent argument that preference falsification explains the rapid spread of eastern Europe’s revolutions.27 For Wedeen, the public behavior of compliance reinforces itself while Syrians act as if they believe the regime’s claims. Consequently, they are unable to develop a shared perception of opposition. “To the extent that people decide whether to obey or to rebel on the basis of what they think others will do, Asad’s cult—from public spectacles to posting signs in shop windows—reinforces the expectation that most everyone will obey most of the time. The cult displays obedience, thereby helping to ensure it” (p. 152). Situations of social dissimulation can quickly erupt into mass opposition as individuals update their assessment of successful action when more persons express dissent. Wedeen finds this tipping model framework applicable to Syria, but also argues that the kinds of “transgressive practices” she observed in her
research have not yet convinced "participants that others are willing to protest actively" (p. 152). Accordingly, prospects for revolution seem slim.

Wedeen's analysis explains not only the lack of regime change, but also the general absence of public resistance. It adds a further layer to the study of authoritarian continuity beyond observing the outcomes of crisis moments. Wedeen draws attention to another dimension of authoritarian stability by explaining why Asad's regime faced few widespread challenges at all. Thus, regime endurance and longevity must be considered in terms of the capacity both to defeat opposition movements (as Asad did when his army crushed the Hamah Revolt in 1982, killing between five thousand and twenty thousand people) and to prevent dissent from arising, reducing the drive for collective action before it yields large-scale resistance.

Rather than dwell on formal political structures, Wedeen delves into the private underpinning of the Syrian regime and its longevity. Because of her book's focus on internal discipline and self-censorship, it may encounter criticism for being hard to verify empirically. Future work on disciplinary-symbolic power can determine the final extent of a social scientific contribution, but Wedeen specifies that one may disprove her argument by finding "a regime in which tired slogans and empty gestures foster allegiance and actually generate people's emotional commitments to the regime" (p. 152). Alternatively, one could also challenge Wedeen's work by showing that coercion remains the ultimate enforcer of compliance in the Syrian state. Since repression does not have to be applied in order to intimidate and silence dissenters, this alternate explanation could be a strong counterhypothesis.

The succession of Bashar al-Asad after his father's death in 2000 provides new ground for applying and testing Wedeen's analysis. Will the cult maintain its influence under Bashar? If so, how? If not, will the state's reliance on coercion increase? A diminution of the cult's power without a corresponding increase in coercive pressures or popular legitimacy would point to the importance of these latter forms of authority and by implication undermine the centrality of disciplinary-symbolic power in both Asad governments. Thus, Bashar's tenure offers a crucial case for debating which forms of power underpin the Syrian regime.

The creation of authority through symbolic practices and the social discipline they evoke among their consumers presents a core issue in regime analysis around the globe. Consequently, Wedeen's work on disciplinary-symbolic power merits a prominent position, alongside traditional concepts of legitimacy and repression, in explaining the maintenance of authoritarian regimes.

**Beyond Transitions: Researching Contemporary Authoritarianism**

While it has been both important and exciting to watch the progress of democratization in many corners of the world, counter trends also merit attention.
Authoritarianism may dominate some regions entirely (the Middle East and Central Asia), while touching others more unevenly (Africa, South and East Asia), but non-democratic rule can be found in most parts of the world. Many states sustain authoritarian rule with varying combinations of overt repression and more subtle restrictions of liberties, but these complexities should not push researchers to shy from cases of authoritarian stability and strengthening or spin their cases as "slow democratizers."

Recent works on Middle East politics highlight specific issues and regime structures underlying the potential for long-term authoritarianism, a possibility that Chehabi and Linz do not fully consider. The cases researched by Vandewalle, Herb, and Wedeen may not be nearly as fragile or as rare as *Sultanistic Regimes* contends. Highly personalistic states like Libya and Syria have endured economic crises and popular unrest, while quelling opportunities for large-scale protest. Moreover, in contemporary Middle East political development their stability is common, even modal. Demonstrating deep sultanistic tendencies, many Middle East leaders during the past decade have molded institutions to support their own aims, while further restricting popular political space. Regimes elsewhere (for example, Malaysia, Turkmenistan, and Venezuela) have developed their own distinct, but often comparable, methods of keeping power in the hands of incumbent elites. Consequently, analyses similar to Vandewalle's, Herb's, and Wedeen's can apply to cases outside the Middle East and help explain the strategies and institutions that support authoritarian rule in those systems as well.

At the third wave's low tide comparative regime analysis depends on theoretical approaches that encompass politics under a variety of systems. Existing dictatorships, even if they move toward authentic pluralism, may take a different route than past democratizers. Yet their contribution to political theory need not be constrained by this difference. These books illuminate unexplored puzzles that can fuel a new research agenda concerned with authoritarian stability as well as transition. Under what conditions does extreme patrimonial rule, sultanism, sustain itself? What role do external rents and superpower support play in regime maintenance? How do authoritarian elites resolve internal power disputes and prevent the rise of soft-liners who might ally with the opposition? To what extent does an autocrat's personality cult reduce the need for coercion or popular legitimacy? And why do some authoritarian regimes successfully curtail collective action, while others give rise to domestic challenges?

These inquiries do not depend upon democratization or transition, but the answers to them will necessarily improve our understanding of why some regimes collapse while others persist. As part of this effort the concepts of distributive states, dynastic monarchism, and disciplinary-symbolic power can be challenged, refined, and above all applied by a broad range of comparativists following contemporary politics under authoritarianism.
NOTES

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4. Tremendous intellectual resources were brought to bear on the issues of liberalization and democ­ratization in the Middle East. See, for example, Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany, and Paul Noble, eds., *Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World*, vol. 2 (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1999); Augustus Richard Norton, ed., *Civil Society in the Middle East*, vols. 1 and 2 (New York: E. J. Brill, 1993, 1996). It is not an exaggeration to say that these books remain off the radar screen of most non-Middle East specialists, even those concerned with transitions to democracy.

5. A survey of political science articles found that Middle Eastern cases comprised only 7.1 percent of the cases covered in three major comparative politics journals from 1982 to 1997. If Turkey and Israel, the region’s electoral democracies, are omitted from the count, the fraction drops to 3.4 percent. Similarly, African states made up only 6.6 percent. Adrian Prentice Hull, “Comparative Political Science: An Inventory and Assessment since the 1980s,” *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 32 (March 1999), 120. For a discussion of the professional obstacles faced by Middle East scholars, see Jerrold Green, “The Politics of Middle East Politics;• and James Bill, “Comparative Middle East Politics: Still in Search of Theory,” *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 27 (September, 1994).

6. Lucian Pye, “Political Science and the Crisis of Authoritarianism,” *American Political Science Review*, 84 (1990), 3–19. Today both the number of fully democratic countries (countries holding meaningful and regular elections) and the number of authoritarian countries fall in the mid to low eighties. Another two dozen states hold deeply flawed but partially competitive elections for the highest positions in government.


11. Ibid., p. 89.
12. Romania’s outcome is coded as similar to Haiti’s (military coup followed by soft-liner rule) (p. 78). Yet Romania now provides an additional transition from sultanism to democracy. A year after the publication of Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation, Romanians elected opposition leader Emil Constantinescu president, ending government control by the “ex-communists that had been ruling [Romania] since 1989.” Michael Shafir, “Romania’s Road to ‘Normalcy,’” Journal of Democracy, 8 (1997), 144.
17. Mubarak’s Egypt was once called the “trailblazing” case of liberalization in the Arab World. See Michael Hudson, “After the Gulf War: Prospects for Democratization in the Arab World,” Middle East Journal, 45 (1991), 408.
20. Ibid., p. 220.