Democratization by Elections?

COMPETITIVE CLIENTELISM IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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Authoritarian regimes often hold elections for decades without these contests contributing to a democratic transition. Even in countries with hegemonic authoritarian regimes—North Korea, Syria, and Zimbabwe, for example—voters have gone regularly to the polls, casting ballots for representatives at the local and national levels. Indeed, scholars have consistently found that authoritarian regimes that hold elections tend to last longer than those that do not.[1] It is only in "competitive authoritarian" regimes, which already exhibit some degree of political uncertainty and potential instability, that elections appear to increase the likelihood of a stable transition to democracy.[2]

Why do elections often tend to reinforce rather than undermine authoritarian regimes, and under what conditions do they do so? Focusing on legislative elections in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), this essay argues that elections provide elites and their supporters an opportunity to compete over special access to a limited set of state resources that they can then distribute to their clients—a process that I call "competitive clientelism." By doing so, elections aid ruling elites' ability to grant special privileges to local elites, creating among contending elites and their followers a belief that they will have access to state resources—if not today, then in the future—and establishing an incentive structure that tends to return proregime legislatures. Far from putting pressure on the regime to democratize, elections can provide a mechanism for the distribution of patronage that reduces demands for change.

Citizens in the MENA region have long participated in elections. For decades, voters have gone to the polls and cast their ballots for a variety

of institutional bodies—student organizations, trade unions, municipal councils, national legislatures, and the head of state—as well as to voice their opinions on referendums. They have done so in a variety of regime types—from monarchies to single-party states—and even when they lived under British and French tutelage during the mandate period. They have participated in elections in the context of regimes that maintained highly constrained political spheres. Even today, despite the reintroduction of multipartism in many countries and a general (albeit limited and circuitous) trend toward political liberalization, countries in the MENA consistently rate as Not Free or only Partly Free according to Freedom House, and have notably lower scores in government responsiveness and political rights according to the World Bank.

How voters behave, the ways in which incumbent elites attempt to manage citizen participation, and the extent to which elections can promote democratization depend to some degree on the type of election. Elections for student councils, trade unions, municipal councils, national legislatures, and the presidency all have very different dynamics. Take, for example, presidential and legislative elections in dominant-party regimes. In this context, presidential elections signal support for the incumbent leader, dissuading potential opponents from challenging the regime. To be effective, regime elites must show not only that voters will cast their ballots for the leader, but also that they can mobilize the people. They seek both high voter turnout and an overwhelming majority of votes cast for the ruler. In contrast, legislative elections do not require—and rarely see—such high voter turnout or such sweeping victories.[3]

Competitive Clientelism in Legislative Elections

Before examining the logic of competitive clientelism, we must first clarify what authoritarian legislative elections are *not*. Elections are not contests to choose key decision makers or fill top cabinet posts. Even where the legislature is not dominated by a single party, as in the monarchies of Jordan, Kuwait, and Morocco, the parliament does not significantly affect government formation. The king chooses the prime minister, who then appoints the cabinet, distributing ministerial portfolios without systematically consulting the parliament or considering electoral results. Parliaments may bring down the government through a vote of no confidence; however, because the king can dissolve the parliament at will, and has at times chosen to do so, this power remains more theoretical than actual.

Legislative elections are also not intended to influence policymaking, as the role of the legislature in MENA countries is narrow. Members in the elected lower houses rarely legislate, but rather consider laws formulated by the government. Moreover, in countries such as Jordan and Egypt, an appointed upper house effectively holds veto power. In others,

such as Syria, the ruling party officially dominates the legislature, with the party elite carefully vetting all candidates. The parliament's role is so limited in Syria that one parliamentarian, in response to a question about legislation, reportedly exclaimed: "We're members of parliament. We don't make laws!" Add to that the ruling elites' ability to use emergency laws and other measures to disband parliament or punish individual representatives who pose a significant challenge to the existing political order, and it is unsurprising that legislators shy away from critically addressing sensitive policies.

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In authoritarian regimes, legislative elections are seldom arenas in which the opposition and incumbents struggle over the rules of the game. Only infrequently are elections in such regimes two-level competitions—over offices and the resources associated with them and, at the same time, over expanding the political sphere. The question of democratization is rarely, if ever, on the table. Indeed, in many cases elections were instituted entirely apart from any discussion of "democratization." In Algeria, Syria, Tunisia, and Egypt under the monarchy, elections were used to grant participation, but not under the guise of democratization. Moreover, even where elections are convened in the context of promised or expected democratization, people become cynical in the absence of real change. For example, there is little reason for citizens of Egypt to expect democratization to be just around the corner more than thirty years after the reintroduction of multiparty elections.

What, then, is at stake in MENA elections? In consolidated authoritarian regimes, where the policymaking component of elections is highly circumscribed, elections are best thought of as competitions over access to state resources, or "competitive clientelism," and the candidates and voters alike recognize this. Parliamentarians may not make laws, but they can use their position and influence to pressure ministers and bureaucrats into dispensing jobs, licenses, and other state resources to their constituents. They do so, in part, by using the floor of the legislature and their access to the media as leverage, threatening publicly to cast doubt on officials' performance should their requests go unmet. Consequently, many call parliamentarians *naïb khidma* (service deputies), referring to their role of providing services rather than legislation or executive oversight.

In countries with little transparency and weak rule of law, finding a mediator (or *wasta*) between the citizen and the state is key. Individuals wanting to enter university or obtain government licenses, public hous-

ing, employment, or a broad range of other state resources know that they must often find someone to help them accomplish their goals. Navigating such ordinary dealings with the bureaucracy is rarely a simple matter of finding the right office, filling out forms, or paying a standardized fee.

Thus a 2006 survey that Lindsay Benstead and I conducted in Algeria found that only 59 percent of respondents would, if they wanted to resolve a dispute with the government, first take the issue to the agency in question, and only 24 percent believed that this approach would be the most effective. Even more strikingly, only 39 percent said that if they were seeking employment in the public sector they would first approach the agency; less than 20 percent believed that this was the most effective approach. Similarly, surveys conducted in Jordan in 2000 and 2005 found that the majority of respondents believed that they would need *wasta* in order to succeed in conducting business with government agencies or to obtain public-sector employment.[4] Anecdotal evidence from Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, and Syria suggests that this phenomenon is widespread. People recognize that they need someone to assist them in achieving their goals, and they frequently discuss who is best connected to the personnel in the office of interest and who is willing to help.

Parliamentarians are not the only ones who can provide such services, but given their office, they are well-placed to do so. More important, citizens see this as the parliamentarians' major role, much more than policymaking or oversight. As Sa'eda Kilani and Basam Sakijha conclude:

> [P]arliament, whose main task is to monitor government's performance and legislate laws, is gradually becoming the haven for *Wasta* practices. Voluntarily or out of social pressure, parliamentarians' role in mediating, or, in other words, using *Wasta* between the citizen and the state is . . . becoming their main task.[5]

Legislators also have direct access to certain resources, which they can distribute to their supporters. Some of these are in the form of parliamentary perks, such as personal discretionary budgets and a staff for which they can hire supporters. Other advantages come from their ability to exploit their position for their own personal gain.

Indeed, at stake is not only access to a set of resources that the parliamentarian can help to mediate, but also perks that elected officials can enjoy themselves. In addition to the glamour and prestige of being in parliament and, for some, a hope that they can make a marginal contribution to the public welfare, members of parliament (MPs) also receive cars, drivers, offices, and a set of attractive benefits, and they gain direct access to government ministries that dole out public contracts. Candidates compete not only to obtain a position as a *wasta* between citizens

and the state, but also to obtain their own privileged access to state resources. Thus a factory owner-cum-MP may use his connections with the ministries to bypass import duties or to win large public contracts worth significant sums of money. Finally, in most cases parliamentarians have immunity from prosecution. Incumbent elites sometimes violate this in response to political challenges, as they did in Syria during fall 2001 when they imprisoned MPs who chose to challenge the regime. For many, however, political immunity can be quite lucrative. Samer Shehata describes this mechanism in Egypt:

> Immunity from prosecution, it is said, allows some parliamentarians to engage in all sorts of extra and sometimes illegal practices and business ventures, making significant sums of money in the process. In addition, membership in the Assembly, it is believed, opens up all sorts of other opportunities for pecuniary gain (e.g., selling favors, including jobs, licenses, access to government land at below market price).[6]

The Perspective of Voters

Understanding elections as competitive clientelism can help to explain electoral behavior. Candidates are rarely those who most oppose the regime; legislators have limited incentives to use their positions to challenge the government; and voters' choices reinforce the proregime bias of parliaments. In short, in the absence of political or economic shocks, elections inherently help to maintain the status quo.

Citizens recognize that elections are primarily about obtaining access to state resources, and this affects both their choice of candidates and their willingness to vote. Fundamentally, people vote for candidates whom they believe can deliver services and who will direct those services to them. When citizens feel that candidates do not meet these conditions, they stay home from the polls.

Voters see candidates who have good relations with the state as being able to deliver. They therefore choose not to cast their ballot for candidates who have shown themselves unwilling to cooperate with the incumbent elites. As one Jordanian explained:

> I came to seek a job from the deputy of our district. He told us that the government does not listen to them these days . . . I wonder why the deputies oppose the government. They should comply with and obey the government's policies so that we can take our rights, because it is up to the government to pass anything. Frankly speaking, I will not elect anyone unless the government approves of him because we want to survive.[7]

Voters want to ensure that their legislators will deliver services to them and not to others. Critically, voters often expect legislators to distribute goods based on personal ties to individuals, not simply on membership in their constituency or their support in previous elections.

Not all constituents are equal. Rather, those who can appeal to their representative as a member of the same family, tribe, neighborhood, or village are more likely to gain help. Voters thus act within their understanding of social norms and constraints, and because they do so, elections help to reify and strengthen existing social patterns and clientelistic networks.

Voters support those with whom they already have established ties to obtain positions of privileged access. A 2007 survey by the Center for Strategic Studies (CSS) at the University of Jordan found that more than a third of Jordanian voters cast their ballots for a candidate who was a member of their tribe or family, and almost half of voters stated that they intended to vote along tribal lines. Similarly, a 2003 poll found that nearly half (49 percent) voted for a candidate with whom they had close personal ties. In other cases, emphasis is placed on whether or not the candidate is a committed *ibn al-balad* (son of the community). The motivation is the same: Voters want to elect parliamentarians who will deliver services to them.

Voting for services is not unique to authoritarian regimes, but the extent to which it overshadows ideology, policymaking, and elite turnover may be. Recognizing the limited role that MPs play in policy making, and even more so in replacing the existing elites, voters pay little attention to political parties and party platforms. Citizens vote for *wasta* rather than this or that policy, and thus are generally uninterested in party labels. Indeed, the political parties that do exist are more frequently known by their leader than by the party name or platform. In part because political parties generally lack relevance for citizens, they tend to be weak organizations with little control over or support for their candidates. Islamist parties provide some exception to this. Unlike their secular counterparts, Islamist parties are tied to religious and social-service organizations and thus already deliver services to their constituents, even without holding elected office. As a result, they tend to be better organized than other political parties and to be well respected by and in touch with their community.

In general, however, even in dominant-party states, voters do not cast their ballots based on party membership and policy platforms. For example, in a 2006 poll only 5.8 percent of Algerian respondents stated that they cast their ballots for candidates with "a good program." A detailed study of Fatah infighting during the 2005 municipal elections in the Palestinian territories shows that Fatah leaders recognized that credible commitment to service provision, *not* party platforms, would determine their success or failure in the elections. Similar dynamics have been found in Egypt.[8]

Understanding authoritarian elections as exercises in competitive clientelism provides insight not only into how voters decide to cast their ballots, but also into who goes to the polls in the first place. Contrary

to the conventional wisdom, which tells us that people in authoritarian regimes are forced to vote, voter turnout in MENA legislative elections is generally quite low. For the most part, voting in these regimes is not compulsory, and turnout in the latest legislative elections in the MENA ranged from a high of nearly 90 percent in Tunisia to a low of 23 percent in Egypt, where some districts registered turnout rates as low as 7 percent.

Given the authoritarian nature of the regimes and limited role of the legislatures, many believe that voting is simply irrelevant. Asked why they do not vote, people often say that "elections are not useful in this political system" or "elections are a fraud." Individuals from groups that have historically had tense relations with the regime—such as Palestinians in Jordan or those from traditionally oppositional areas in Iran—tend to abstain from voting because they believe that their candidates will not be able to deliver services. Citizens are also more likely to abstain from voting if they believe that their representative has the capacity to provide *wasta* but will not do so for them. Consequently, turnout in rural areas tends to be higher than in urban areas, reflecting the fact that social networks tend to be denser and individuals are more likely to have personal relations with candidates outside the cities. Importantly, the result is that more conservative voters are likely to go to the polls, reinforcing rather than undermining the regime.

Candidates and Outcomes

Who runs for elected office in the Middle East and North Africa? Those most likely to throw their hats into the ring are those who either have, or can anticipate developing, close ties with the state. Those who are most opposed to the regime, on the other hand, will not run. Opposition elites are all too aware that if they use positions in parliament to oppose the regime they will not be able to obtain resources. Denied the ability either to distribute state resources or effectively to change the system, they will eventually be denied votes as well. Moreover, many argue that elections and legislatures are simply "a game" intended to shore up the regime. Thus they stay out of politics, instead channeling their efforts into civil society and other activities. Individuals who do run tend to recognize their role in delivering services. Their campaigns emphasize their personal connections and ability to provide services rather than party platforms or hotly debated policy issues.

Significantly, the majority of candidates in the Middle East finance their own campaigns, often at astounding expense. This is partly due to the potential financial gains that successful candidates can reap in office. For example, Egyptian candidates will spend vast sums to run in campaigns, despite a legal campaign-spending limit roughly equal to US$12,300 (in a country where annual GNP per capita is less than

$1,500).[9] Similarly, in Jordan and Syria, candidates generally fund their own campaigns, often drawing extensively on their personal accounts, at sums that both candidates and observers agree are many times the average annual income.

Understanding elections as a business investment helps to explain which types of elites choose to become candidates. Those most fervently opposed to the regime are the least likely to enter the race. Some see running in elections as legitimizing and supporting a nondemocratic regime. They also recognize that they would probably lose, because voters do not cast ballots for candidates whom they perceive as unable to work with the government. Thus, for ardent opponents of the regime, running for office is both ideologically distasteful and a poor investment.

Elites enter the race when they believe that they can win, or at least when they can raise their social prestige through campaigning. A 2005 survey of Jordanian candidates that I conducted in conjunction with the University of Jordan's Center for Strategic Studies found that they made the decision to run based on the encouragement of family, friends, and their tribe. By contrast, the urging of political-party elites and government officials to enter the race was much less important. Moreover, candidates who belong to parties other than the ruling party often choose to run as independents, deemphasizing their party affiliations. Recent elections in Palestine and Egypt—where many members of Fatah and the National Democratic Party (NDP), respectively, ran as independents—demonstrate the extent to which service provision and individual connections dominate party affiliation and platforms in elections.

The campaigns also emphasize candidates' ability to deliver services and their willingness to do so. In Jordan, candidates are more likely to discuss their tribal ties and family relations than their political positions. In Egypt even candidates who are committed to discussing the legislative and oversight roles of the parliament recognize that services, not legislative records, interest voters.

Elections can be expensive enterprises, but they also have relatively low barriers to entry. Because political parties are weak, they do not play an important role in vetting potential candidates. Moreover, while ruling elites will use legal and extralegal means to prevent determined, vociferous opposition candidates from running, they typically do not limit the number of candidates. Indeed, rulers generally benefit from a large number of candidates and the resulting high legislative turnover. In races with large numbers of contenders, candidates with even a relatively small number of supporters often win, and many "wasted" votes are cast for the losers. In fact, in Jordan's 2003 parliamentary elections more than 60 percent of the ballots were cast for candidates who failed to win seats.

In subsequent elections, then, it is not surprising that potential candidates believe that they have a good chance of victory and continue

willingly to enter the race. With more and more hopefuls deciding to play the odds, the number of candidates in the MENA region has ballooned. In Jordan, on average, seven to eight candidates have contested each seat in the four elections since 1989.[10] In Iran's 2000 parliamentary elections, more than five-thousand candidates campaigned for the 290 seats at stake. And in the 2005 Egyptian elections, 5,133 candidates ran for 444 parliamentary seats.[11]

Ruling elites can manage elections with relative ease. Elections are fundamentally about access to state resources, not changing the rules of the game through a process of democratization, and the logic driving both the candidates' and the voters' choices tends to reinforce the regime. Ruling elites can therefore shape elections through institutional mechanisms rather than relying primarily on repression.

Incumbents can fashion district maps to funnel legislative seats—and resources—to traditional supporters of the regime. In Jordan, districts are drawn to favor (disproportionately) areas where East Bank (that is, non-Palestinian) Jordanians predominantly reside, and anecdotal evidence suggests that Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq engaged in similar manipulation. Electoral rules also shape outcomes in the ruling elites' favor. The 1993 Jordanian electoral law, which decreed that voters could cast only one vote in multimember districts (in other words, "one person, one vote"), favored conservative forces over the opposition. Even in Egypt, where the Supreme Court has frequently ruled in favor of opposition parties' challenges to electoral laws, subsequent legislation has ensured the ruling NDP's continued dominance. The precise rules may vary across authoritarian regimes, but institutional rules—combined with the logic of competitive clientelism—allow ruling elites to use election laws to manage outcomes.

When this method seems to fail—as happened in the 2005 Egyptian elections—rulers turn to repression. Amr Hamzawy and Nathan Brown describe the "clumsy tools" that the NDP used to ensure its continued dominance:

> Independents who had defeated NDP candidates were rushed into the party. In districts where opposition candidates were strong, police were used to surround polling stations to prevent voters from reaching the polls. Journalists covering voting were physically attacked. Supervising judges who publicly criticized official behavior were threatened with prosecution, while the perpetrators of violence were allowed to act unimpeded. The result was something of a schizophrenic election: The campaign itself saw freer discussion and media coverage, limited but real willingness to accept some domestic monitoring, discrete arrangements for international observers, and the creation of at least the form of an independent election commission. But as the extent of the [Muslim] Brotherhood's strength became clear, the gloves came off. By that time, only the crudest of tools were left to produce the regime's desired outcome. Far more thuggery and manipulation were necessary than was healthy to protect the regime's reputation.[12]

Yet such occasions are striking because they are rare. The experiences of Iran, Jordan, and Syria are much more common: Ruling elites may engage in some fraud and repression, but they can largely manage electoral outcomes through institutions and competitive clientelism, thereby maintaining proregime parliaments.

Prospects for Democratization

Elections in authoritarian regimes not only fail to push the transition process forward, but tend to strengthen the incumbent regime. They create political dynamics that undermine public support for institutions and individuals associated with democracy. They also provide a more efficient mechanism of patronage distribution, allowing incumbents to remain in power at a lower cost. Only in the presence of economic or political crisis are these elections likely to serve as a catalyst for democratization.

Elections based on the logic of competitive clientelism foster public disillusionment with democratic institutions. Citizens develop a cynical view of parliament, seeing parliamentarians as privileged pawns, willingly supporting the regime's policies in return for personal enrichment, or at best as ineffective. Opposition elites who do run in elections, and particularly the few who win seats, are often viewed as having been coopted by the regime. Unable to make policy, they become part of the patronage network, providing selective benefits to their constituents.

Parliaments are further weakened by low incumbency rates. Turnover rates of parliamentarians typically exceed 75 percent. In Iran, for example, only 83 of 275 MPs returned in 1992, and fewer than 60 of 290 returned in 2000.[13] In Jordan, only 19 of the 110 members elected in 2003 were returning from the 1997 parliament, and only 20 of the deputies who won in 1997 elections were returning from the 1993 parliament.[14] These turnover rates are the result of weak parties, the huge number of candidates, and patronage-based voting. It is much easier for voters to expect that they will receive selective benefits from their parliamentarian than it is for the parliamentarian to distribute selective benefits to all of his constituents.

Similarly, elections in hegemonic authoritarian regimes tend to weaken political parties and undermine opposition leaders. Parties come to be seen as personalistic cliques, focused on their own interests. Less than a fifth of Algerians surveyed in 2006 believed that parties served the people's interests, as compared to 79 percent who believed that they served the leader's interests. In a 2007 CSS survey, only 9.7 percent of Jordanian respondents believed that political parties represented the people's social, political, and economic aspirations. Similarly, a 2003 poll found that less than 15 percent of Jordanians believed that parties served the interests of the people, while 49.1 percent believed that they served the party leaders and 35.3 percent did not know.

Citizens also view parties as unable to field candidates effectively or influence government. For instance, a 2004 CSS poll found that less than a fifth of Jordanians believed that their parties had been somewhat or very successful since parties were legalized in their country in 1992. Moreover, a 2007 CSS survey found that 84 percent of respondents believed that no parties were capable of forming the government in Jordan, and fewer than 5 percent named a party that they thought could form the government. Similar attitudes were expressed in Morocco, where the palace—recognizing in the 1990s the crisis of weak parties—actually sought to shore up the opposition parties. Even in dominant-party states, the public does not view parties as successful. In our 2006 survey, only 5.5 percent of Algerian respondents believed that political parties were "very successful," 49.6 percent saw them as "somewhat successful," and 36.9 percent saw them as "not very successful." In Egypt, when asked about the importance of political parties, 54.5 percent of respondents in a 2000 al-Ahram survey saw them as "important," and 24.5 percent considered them to be "somewhat important." Even here, however, 21 percent of respondents believed that parties in a state dominated by the ruling NDP were "not important."

Not surprisingly, then, citizens choose not to join political parties. In Jordan, the 2004 CSS survey found that only 1.3 percent of respondents already were or planned to become members of a political party. In Egypt, two surveys conducted by al-Ahram in 2000 found that only between 4.7 percent and 5.4 percent of respondents claimed to be members of a political party, a surprisingly low proportion given the role of the NDP.

As a result of weak support, political parties tend to splinter into even weaker offshoots. Activists understand that most voters cast their ballots based on a candidate's profile, not his or her party affiliation. Thus disgruntled party members find it easy to leave and form a new party since the party label is of little value in the first place and most parties have minimal funding. An important exception to this rule appears to be Islamist parties, which control significant resources. More frequently, however, weak parties become weaker and even less effective through a series of splits and splinters.

By allowing elites an opportunity to vie over access to state resources, elections not only help to undermine prodemocratic forces but also provide an efficient mechanism for distributing patronage. The frequency of legislative turnover gives those who have failed to win a seat the hope that they might win in the future. As such, elections can help the party in power to coopt potential counterelites. Elections also can help to link the countryside to the capital, enabling ruling elites to distribute patronage to constituents in outlaying areas without requiring detailed local information.

Finally, ruling elites may benefit from a "democracy dividend" in re-

turn for holding elections. International advocacy for holding elections increased after the end of the Cold War, and aid was often channeled directly to ruling elites—hardly incentive for political change. This dividend has not been available to all countries. For example, Syria, in contrast to Egypt and Jordan, has had a difficult time gaining respect from the international community for holding elections—even though elections in Egypt and Jordan arguably have not moved these countries any closer to a democratic transition than have those in Syria.

The Potential for Authoritarian Breakdown

This analysis suggests that we should be cautious in expecting that legislative elections will foster democratization in the Middle East. They may. But they can yield real change only if circumstances on the ground are altered in ways that would affect voters' and potential candidates' decision making. Supporters of democracy should thus focus on changing the overall playing field rather than just the electoral process.

Elections are most likely to advance democratization when they are held in the context of declining political and economic resources. The reason for this is simple. The stability promoted by elections depends on the ability of incumbent elites to deliver resources. Voters cast their ballots for proregime candidates and candidates choose whether or not to run based on the expectation that ruling elites both monopolize resources and are secure in power. If ruling elites are unable to deliver or if the government appears vulnerable for political reasons (defeat in war, for example), then voters and candidates may defect and elections may become much more contested. Oppositions tend to exploit such circumstances and to cohere more. In these cases, elections can foster democratization.

Elections under authoritarian regimes may also lead to democratization when the legislature's powers are expanded vis-à-vis the executive. This is a tall order, and particularly unlikely in the absence of domestic crises or external pressure. To the extent that external forces can apply pressure for change, however, it should be aimed at expanding the legislature's powers as well as improving election procedures. To be successful, parliamentary-strengthening projects must enhance parliament's ability to make policy and to hold the executive accountable. Such improvements should turn voters' attention to candidates' policy preferences, strengthen political parties, and boost the possibility of democratic change.

Enhancing transparency and the rule of law, and developing an economic sphere that is independent of the state would also increase the possibility of democratization. Such improvements would limit the demand for *wasta*. With increased transparency, voters would no longer be so dependent on personal ties to obtain resources, and with the develop-

ment of a private sector truly independent of the state, they would rely less upon state resources in the first place. Voters could then focus on candidates' policy positions and vote for those who best represent their interests, and opposition candidates would see a greater chance of winning and thus be more willing to enter the fray.

Of course, these are not easy changes to effect. Authoritarian elites recognize that increased transparency undermines their authority, and can be expected to resist strongly. They also understand the political advantages of controlling the country's wealth, and even amid the process of economic liberalization they have found ways to maintain high levels of state control over the private economy. In the absence of such changes, however, elections can be expected to help bolster authoritarian regimes, and democracy promotion through elections will have little impact.

NOTES

1. Jennifer Gandhi and Adam Przeworski, "Dictatorial Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats," *Comparative Political Studies,* November 2007, 1279–1301; Barbara Geddes, "Authoritarian Breakdown: Empirical Test of a Game Theoretic Argument," paper presented at the American Political Science Association annual meeting, Atlanta, 1999; and Axel Hadenius and Jan Teorell, "Elections as Levers of Democracy? A Global Inquiry," in Staffan I. Lindberg, ed., *Democratization by Elections: A New Mode of Transition?* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

2. Jason Brownlee, "Harbinger Toward Democracy: Elections Before the End of Authoritarianism" in Lindberg, *Democratization by Elections.*

3. See Jennifer Gandhi and Ellen Lust-Okar, "Elections Under Authoritarianism," *Annual Review of Political Science* 12 (2009): 403–22.

4. The poll was conducted among 320 politically active members of various elites, including doctors, journalists, lawyers, and politicians, with 45.8 percent responding that they would seek *wasta* before beginning their task, and 19.2 percent looking for it after beginning; see Sa'eda Kilani and Basem Sakijha, *Wasta: The Declared Secret—A Study on Nepotism and Favouritism in Jordan* (Amman: Press Foundation, 2002), 126. Similarly, a 2005 German Development Institute survey found that of 58 businesspeople interviewed, 86 percent believed that *wasta* was important for doing business with public institutions and 56 percent of the respondents admitted to using *wasta* themselves. More than three-quarters of 180 low- and middle-ranking civil servants surveyed believed that *wasta* was either "very important" (51 percent) or "somewhat important" (25 percent) for gaining employment in their department; see Markus Loewe et al., *The Impact of Favoritism on the Business Climate: A Study on Wasta in Jordan* (Bonn: GDI, 2006), 32, 34–35.

5. Kilani and Sakijha, *Wasta,* 58.

6. Samer Shehata, "Inside an Egyptian Parliamentary Campaign," in Ellen Lust-Okar and Saloua Zerhouni, eds., *Political Participation in the Middle East* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2008), 100–101.

7. Khaled cited in Kilani and Sakijha, *Wasta,* 59.

8. Dag Tuastad, "Local Elections in Gaza," in Lust-Okar and Zerhouni, *Political Participation in the Middle East;* and Shehata, "Inside an Egyptian Parliamentary Campaign."

9. Shehata, "Inside an Egyptian Parliamentary Campaign."

10. Hani Hourani et al., *Who's Who in the Jordanian Parliament: 2003–2007* (Amman: Sindbad, 2004).

11. Haleh Esfandiari, "Is Iran Democratizing? Observations on Election Day," in Larry Diamond, Marc F. Plattner, and Daniel Brumberg, eds., *Islam and Democracy in the Middle East* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 124; and Shehata, "Inside an Egyptian Parliamentary Campaign."

12. Amr Hamzawy and Nathan J. Brown, "Can Egypt's Troubled Elections Produce a More Democratic Future?" *Policy Outlook,* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, December 2005. Available at *www.carnegieendowment.org/files/PO24.brown.hamzawy.FINAL1.pdf.*

13. Kayhan cited in G.M. Tezcür, "Intra-Elite Struggles in Iranian Elections," in Lust-Okar and Zerhouni, *Political Participation in the Middle East.*

14. Hourani et al., *Who's Who in the Jordanian Parliament,* 204.