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Democracy and Authoritarianism in the Middle East  
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## Introduction

Over the past few decades and especially at the turn of the century, there has been a flurry of reforms proposed and passed by governments in the Middle East, seeking to of modernization, as well as promising progress towards a more democratic, politically-open society. Faced with growing international criticism for their anti-democratic processes, deteriorating economic conditions, and internal political upheavals and political opposition, rulers of these regimes have been compelled to implement measures that seem to open the political arena to more contestation, relax restrictions on political participation, and amend constitutions with great frequency in order to deflect such criticisms. The rulers of these many of these countries speak the language of democracy, promising further political reform, but do these promises and reforms necessarily guarantee a transition to a more democratic system? Or are these measures a mere smoke screen, cleverly implemented to cushion authoritarian regimes from domestic and international criticisms while at once retaining power?

This paper intends to discuss a specific case of Middle Eastern regimes, the partial autocracy, and its experience with democratization and the challenges the process faces. I will first examine the methods used to analyze Arab authoritarianism in comparative politics, followed by a discussion of views concerning the nature of democracy in an Arab context and how society at large interprets its message. I will examine the major players in the political arena who have the power to change the political system, namely the ruling party or individual, the liberals, and the Islamists, all of which have proven to be the only viable political actors for reasons discussed later. After identifying the actors, I will largely take up the recent research that focuses on the durability of semi-authoritarian regimes in the Arab world and why such systems of government have endured for so long without any fundamental change in the political order. Such a discussion will mostly focus on institutions, such as security forces, election rigging, and the co-option of opposition groups that have been implemented for the perpetuation of autocratic rule, steering clear of stereotypical arguments that blame Islam for the autocratic phenomenon.

To illustrate the points which I intend to make and the authors' theses I intend to support, I critically examine the example of Morocco, as it is heralded as one of the most promising examples of a partial autocracy making a democratic transition. I will focus on tools of democracy that the regime uses to manipulate oppositional forces, such as the Constitution and parliamentary election allocations. I will also examine the role that moderate Islamic movements have played in the country and how they have managed to pose as a oppositional political force, and the general trends observed when Islamic political groups interact with the political system, such as adopting more moderate and tolerant platforms. The strategies used by the regime and the Islamists when considering inclusive politics will also be addressed. My thesis will support the inclusion of these Islamists in the political process as the only viable way to spur democratic change in the Middle East, namely Morocco's Justice and Development Party (PJD). Their large support base, strong internal organization, relative independence from the regime, and their ability to adapt to democratic institutions have been shown in the case of Morocco, and bode well as helpful steps towards democratic consolidation. I end by suggesting that oppositional forces need to unite in order

to break the political deadlock that has managed to keep these states from advancing on the path of democratization.

### *Getting to Pluralism: Operating a Partial Autocracy with Three Political Actors*

A principle source around which I will frame the discussion will be the recent publication from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, authored by Marina Ottaway, Amr Hamzawy, and Michele Dunne, entitled *Getting to Pluralism: Political Actors in the Arab World*. The authors of the group's most recent publication, a culmination of years of research on the subject of democracy promotion in the region, have concluded that governments in the Middle East have reached an impasse due to the gross imbalance of power between the only three viable political actors in the region: the regime, secular groups, and the Islamists. Due to the power disparity that manifests itself in the regime's favor, opposition groups, though existent and viable in the controlled arena in which they operate, do not pose a threat to regime security. Thus true democratic reforms cannot be implemented with the amount of unchecked powers that are exercised by the regime. These disparities, according to the authors, are due not only to the power exercised by the regimes, but also because of weaknesses in the secular and Islamist opposition groups, due to divisions within between hardliners and moderates, as well as a lack of consistent participatory politics and internal disorganization that keep secular parties perpetually weak. Externally, secular groups have either been co-opted by the regime to keep them weak or as political assets. Such examples include the Moroccan USFP, co-opted by the government in an attempt to quell their criticisms while simultaneously protecting them from a perceived Islamic threat. As far as the Islamic opposition, the parties have been condemned to a smaller political arena in which they are allowed to operate. Such discrimination is attributable to the preconceived notion that once to power, Islamists would like nothing more than to abrogate the democratic system that elected them.

In sum, the opposition faces many of the same challenges internally as well as externally as the regimes do, although they have an uncontested monopoly on power that allows them to dominate and dictate domestic policies and stave off real democratic reforms. These obstacles have led to stagnation and a political deadlock from which there is no immediate remedy. Such a cure can only be advanced if the secular opposition is able to reform itself structurally, and the Islamists are able to reconcile differences between their hardliners and moderates, as well as between fundamental ideological concerns and the pragmatics of participating in a competitive political process.

This process cannot better illustrated itself than in the Moroccan parliamentary process and the relationship with the monarch. In Morocco, the institution of the monarch is able to at once allow parliamentary pluralism with contested election, co-opt troublesome opposition forces by playing off the popular fear of the Islamists by the liberals, acting as a benevolent arbitrator between competing voices, and keep all the power consolidated in his hands. To support the observation made in *Getting to Pluralism* on the co-optive nature of these regimes, Professor Daniel Brumberg suggests that the monarchy has adopted a policy of "dissonance" politics (37, 40). In dissonance politics, the regime leaves a "symbolic distance between the state and society", allow different groups to contend as opposition in a political arena (40). This tactic allows Islamists to compete with non-Islamic political groups and to create a space for political discussion that has the effect of discrediting and excluding extremist groups, benefiting the state's security, decreasing the cost of political liberalization, and at the same time, validating moderate, Islamic political positions vis-à-vis the state.

Under this policy, “the more such contention there is, the likelier it is that rulers will risk an opening”, allowing the ruler to act as an arbitrator between the many competing political groups (Brumberg 40). This tactic further legitimizes and increases the political import of the ruler. This political tactic is much more effective than “harmonic” politics, in which the state imposes a unitary nationalist or religious ideology upon the population, represses opposition, and often leads to “‘counterhegemonic’ Islamist opposition movements whose presence increases the expected cost of political liberalization” (Brumberg 37).

In the case of Morocco, the monarch has decided to adopt a policy of dissonance. The tactic has been able to “pit one group against another in ways that maximize the rulers’ room for maneuver and restrict the opposition’s capacity to work together” (Brumberg 40). The tactics of this partial autocracy is one of divide and rule, and in Morocco, the King takes advantage of a proportionally-elected parliament of over 30 political parties, a co-opted loyalist liberal coalition, and a constitution that naturally perpetuates the political domination of the King (*The 2007*, 2; *Chambre*).

#### Interpreting Political Stagnation: Arab Semi-Authoritarianism and the “King’s Dilemma”

The essays in *Getting to Pluralism*, however, fall short of addressing a viable solution to the political stalemate, only suggesting that the oppositional groups reorganize themselves in a way that would evolve into *meaningful* political opposition to pressure the government to implement real democratic reforms, in addition to the social and economic ones undertaken in the last decade. While the authors touch briefly on the mechanisms that keep these autocrats in power, they do not expound upon the role of these institutions, such as the security forces, election manipulation, and other regime tactics that mean to perpetuate their rule. The essays also do not address authoritarianism itself, which is at the heart of the inability for these groups to break free of the political deadlock. Therefore, in addition to this ground-breaking paper, a discussion about the nature of authoritarianism in the context the Middle East is crucial to understanding the mechanisms that create the rules for the political game, as well as to appreciate the adversity the opposition faces. This discussion of the uses and import of executive power serves to underline the core issue perpetuating the democratic stagnation that has taken hold of the Arab world in an era when more citizens are growing politically apathetic and disillusioned with their political options.

One theory that seeks to explain the authoritarian grip on power in the region was put forth by Samuel Huntington is the theory of the “King’s Dilemma”. The paper highlights the concerns that autocrats in the region have over losing their grip on power, suggesting that a controlled, top-down reform model would lead to the masses demanding more from their government, until its eventual collapse and the dissolution of the regime. In *Getting to Pluralism*, Marina Ottaway and Michele Dunne write about the phenomenon of managed top-down reform in the form of economic and social change in these countries, while political reforms have been lacking. The rulers view democratization “as an obstacle to the development of a more dynamic economy and a more efficient administration--and of course as a threat to their power” (*Getting* 17). Noting the case of Morocco, the authors write that this is the reason for why the government has “committed to a vigorous reform program in the realm of human rights and, increasingly, economic development, [that] has given no sign

that it perceives the need to build stronger political institutions at the same time” (*Getting* 17).

While this strategy of top-down reform might be viable as a short-term reform policy of reform, it becomes problematic in the long-term when considering what the process of such reform leads to. Democratic reforms in the long-term inevitably imply the incumbent regime’s loss of power, or at least the ability of the opposition to eventually contest the key seats of power in an open political environment. Thus, in order to truly open to a process of democratization, the authoritarian must *choose* to relinquish their power. The process depends on human agency, and thus a likely push from the bottom to the top, as Huntington views it, cannot yield many results, as he has underestimated the strength and political mechanisms and institutions that keep Arab regimes in power.

As addressed in *Getting to Pluralism*, the opposition is severely divided, the population is largely politically apathetic, and the will and ability to suppress dissent is very high. Though touched on in her essay, Ottaway does not develop this counter point sufficiently, except to suggest that democratization would happen with the moderate splinters in the regime that see democratization as inevitable due to view that world trends towards more liberal, democratic systems would be highly beneficial for their country (*Getting* 15). The theory of regime collapse from the bottom to the top depends too much on the role of the masses without addressing the role of democratic institutions, divisions within the opposition that render it weak, the strength of security forces, international pressure, and the general population’s political apathy.

Top-down reform has indeed been effective in developing better governing strategies and bringing economic and social change such as in Morocco, and indeed the language of liberal democracy has caught the attention of these rulers as the only true, legitimate form of government, as they feel “the pressure to demonstrate the new vitality and continued relevance of their rule...[and] want to be viewed as constitutional monarchs” (*Getting* 15). These tactics of limited social and economic reform sans the political, however, cannot continue indefinitely and has its limits concerning the degree of democratization it can bring to a country. With the unlikelihood of such a benevolent ruler relinquishing the key offices of power for purely democratic principles, there must be just as much concentration on developing bottom-up reform, encouraging the strong support and resources that Islamist political groups possess to internally reform in order to more effectively sidestep government restrictions. A strong, organized, and ideologically cohesive oppositional movement might deliver more results at the ballot box by imbuing greater confidence in political participation on the part of the masses, perhaps increasing political interest and participation. This may also pressure the government to deliver real political reforms that the public demands to deliver on better governance and accountability, rather than waiting for a just ruler to deliver it. What will follow is a discussion about Arab authoritarianism, the mechanisms that keep in power that Huntington has not addressed in his essay, and the political experience of Morocco. First, however, I wish to give an overview of how scholars have chosen to study political change and stagnation in a region that has managed to stave off meaningful, democratic reforms.

## Arab Autocratic Theory Towards a More Democratic System?

Before addressing democracy in the region, the case of Morocco, and its experience with democratization, it is necessary to first address a scholarly dichotomy that has taken hold of the academic world in recent years concerning the political trajectory of Middle Eastern regimes, as well as how the topic has been studied in general in the literature of comparative politics. The dichotomy to which I allude addresses whether or not the Arab world is on the path to a truly democratic transition or whether the path has been further hampered by failed reforms, promises, and political manipulation. I begin supporting the negation of the former branch of the dichotomy. This stance is also articulated by Oliver Schlumberger in the study and evidence concerning the general political development in the Arab world. In the introduction of his book, he claims that there are two camps of scholars in the observation of Arab political developments: those who believe that the Arab world is on a path to genuine, democratic reform since in recent years, and those who believe that the region has been democratically stagnant (Schlumberger, 2-5). In the first camp, the optimists point to three phenomena that have reappeared since the early 2000s that point to expectations that democratic reform is close: political protests, political reforms, and “more visible reform exerted by external players” (Schlumberger, 2). Internally, he cites the Kifaya movement in Egypt, to which thousands took to the street to protest rigged elections. There was also the notable reforms in Morocco’s personal status code for women, and in the Saudi Arabian local elections, noting that “Middle Eastern rulers have started to vie for international attention for engaging in political reform...in the area of governance” (Schlumberger 3). Externally, powers such as the United States have been paying increasing lip service to the necessity of democratic reform in order to curb international security concerns such as terrorism, citing the US Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), as well as World Bank and other initiatives and constraints imposed by international organizations to encourage democratic growth and an improvement in political and human rights (Schlumberger 3-4). The semi-authoritarian system appears to be challenged from both internal and external actors, and autocrats appear to be responding to both sources of pressure in a way that gives the appearance of democratic change.

These arguments, however, do not necessarily lead to this camp’s conclusion that true democratic reform is taking place. This alternative stance, taken by the authors in the compilation of essays in Schlumberger’s book, seeks to address the real mechanisms that can trigger true democratic reform, notably addressing the real obstacle to democratic transition: the ever-enduring grip of authoritarianism and how, without fundamental, institutional changes in the redistribution of power, Arab societies will be unable to make true and lasting transitions to democracy. The branch of this dichotomy has been further supported by

phenomena such as the inclusion of oppositional forces, such as the Islamists, into the political arena that gives the *impression* that regimes in the region are moving away from more authoritarian styles of rule to a more democratic one. Also, regimes promise not only political participation, but also meaningful, status-quo-altering competition, and promising real bids for power in the government that could seem as if democratization is on the agenda. Such reforms, however, have led to no real shift in power from the regime to the parties elected in parliament or the courts. Independent institutions that work to curb a ruler's or regime's power and to effectively pressure for promised reforms do not exist. Most reforms that have been implemented, moreover, have been purely economic and social, such as in Morocco, rather than political, giving the regime a "vener of modernity" that have deafened the criticisms Western governments and domestic democrats cry in protest against such uneven consolidations of power (*Getting* 15).

When using democratic institutions that the state does have in place, such as parliaments and constitutions, these regimes have been cleverly able to stuff them with their own supporters and pass constitutional amendments that in turn restrict opposition and strengthen and consolidate the regime's power. Marsha Posusney's article addresses this phenomenon and the toll it takes on oppositional forces in the larger political system, against which governments use *tadakhul* and *tawzir* (interference and falsification) to manipulate elections (Posusney 91-92). She notes further that what is "more subtle than *tadakhul* or *tawzir*... [is] manipulating electoral design [which] offers incumbents another way to control electoral outcomes in an immediate sense and partisan politics in their countries more broadly" (Posusney 94). Such constitutions, such as the Moroccan Constitution, have also been cleverly crafted to keep power in the rulers' hands, removing contestation for their seat of power from the public political domain. Given these factors, I espouse the latter assertion concerning the Arab world's political trajectory in that the region is not on a course towards a more democratic opening due to the lack of distribution of real power, the coercive institutions that keep these regimes in power, and the manipulation of democratic institutions that rulers have found "useful for dealing with regime-versus-opposition conflicts, thereby paving the way for 'democracy without democrats'" (Islamists).

## The Elusive Arab Autocrat and Arab Democracy in Comparative Politics

Moving now to the study of these hardy authoritarian regimes in the field of comparative politics, Schlumberger writes that “only a handful of articles at the time of this writing aimed to explain the durable yet dynamic form of Arab authoritarianism...the discussion is still at a stage where no mainstream or academic consensus has emerged” (Schlumberger 8-9). Echoing this sentiment, author Marsha Pripstein Posusney notes that “Middle Eastern cases are almost completely absent from the most important works on political transitions, including those that explicitly focus on the developing world”, focusing instead on successful cases of democratization (Enduring 127, 128). The study of these authoritarian regimes and the lack of democracy in comparative politics has been broken down into two camps for the reasons explaining the lack of democracy in the region. The first camp believes that Middle Eastern politics operates at a deficit when it comes to democratic institutions, culture, or due to Islam. The competing assumption is that it is human agency that will decide the course of democratization, or those who view “democratization as a contingent choice of regime and opposition actors” (Enduring 128). Again, given the evidence with the articles that will follow, I agree with Posusney’s assertion that both groups should be considered together to create a deeper understanding of the complexities of the political realities, because both of their “contributions...highlight the importance of various institutional arrangements for choices made by political activists and elites that serve to perpetuate authoritarian rule” (Enduring 128).

The one mentioned factor, the common “orientalist” approach to analyzing the political situation and the assertion that Islam is counter democracy, however, is a point that is mostly unfounded due to recent research. Author Eva Bellin points out that other religions have once been incompatible with democracy, such as Catholicism and Confucianism, yet countries around the world that adhere to these religions were able to make a transition to democracy (Enduring 128, Bellin 23-24). Also, polling such as that which was undertaken by University of Michigan Professor Mark Tessler, shows that “Islamic attachments have relatively little explanatory power so far as political attitudes are concerned...those individuals who are most religious...are no less likely than others to favor...democratic governance...” (Tessler). His assessment will be addressed later.

To continue with this method of considering both schools of thought in my analysis, I point to one example of how authoritarianism has been analyzed in the Middle Eastern context. Many articles and books have been written that ask why authoritarianism has endured for so long in the region while other regions of the world, notably Latin America and Eastern Europe, have made fairly successful transition to democratic systems of governance after the Cold War. Indeed, there have been many discussions about what can be done to wrest power from a small group of elite to distribute to the masses based on these cases. In a world that is slowly becoming more integrated due to globalization and in which regions once characterized by the heavy hand of autocracy are making transitions to more democratically-inclined governments, the question raised concerning the governments of the Middle East has begun shelving the frustrating conundrum of how democracy has not taken root in the region. The question now being asked is why “the vast majority of Middle Eastern and North African states have failed to initiate transition at all...[that in which] lies the exceptionalism of the region” (Bellin 142). In the political science field, research on democratic transition and autocratic collapse have largely ruled out the Middle East as an oddity that did not fit mainstream trends, and thus lent to the idea that the region was somehow exceptional due to

its resilience against democratic transition (141-42). The study of democratization in the Middle East has been a casualty over the years, often written off as Arab exceptionalism and ignored as failed cases. After the fall of communism, as Tessler points out, the Arab world was ignored, and thus theories about democracy could not be refined, nor could more general observations of democracy be observed (Political Attitude 1). Scholarship has only recently turned its attention to the region, this time with a more comparative view in a quest to find similarities to other autocracies and their components around the world, rather than writing them off as exceptional.

In readdressing Schlumberger, the question of why democracy has not taken root is less important than addressing and analyzing how authoritarian, or semi-authoritarian regimes, have remained resilient in face of global trends towards democratization. It is first necessary to understand the complexities of authoritarianism before moving to policy suggestions and attempting to offer solutions to how democracy might take root. To support this overarching, emerging observation that has caught the attention of political scientists in the field of autocratic durability in the Middle East, author Jason Brownlee asserts that “an explanation for the lack of democracy in the Arab world should begin with an explanation for the lack of regime change, namely, regime survival of domestic political conflicts (Brownlee 47). These ”conflicts” to which Brownlee refers, though not mentioned specifically, must certainly be in reference to the issues with which the other authors in this paper have issue: the unhindered ability for durable, effective opposition movements to gather, independent judiciary and legislative branches, independent political institutions, a contestable political arena, human rights, and issues concerning civil liberties. These domestic issues, couple with, exasperated, and perpetuated by the oppressive and uncanny durability of Arab autocrats, lend to the regions complete lack of true democratic roots. Herein lies the exceptionalism of the Arab world, and herein lies the opportunity for further research to first understand the complexities and multi-layered challenges that face the people of the Middle East. Research thus far has proven that there is one no key issue that can solve the problem of autocratic durability in the region.

The questions arisen are beginning to revolve around finding the root causes of such strong autocracies, and analyses have recently ranged from the power and interconnectedness of the security forces and their ability to manipulate and suppress dissent, economic rents and funding for oppressive regimes, lack of international pressure, and the internal manipulation of political parties for the benefit of autocratic support. The concentration of my analysis on the durability of the Arab autocrat will be on the groundbreaking work that was initiated by authors Eva Bellin, Ellen Lust-Okar, and Marsha Pripstein Posusney, which first appeared in a special issue of *Comparative Politics* in January of 2004 (Schlumberger 8-9). I will present these emerging studies of which the research is still in its infancy in order to use it as a background for understanding autocratic institutions, as well as the problems that face democratically-minded forces in the region.

Schlumberger, along with the more contemporary analysts employed in this paper such as Evan Bellin and Jason Brownlee, prefer a structural analysis of authoritarian systems rather than providing positive or negative assessment of these semi-autocratic systems, leaving behind judgmental words such as “gap” and “deficit” when speaking about democracy. The authors seek to deconstruct the mechanisms that keep these semi-autocrats in power rather than holding the region to a definition of democracy after Western models or holding only to the necessity of democratic “perquisites” (Enduring 128). Schlumberger critiques this approach when discussing past attempts to analyze the region: “one thing remained constant: the popularity of an implicit frame of reference that analyzes middle



Eastern politics against the normative background of how “the free world” would like to see Arab countries ruled” (Schlumberger, 6). The assumption taken in the chosen articles in this paper treat authoritarianism as the root of the democratic stagnation and as a phenomenon that should be deconstructed and analyzed both dependently and independently from Western expectations and a balanced consideration should be the the starting point of any meaningful scholarly research. This, therefore, is the assumption around which I frame the discussion about the democratic experience in the region.

### Eva Bellin’s Institutional Analysis of Security Apparatuses and the Myth of Arab Political Exceptionalism

In the first study on which Arab authoritarianism is based is an article written by Eva Bellin, entitled “Coercive Institutions and Coercive Leaders”, in *Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Regimes and Resistance* published in 2005. She bases her analysis on the assumption that it is the power and will that regime security apparatuses enjoy as the reasons for why democratic initiatives in Arab countries are snuffed out before they are able to take root. She discusses four factors that allow these security institutions to stay so powerful: funding paid by rents from natural resources found in the region, support from international actors, patrimonialistic appointment systems, and a lack of popular mobilization to push for meaningful, democratic reforms. These factors, though not all exceptional to the region, contribute to the ability and the will to suppress oppositional forces in these countries for regime preservation. She concentrates on institutional reasons for why democracy has not taken root rather than the region lacking any sort of democratic prerequisites that are inherent in the regions political and cultural history. Such arguments have in the past lead to the dead end conclusion of “Arab Political Exceptionalism” as the explaining factor for the resilience of Arab authoritarian regimes.

Her analysis begins with an assessment of the region’s political statistics. Quoting Freedom House, she asserts that there has indeed been a global trend towards more open, democratic systems of government world wide, especially in the Americas and the Asia Pacific region since the early 1970s (21). This trend, however, has been repelled by the Middle East, and according to Freedom House scores, the region in some instances has remained stagnant or regressed slightly into more consolidated, authoritarian-style regimes. According to the data that she presents, only Jordan has managed to move from the “Not free” classification to “Partly free”, and all countries in the MENA region, save Israel, fall under the categories of “Not free” and “Partially free” (22).[\[1\]](#)

After addressing the region’s political statistics as proof of her claim, she offers common hypotheses as to why the region is an exceptional case in world politics, and concludes that weak economies, weak civil society, poverty, low literacy, societal inequalities, geography, and Islam are all unconvincing reasons to why democracy has not gripped the region (cite). These “preconditions” to democracy are weak evidence to explain the phenomenon, as “democratization is so complex an outcome, no single variable will ever prove to be universally necessary or sufficient to compel it” (Huntington 1991: 38, Rustow

1970: 343; Bellin, 24). She argues that the key to Arab exceptionalism does not lie in a given *deficit* of prerequisite to democracy, as many other regions sharing this have made the transformation to democracy, nor does it lie in the puzzle as to why democracy has *failed* in the region, mirroring Schlumberger's call for a new approach to studying Arab authoritarianism. The true *point de départ* lies rather why the region has "failed to embark upon transition at all" and in this "lies the exceptionalism of the region" (Bellin 24-25).

The basis for Bellin's analysis depends on literature of revolutions laid down by Theda Skocpol. In his work, he notes the disconnect between the seemingly-abundant occurrences of "democratic impulses", such as civil society, yet there seems to be a limited number of successful revolutions that lead to a fundamental regime change. It was hypothesized that there was a strong connection between the state's security forces and successful attempts, as "the strength, coherence, and effectiveness of the state's coercive apparatus" provides an inverse relationship to successful cases of revolution (Bellin 34). Bellin ties this hypothesis of successful revolution attempts to attempts to democratize: "democratic transition can only be carried out successfully when the state's coercive apparatus lacks the will or capacity to crush it" (34). Thus, the exceptionalism in the vitality of these regimes lies in this *will* and *capacity* to stymie any democratic movement, and she does claim that in the Arab world, the existence of both conditions has led to the strength of the security apparatus and the durability of these regimes (143).

Based on her hypothesis that the security apparatuses are the root of the durability of Arab authoritarianism, she presents the four factors that keep them functioning: fiscal health, maintenance of international support networks, the will to repress (which is inversely linked to its level of institutionalization), patrimonialism, and the lack of popular mobilization (Bellin 27-29). In the first, fiscal health, she highlights oil rent money, either from the state itself (such as Saudi Arabia), or exported to other countries (such as Morocco) who in turn provide guest workers, giving the state "access to substantial discretionary resources so that...the state is still able to hew to conventional economic wisdom and "pay for itself first", that is, "give first priority to paying the military and security forces" (32).

Indeed, the Middle Eastern regimes fund their security apparatuses very well, and reserve one of the highest percentages of their GDP to such expenditures in the world. She points out that on average, nations of the world spend about 3.8% on their security forces, whereas the regional average lies around 6.7% (147). She also notes that 40% of global arms sales in 2000 went to only seven Middle Eastern countries, and the number of people that comprise these forces are also high (147). To give a comparative perspective, Bellin cites that French security forces per capita is 6.31/1000, while in the Middle East it is around 16.2/1000 (147). The extra discretionary spending supplied to these countries, whether because of domestic oil, gas, or mineral resources internally or the money sent back to home countries, is one of the few unique features of Arab authoritarian states and which lends to the ability to fund apparatuses, keeping them from giving way to democratization because of pressure from below.

The second variable that Bellin claims strengthens the security forces is patrimonialistic systems of promotion that rely on personal connections to the rulers and their family, such as Morocco, Syria, and Saudi Arabia. Bellin notes that this "Inter- intracorp discipline is maintained by relying on balanced rivalry between primordial groups", taking advantage of tribal associations, as in Jordan and Saudi Arabia (33). Syria, for example, relies on political and religious associations for security appointments, balancing Ba'ath party members, Christians, Alawis, and Sunnis (33). This lack of institutionalization based on political reliability creates another disconnect with society in addition to the rent funds, as

security officials depend on their power and funding from the ruler's directly. An institutionalized system of appointment, on the other hand, would offer independence from the regime's will, which currently "makes for the coercive apparatus's personal identification with the regime and the regime's longevity and thus fosters resistance to political reform" (34). She further asserts that the reason these security forces are resistant to democratic change is because, if democratization were to take place, "few of these officers could expect to ride electoral politics to power" (34).

Another factor that Bellin cites as a condition keeping regimes in power is the lack of popular mobilization in the Middle East for democratic change. Though not limited to the region, it compounds the difficulties of few oppositional forces that exist within these countries. Without a strong and consistent push for democratization on the part of the public, or even for serious reform, the cost associated to oppressing the opposition is low for the regime. Bellin also notes that when opposition was high, the regimes were able to lessen such costs "by playing on the special threat posed by these particular forces" (35). Most notably has been the Arab-Israeli conflict and a fear of Israel, and of the Islamists, a powerful oppositional force in the region. The fear, which will be discussed later, revolves around the assumption that they will come to power and abrogate any democratic process once installed, or a fear of the imposition of an extreme version of Shari'a law upon society without the present regime to keep them check.

In addition to the manipulation of popular mobilization by these regimes, Bellin asserts that the public itself is skeptical of any move towards democratization, as political liberalization experiments have historically been identified with colonialism and foreign domination, as well as the fact that there does not exist an enduring democratic experience in the region, nor are there any true democratic institutions to take advantage of (150). In short, the region operates at an experience deficit that, in the face of these hardy regimes, renders any push for democratic institutions nearly impossible to take root. Added with a strong security system and a regime that possesses the will and power to suppress their population, any internal or external push for democratization is very difficult.

Bellin's argument seems to assert that though the removal of the security apparatus will not necessarily spell out democratic change, its absence is a necessary component in a push for impartial institutions and oppositional political life to take root. In fact, she fears that a vacuum would be created and something more controlling or dangerous could fill the gap (153). She only asserts that the presence of such an institution that guarantees suppressive will and capability will be certain to stop democratization in its tracks. On the road to democratization, however, it is necessary for its removal, otherwise there is no possibility for advancement. Also, without constraints on funding the apparatus, international pressure, formal institutionalization of security forces, and a politically-motivated population, democratic initiatives are politically meaningless.

Bellin's also asserts that another factor that keeps these regimes in power and from initiating true democratic reform is fear. The assumption in her paper, as well as in the Carnegie paper, *Getting to Pluralism*, seems to be that true democratization--meaning the electoral contestation of key seats of power--would not only compromise the current power institutions as they exist, but also the lives of those who hold the power (145-46). Power, manifested partly in the will to suppress, the preservation of that power, and the benefits associated with it are enough of keep the will to do so strong. Taking Bellin's analysis into consideration and comparing it to the political realities laid forth by *Getting to Pluralism* and the "King's Dilemma", it is conceivable that top-down reform for the time being would be impractical on the part of the ruler, as well as any international pressure to bring it about.

This would also contradict Marina Ottaway's assumption that top-down reform, mentioned later, would be an effective long-term strategy. As long as these regimes hold onto their patronage system through loyalty to the regime, are able to pay it from money not extracted from citizens as with rents, and fear political and even life-threatening reprisals by once-suppressed groups due to the opening up of the democratic process, Arab autocracies will continue to endure without any true top-down reform that leads to democratization.

#### Jason Brownlee and the Importance of International Pressure on Arab Regimes

To elaborate on the importance of international pressure on autocratic regimes, author Jason Brownlee offers an analysis of the total autocracies of the region, namely Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Tunisia, in which political contestation, even a superficial form of it like in Morocco, is illegal. In these police states, the government has outlawed political opposition, especially Islamist groups and are notorious for their brutal crackdowns on uprisings and hints of unrest. In his analysis, he seeks to explain why many autocracies that have historically repressed their populations brutally have eventually collapsed, yet others, such as the Middle Eastern North African regimes, have not. He agrees with Bellin's conclusion that the "critical variable accounting for authoritarian durability in these cases prove to be extensive repressive capacity and minimal externally imposed constraints on its use" (Brownlee 45). Brownlee concludes that "it is the *constraint* upon personalistic rulers-mainly by an external superpower-that often brings their downfall "and it is that limitation...that the Middle East has lacked" (Brownlee 48). He also chips away at the notion that the Middle East is somehow unique in its democratic deficit or unique in its oppressive techniques, noting that "authoritarian regimes withstanding domestic challenges through the unrestrained use of repression" is not an anomaly in the political science field (57).

It would thus be helpful to once again use the approach of Bellin in piecemealing the many facets that for so long have lead to the myth of Arab exceptionalism and its exclusion from many political studies as irregular. Brownlee warns, however, that "while independence from foreign patronage may be a sufficient condition for the re-stabilization of a heavily patrimonial regime, it is not a necessary one", and leaves the possibility for further research to be completed in the direction of regime change in order to find necessary consequences that foreign pressure has on repressive regimes (59). Like Bellin's conclusion that the removal of the security apparatus does not necessarily equivocate to the beginning of democracy, Brownlee notes that stronger international pressure does not necessarily mean a more constrained regime. Both authors assert that what they suggest is that security

apparatuses are roadblocks to democratic openings, and further research is needed in the field of democratization in the context of the Arab world and regime durability if democracy is ever to take root. Brownlee notes also that there should be special attention paid to US Middle East policy towards both democracy promotion and the support of authoritarian regimes due to the mixed signals that often reach the Arab capitals. He suggests that the policies should be a state by state case, and agreeing with Bellin, that the support of these regimes due to security interests spurred by oil and amplified threats of Islamic extremism have only worked to guarantee the continuity of these regimes (59).

In regards to Islamic opposition, which the the authors in *Getting to Pluralism* supports as the strongest and most viable oppositional force in the Arab world, Brownlee notes that these groups' efforts to muster support have been hampered by the fact that they are viewed as a security risk by the autocratic regime. In this, the security interests of the US and the regime coincide, and a dangerous, symbiotic relation develops in such a way that the US government is convinced that often-brutal repression of the opposition will prevent a training ground for terrorism. Such a policy is seen as preventing a security backlash against the US. It fails to realize that, "Islam provided a set of ideas for mobilizing *against* dictatorships" (60). This paper, however, will not discuss the debate over whether or not Islam supports democracy, because such a debate depends on many factors, most important of them is who is interpreting Islam. I will instead focus on Islamist political parties that have legitimized the political process through their participation, such as the Moroccan PJD.

### Surveying Support for Democracy in the Arab World

The next issue concerns how democracy is interpreted in the Arab world. In Mark Tessler's and Amaney Jamal's "Measuring Support for Democracy in the Arab world and Across the Globe", the authors look at ways in which support has been measured for democracy and their opinions on the best ways to measure it in the context of the region (Tessler 1). The authors begin by identifying two different types of measuring support for democracy. The first is asking respondents directly about democracy and its institutions, which are most commonly drawn from Dahl's theory of polyarchy or a minimalist definition of what institutions are necessary for a democracy to function (Measuring Support 1). To this, the authors criticize that people are well-versed in democratic lingo, and there is no way to know if they are speaking to be politically correct, as democracy has almost universally

become the one legitimate form of government, or whether they truly are democrats (Measuring Support 1). The politically correct version poses a problem for gauging true democratic commitment because many regimes of the Middle East speak of democracy because it is appealing, yet have no intention of ceding power to the people.

The second type of analysis for gauging people's commitment to democratic transition is the technique used by the Arab Barometer, which uses "mostly value-oriented indicators as proxies for a democratic, political culture," and this technique shows that people may "support democracy, and sincerely, without necessarily possessing a democratic political culture orientation" (Measuring Support 2). This technique, therefore, focuses on attitudes of the "Arab Street", or the assessment of Arab political culture, rather than an assessment of the democratic institutions that are usually designed to hold leaders accountable and act responsibly (Islam and Democracy 3). This study, in the form of a survey about the what the authors have typified as being part of a necessary democratic culture, is one of the very few that have emerged in recent years. Much like studies that address Arab authoritarianism, studies of the attitudes towards democracy of average citizens in the Arab world are scant. The survey and methodology employed by Tessler and the other researchers is useful for asking questions about democracy without actually setting the respondents up for politically correct responses, though there still remains the "possibility that many people are simply giving a socially acceptable or politically correct response" (Measuring Support 3). These responses, however, are generally more reliable than the first method. The method is to create a system that would "gauge both individual level support for the democratic system as a whole" and the sample's ability to practice what they preach in terms of democratic support (Measuring Support 3, 12).

Addressing the role of Islam in attitudes towards democracy, the studies which appear in the Arab Barometer reveals surprising results that transcend outdated assumptions about Arab political culture as it relates to religiosity, the compatibility of Islam with democracy, and democratic transition in general. Such stereotypical arguments advanced that "whereas democracy requires openness, competition, pluralism, and tolerance of diversity, Islam, they argue, encourages intellectual conformity and an uncritical acceptance of authority", as well as citing the fact that divine word is often placed above the will of the people, leading to the authoritarian regimes we see today (Islam and Democracy 5).

Concerning the relationship between religiosity and politics, trends that have been documented in countries like the United States have usually been used to make assumptions about Arab political culture. Namely, that more religious attachment meant more conservative views, and that the more conservative one is, the more general support for security measures and a more hawkish foreign policy will be noticed (Islam and Democracy 7).

The results of these surveys, conducted from 1988-1996, concluded that "despite a number of statistically significant relationships, Islam appears to have less influence on political attitudes than is frequently suggested by students of Arab and Islamic society" (Islam and Democracy 15). Forming part of this conclusion were the observations made in Morocco, specifically, in which "Islamic guidance" in political matters was not an important factor for politics as it was for economic issues (Islam and Democracy 15). Another important trend observed contradicts the assumed inverse correlation between religiosity and support for democratic principles. This, Tessler hypothesizes, could be explained by the fact that the societies observed were in general more pious than secular societies, such as the United States. Personal piety, taken as a common societal thread, would not do much to influence one's political beliefs either to the right or left. The study concludes that "a

democratic, civic, and participant political culture may indeed be necessary for mature democracy,” but given the evidence in the 5 countries observed, including Morocco, “Islam is not the obstacle to democratization that some Western and other scholars allege it to be (Islam and Democracy 18).

Such observations are groundbreaking in how the region should be studied and viewed in comparative politics as presuppositions and stereotypes give way to serious, scientific research. Such a study poses challenges to authors such as Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington, the former who uses more of a classic orientalist approach to addressing the lack of democratization in the region, and the latter, whose “Clash of Civilizations” thesis identified Islam as a distinct culture, the tenants of which are largely incompatible with democracy. Such bases for studying the lack of democratization in the Middle East have also been rejected by the authors that follow. Authors like Eva Bellin, as mentioned before, reject the notion that Islam is to blame for the lack of democratization in the region, citing other religions that were once thought incompatible whose societies currently foster the most robust forms of democracies.

Given the many recent years of study and carefully-planned statistical research undertaken by Tessler and his team, this is by far one of the most compelling and scientifically-sound pieces of data for gauging the opinions of the average Muslim in the Arab world towards democracy, despite potential weaknesses in data collection, as noted above. Given this data, therefore, the issue of Arab authoritarianism returns into focus. If Islam and Arabs’ relationship with religion does not statistically seem to create a culture that is inhospitable to democracy, then why has democracy not taken root in the region? The next section of this paper will treat the phenomenon of these unusually politically savvy autocrats that have managed to perpetuate their rule in the face of international and domestic pressures, and despite the global movement towards democratization of societies. The root of the problem, given these surveys and the articles that follow, are the nature of Arab autocracies themselves, and the institutions that keep them in power.

#### Frédéric Volpi’s Thesis:

The “Pseudo-democracy in the Muslim World” as a Replacement for Western Democracies

In Volpi’s analysis, he claims that scholars have spent much time classifying regimes in the Arab world as to what they lack democratically, holding the liberal notion of democracy-read strong, independent institutions that allow for a free political arena in which the majority will rule-have colored the study of democracy in the Arab world. Like author Schlumberger *et al*, Volpi believes that a better scholarly approach is to start with the descriptive before handing down a verdict. As Schlumberger grapples with describing authoritarian regimes and their unique hold on power in the Middle East, Volpi writes that the the debate concerning the nature of democracy in the Arab world should also follow a similar path. He writes that democracy in the region falls on a spectrum that ranges from a republican-style democracy that is centered around evolved concepts of *asaybiyya*, or group loyalty to the leader or political ideology, to an Islamic-style of democracy in which law is based on “Islam as a creed and the community of believers (*ummah*) as the locus for a just society” (Volpi 1066). This classification of pseudo-democracy falls between both styles of government and is currently how many governments in the Arab world should be classified.

In explaining the democratic experience in the Middle East, Volpi challenges the notion that “democracy” should always be made in reference to what the West thinks about

democracy, pointing out that “democratic legitimisation does not necessarily coincide with liberal democratic norms and processes”, noting the political trend at the end of the 20th century was a deviation from the norm of majoritarian democracy to one that “proposes a type of a democracy that is designed to place restraints on majority rule with the view to protect very specific individual rights and civil liberties” (Volpi 1063-4). Volpi’s consideration of cultural views-shaped by the Islamic tradition of “communal notions of public virtue or religious orthodoxy” challenges calls for direct democracy in order for said-communal preservation, offering an interesting argument that addresses alternative reasons for why democracy as the West knows it have not taken root in the Arab world. This forms the fundamental base upon which pseudo-democracies are founded in the region, and thus must not be negatively compared with liberal democratic experiences. According to Volpi, it should also not be held true that in the presence of democratic institutions, a liberal form of democracy would necessarily take hold of the population. In other words, culture and religious experiences seem to be the basis upon which democracy is to be built in the Middle East, and thus these pseudo-democracies should be considered as unique political phenomena, not as a “a deviation from a ‘democratic’ normative framework and teleological order” (Volpi 1061).

This theory contrasts to the assumptions made in the publication *Getting to Pluralism* in addressing the democratic stalemate in the region, in which a liberal democracy is assumed to be the end-goal and which assumes that society would naturally select this democratic style of government if given free choice and proper, independent institutions. In this case, autocrats are assumed to have an instrumentalist reason for holding onto power and suppressing their population and controlling the political processes themselves to prevent a loss of power (Volpi 1063). Volpi’s theory assumes more than just an instrumentalist approach to autocratic rule in the Arab world, considering that it is instead a natural evolution “influenced by evolving international ideas about liberal democracy” that “are also being reconstructed internally by the interaction between the elite/counter-elite and the populace” (Volpi 1067). Both analyses in both papers offer insights into and descriptions of the possible points on which the Middle Eastern regimes find themselves on the democratic spectrum, and both points of view offer diverging views as to how to conceptualize the discussion of democracy in the Arab world.

While thinking of democracy as a spectrum and systems of government as ongoing processes of interaction between society and ruling elites, Volpi’s argument begins to shake in his criticism of other authors who prefer to analyze the issue from an institutional standpoint. He distinctly discounts the conventional importance of institutions, such as oppressive security apparatuses and the oil rents that form the important pillars of these pseudo-democracies. In his essay, he cites author Eva Bellin as a supporter of this institutional theory that addresses the robustness of authoritarian regimes, and indeed her article, as mentioned in this paper, does not address the cultural, religious, or Islamic oppositional aspects that color the region’s political scene. Volpi also suggests that it is important to move away from the notion that authoritarians are using their powers to suppress and control their population for instrumentalist purposes, noting that their grip on power not always considered a negative trait. He suggests that the uniqueness of these pseudo-democracies and their authoritarian flavor is a product of the fear of the “Islamic free election trap” (Volpi 1067). Quite simply, that the rulers’ “interests as well as the ‘national interest’ clearly would not be best served by the prompt organisation of free and fair elections” as this would “become a means for non-democratic forces to seize power through the ballot box”, as Islamist groups form the strongest oppositional force in the Arab world today (Volpi 1067).



Thus, there are few opportunities and reasons for autocrats to “hand over power ‘gracefully’” (Volpi 1068). Though his point about an analysis of the democratic experience in the Arab world should include one of political culture, Volpi appears to adopt the justification for these autocratic regimes and their unchecked executive power because of this Islamist threat.

Indeed, his argument for considering pseudo-democracies as separate political phenomena that are neither negative or positive, but simply “are”, and thus should be considered for analysis outside the context of liberal democratic expectations based on the inclusion of domestic cultural and political considerations, such as religious influence and the consideration of the public good over that of that of the individual. His argument, however, seems to excuse the presence of authoritarianism in the context of the Arab world, as a mere characteristic of these states and also seems to suggest that suppression of oppositional groups is justifiable due to the mass following that Islamists enjoy. By doing this, he successfully describes one of the techniques that keep autocrats of different stripes in power in the Middle East. One mistake he makes, however, is lumping all Islamists into one group, ignoring distinctions between moderate groups such as the Moroccan Justice and Development Party that are unarmed and part of the state’s political apparatus, and extremist groups or those groups who have not yet laid down their guns, such as Hamas and Hezbollah. These groups can further be broken down into armed groups “Islamic” groups that are independent from the state and either have nationalist ambitions or rally around a common ideological enemy, such as Israel. Nor does he make a distinction between Islamic groups that have evolved to play the political game with experience in elections, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and those groups that have ideological ambitions of collapsing the global order, such as Al-Qaeda.

This theory of the free election trap is also advanced by author Gregory Gause III. He observes and comments on the rise of Islamist governments or parties in certain Arab countries or territories, which fails to take into account the social and political conditions in which they rose. One of the basis of his argument, for example, was the election of Hamas in the 2004 municipal elections. It is well known, however, that in 2006, the group was elected because of its social programs, cynicism with the political process, the Israeli occupation, and disillusion with the Fatah party (CJPME). These elections had nothing to do with their Islamic character, but as a response to what is seen as an ineffective opposition to occupation and the quality of life that Hamas provides for the Palestinian people. The other frequently mentioned case, that of Algeria, can be explained in terms of a win as a protest against the past military rule and the domination of the FLN in politics that persisted since the end of the French occupation.

Gause draws from other examples, such as the recent Iraqi elections, which also seem to miss the point. Gause contends that given the recent surge in violence in newly-founded democracies such as Iraq, that this somehow implicates that radicalism is necessarily the result of a democratic political system. His connection is a bit clumsy, as Iraq is in the middle of fighting what many classify as a civil war, struggling against American occupation, and the fact that the Sunni ruling elite has recently been ousted from power and replaced with one that represented the larger Shi’a community. These factors, however, are not addressed in his assessment in the democratic experiment that Iraq is undergoing, and his generalizations are drawn from a more superficial cause-effect observation rather than an analytical one. In sum, Volpi and Gause categorize Islamic groups too broadly and assumes that if they were elected through free and fair elections, that they would abrogate the democratic process and establish an Islamic state.

The experience of the Moroccan PJD also contradicts the fears laid down by both authors. The PJD has also adopted moderate and even democratic stances towards the Moroccan parliamentary election process, especially after the terrorist attacks in Casablanca in 2003. The group has “agreed to accept the Moroccan constitution, pluralism, the role of the king as Amir al-Mu’minin” (Kaye 155). The PJD has chosen participation over rejection of the political process, even though King Muhammad VI exercises all the real power in Moroccan politics. The party not only acknowledges this, but assures that the monarchy does not contradict its vision of democracy, as it enjoys the support of the Moroccan people, though the exact nature of the relationship between the monarchy and the political system is one of controlled reform and elections (Hamzawy, Interview).

To better illustrate what Gause’s and Volpi’s oversight in categorizing Islamic groups under one heading and thus using it as a crutch to support Arab authoritarianism in their pseudo-democracies, I draw upon the analysis laid out by Mona El-Ghobashy in the evolution of Islamic groups to play politics and moderate as illustrated in Egypt. It is possible to transfer the Egyptian model to the Moroccan Justice and Development Party (PJD) in showing that though authoritarian governments are characteristics of pseudo-democracies, Islamic political parties and their experience playing the political game have lead to a moderation of their messages. This inclusion into politics can help to promote a democratic norms for the parties, either as opposition to check excessive regime oppression. Their exclusion from the process, however, would amount to no more than unchecked despotism that is not conducive to any form of democracy, be they liberal, republican, or Islamic, as Volpin delineates (Volpi 1070). Without the inclusion of the opposition, in this case the Islamists, pseudo-democracies would be little more than blatant dictatorships due to the fact that the liberals, as pointed out by the *Getting to Pluralism*, as the only second source of opposition, are a small minority or have been co-opted by the regime. Without the Islamists in politics, democracy cannot exist.

### Morocco’s Pseudo-Democracy

Though most Arab countries fall under the category of autocracy in some form, the extent of regime control over society and political institutions varies extensively, from the “constitutional” monarchy of Morocco to the police states, such as Syria. To restrict my analysis, therefore, I will concentrate on a state in which political activity is legal and which allow competitive, parliamentary elections, and in which oppositional groups are allowed to exist and compete in the political process, however superficially. This opposition, however

divided, is a necessary component to democratic transition and without it, such as in the police state of Syria or the family-run Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the hope of a successful opposition is moot because it is not assumed here that a benevolent dictator will suddenly throw down his sword and allow for free political competition, as “autocrats do not willingly commit political suicide” (Diamond xi). Regime self-preservation is assumed for the political risks that are associated with a sudden, democratic shift in countries with no recent democratic experiments. Semi-autocracies that allow political inclusion of oppositional forces and which encourage some type of popular political culture, therefore, are the Middle East’s best chance at fostering democratic transition, as they provide a possible political opening to dissenting voices, however narrow or controlled it may be.

Moroccan politics encompass all of the components of semi-authoritarian regimes in the region, especially the complete control of government institutions and mechanisms to influence parliamentary representation and election outcomes. In terms of democratic infrastructure, however, Morocco boasts a lively parliamentary political participation and democratic infrastructure, such as a parliament and courts. The very existence of such institutions “has made Morocco distinct within the Arab world” (Cohen, 51). This infrastructure is important for democratic change in a region in which many regimes target Islamist groups, arresting and imprisoning its members, rigging elections, and enacting laws that prohibit Islamist participation altogether. The king, however, in a bid to modernize and reform his country, has allowed moderate Islamic groups to participate freely in parliamentary elections. Even though the political system is entirely controlled by the Moroccan king, Muhammad VI, he allows these groups to participate in the democratic process. In political terms, it has produced promising results for Morocco’s largest Islamic oppositional force, the Justice and Development Party, or simply, the PJD, and its ability to adapt to parliamentary politics. Thus, it demonstrates how Islamists operating under inclusive, semi-democratic systems such as Morocco could potentially become a strong oppositional force, as demonstrated in the recent elections of 2002 and 2007. I will use the Moroccan example and observations from other Middle Eastern countries to critique the widely-held view that if Islamists are allowed to participate in elections, their inclusion would lead to a *coup d’état* of the regime, leading to an abrogation of the democratic process through which they came to power.

### The Moroccan Political Experience

Since 1997, the Moroccan government has opened its political system under a policy known as *alternance*, was the introduction of a limited political opening under the end of Hassan II’s rule. Though his motives are not fully known, it is speculated that the political opening would have allowed political parties, such as the popular Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires (l’USFP) to take the blame for many unpopular policies initiated by the king in the arena of human rights and economic decline. It is also thought that it would initiate a new pluralized system of government that would quell the rise of Islamism in his country. Other

factors include international pressures on the regime from international groups demanding responses to human rights abuses (Cohen, 51, 58-59).

During the first parliamentary elections of 1997, two secular parties, Istiqlal and USFP, have both sought the protection of the king against the perceived Islamist threat, and form what is known as the *kutla*, a term for parties that were once against the monarchy but now are allied. In the election, the USFP won the most votes, was accepted into the government by the king, and Istiqlal joined. This period, known as *alternance*, was viewed as a permanent state of political acceptance as a government party as they “could not even envisage being in the opposition again” (*Getting 25*, Cohen 46-48). By giving these parties legal legitimacy and by protecting them from Islamists, the King was able to divide his opposition and the parties began to consider themselves as the government rather than oppositional forces that had plagued his rule since their formation after Independence. This left the newly-formed Islamist party, the Justice and Development Party, as one of the only sources of political opposition in the kingdom. As mentioned in *Getting to Pluralism*, the secular parties USFP and the Istiqlal are structurally weak and “do not trust their capacity to compete” (48). Referring to their struggle with the Islamists as viable opposition, the authors portray these groups as “battling on two fronts, secular parties have decided to eliminate one by siding with the monarchy” (48).

Morocco, unlike the police states of the Middle East that author Brownlee identifies, has a very active political arena that allows for political contestation on a level that does not constitute a true shift of power from the King. There exists, however, a great deal of security detail that operates at the detriment to its citizens, as well as a level of international support for the King. This support is based on superficial changes that he has initiated to the constitution to give it more of what was referred to in *Getting to Pluralism*, as a “vener of modernity”. These changes have also altered Morocco has made in terms of political competition by allowing Islamic groups to compete in elections at the turn of the century. Social norms were also altered with the new personal status code, giving women more power over their own lives, such as granting them legal status (*Getting 15; The 2007*, 3). These advancements have been praised by western countries as genuine steps towards democratic transition. This praise has strengthened the King’s legitimacy in the international arena and by many human rights activists.

The Moroccan state, however, continues to jail journalists and bloggers, as was the case with Fouad Mourtada in February 2008 when he created a Facebook profile of one of the King’s family members, who had been “blindfolded and beaten unconscious at the time of his arrest” (Jail for Facebook). The recent censorship of two publications of *Le Monde* is another example of regime control, when the French newspaper published cartoons criticizing the King in October 2009 (Morocco Blocks). There has been an outcry for international condemnation of these civil rights and censorship abuses, yet powers such as the US have remained silent, convinced that Morocco is moving towards a democracy. The King has been able to create not a police state of total oppression, but undergo a strategy of divide and rule under a partial autocratic system of government that allows myriad political parties to develop and compete in a political arena that leaves the King’s position unscathed and uncontested. Such strategy has allowed for the appearance of a lively, democratic culture. Unlike the police states of the Middle East, the King has been able to divide and rule without total oppression through a feared security apparatus. The power, however, as observed by the authors discussed thus far, remains firmly in the hands of the semi-autocrat. The King has been able to use Western tools of democracy to consolidate his power, such as through the Moroccan constitution, and will be discussed next.

## The Moroccan Constitution: Solidifying Semi-Autocratic Rule

Regimes such as the Moroccan monarchy have committed to using modern, democratic-mimicking institutions, such as the constitution, to their advantage in order to pass laws and amendments that perpetuate their rule. These reforms and amendments, however, do not commit to real democratic principles such as less-restrictive elections, checks and balances on power, and which could lead to a less restricted political arena in which healthy, societal and political discourses can take place. As Ottaway and Dunne point out in their analysis of Huntington's "King's Dilemma", "amending constitutions has turned into a veritable industry" (*Getting* 15). True shifts in the balance of power have not occurred, and instead lead to the entrenchment of autocratic rule. As author Abdelsalam M. Maghraoui notes in his essay, "The Constitution still plainly locates sovereignty with the king, limiting the role of the government and the parliament to managing social and economic affairs" (73).

In the case of Morocco, the role of the monarch and his unassailable distance from the worries of political competition was solidified in 1972, under the ratification of a new constitution. It established the King as

"the 'Commander of the Faithful,' thereby formally lodging national sovereignty with a monarchy that claims divine legitimacy...[which] forbade critical debates over royal immunity from messages to parliament or the people at large, and removed parliamentary legislators deemed to be questioning the monarchy, Islam, or the laws of the nation"

(Maghraoui 71).

The Constitution begins by guaranteeing freedoms and human rights, as well as the creation of three separate branches of government, or the necessary institutions for democracy to take root. Though the bureaucracy is present, the autonomy of each branch is not. Through the modern appearance of a constitutional monarchy, the King effectively controls every aspect of the government. The Constitution stipulates that the king names the Prime Minister and can dismiss him, is able to dismiss the PM's cabinet and dismiss the government by dissolving both Chambers of Parliament, and is in charge of appointing the top court officials, even though "the judiciary authority is independent from legislative and executive power" (Chambre). Concerning security issues, the King reserves the right in Article 35[2] to "take warranted measures to necessitate the defense of territorial integrity, the return of constitutional institutions operations, and the management of State affairs" under the vague qualification of an "event" which could leave "constitutional operations susceptible" (Chambre). This vague terminology is left to be interpreted by the King.

One of the most important measures in the constitution, however, lies under Title XII, on *The Revision of the Constitution*, of which "the initiative of the revision of the constitution belongs to the King, the Chamber of Representatives, and the Chamber of Councilors", to which the King appoints the top, influential posts (Chambre). The King,

being of sacred nature and the final arbitrator of the law, in Article 106 is protected indefinitely from removal: “The monarchical nature of the state, as well as the relative arrangements concerning the Muslim religion cannot be the object of constitutional revision” (Chambre). Through modern institutions, though not a product of social contract à la John Locke, the King has been able to produce a democratic document without ceding any real power, and indeed strengthening his position to a level that is almost untouchable under the current political arrangement. Through the manipulation of political tools associated with modernity, such as the Constitution, new laws in human and women’s rights with the personal status code, and the increase in pluralistic political activity at the end of the 20th century, the King has been able to deflect international pressure to politically liberalize while gaining legitimacy in the eyes of the international community. Brumberg cleverly draws a parallel to the Soviet Constitution, writing that “They guarantee freedom speech, but not freedom after speech” (43). In the case of Morocco, the status of the King as the Commander of the Faithful has been enshrined in the constitution, and thus these freedoms or guarantees given to the people by the constitution are legitimate unless they “infringe upon ”national” or “Islamic” values”, such as the case with the trial of the cartoonist after the publication of offensive cartoons against the royal family in late 2009 (Brumberg 43, Morocco Blocks).

This is a case in which international pressure has failed to achieve any democratic results, and thus explains, like in Brownlee’s thesis, why international pressure has not seemed to spur democratic transition. Yet his thesis is interesting in that past pressures on Morocco have led to a less oppressive, more politically active state that is indeed a model for contemporary Arab states on their way towards liberalizing politically. It may be because of international pressure or ties with western countries, especially France and the United States, that have kept it from slipping into the political choke hold of Asad’s Syria. Though a cause-effect mechanism is too complex to be decipher in this case, it is a possibility that there is a link between the two styles of international involvement and the degree of repression of the state under investigation. Again, more research in the area is needed.

It is above all important to recognize what democratic reform means in the Middle East: executive control over the political process and the instituting of social and in some cases, political reforms, as in the case of Morocco. The King has allowed the Islamist Justice and Development Party to participate in politics in order to either give a semblance of reform and modernization or to have the opposition present for its own sake. The power, however, still lies in the hands of the monarch, who chooses who will and will not participate in politics. The institutions that hold the actual power have not changed, yet the democratic process is allowed to continue for the sake of better governance and as an outlet for the people to voice their concerns. In addition to the reality of who controls the political system, it is also important to recognize another possible motive for allowing Islamists participate in politics: their eventual moderation as they interact with the democratic process, thus reducing the challenge to the authoritarian regime. As El-Ghobashy observes with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, groups tend to leave behind the calls for the establishment of an Islamic state and begin to focus on social issues and government corruption. In Morocco, the PJD, though never a radical Islamist organization, was included in the political process *because* of its moderation and commitment to the democratic process and parliamentary politics. In contrast, Gregory Gause's thesis that democracy breeds extremism does not take into account of the unique sociopolitical situations of each country that he chooses to cite as problems, namely Palestine and Iraq, which are experiencing devastating turbulence, war, and occupation. His theory is further weakened in what he implies the word "democracy" should mean in this part of the world. He assumes that a democratic process must be total and penetrate every echelon of the political power hierarchy, which is simply not the case in Morocco. Islamist participation in this country is heavily monitored, and the King can decide to ban them at any time. There have been democratic reforms, and the country is arguably more democratic in the sense of parliamentary elections than in the past, yet it is still the executive that holds the power. Islamist participation in the democratic process, therefore, is possible and is highly desirable to moderate their goals, alleviate frustrating oppression, and to acknowledge the political reality that these groups do exist and have a popular support structure. Their inclusion is necessary for modernization and the development of democratic, representative politics, and the Moroccan model should be an example for the rest of the region's authoritarian regimes.

Mona El-Ghobashy's Analysis of  
Moderation Through Participation: The Political Islamist Experience

Mona El-Ghobashy thesis concerning Islamist inclusion or interaction with the political process leads to a more moderate platform and ideology which is geared more towards domestic and social issues, as well as fighting corruption. By using El-Ghobashy's

theory as a model, it is possible to critique the theory that Gregory Gause advances, namely that Islamist inclusion into the government will create a spiraling effect that will end with an intolerant, terror-producing, Islamic state. In comparing these two thesis, I argue that inclusive government policies of Islamic groups is not a danger and can actually help legitimize the democratic process and moderate these Islamist groups. If El-Ghobashy is correct, then not only does she succeed in over turning Gregory Gause's thesis, but also in offers a promising opportunity for inclusionary politics in other countries in which Islamist political participation has been limited or non-existent. In using Morocco as a case study in which to apply these theories of democratic participation, I show that Islamists have claimed or proven that they have wanted to work with the government and are dedicated to the democratic process, and their moderate approach and dedication to fight corruption that the ruling elite exemplify may bode well for political society in general.

#### El-Ghobashy's Case Study: Lessons from Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood: A Tendency and Strategy for Political Opposition

To analyze the participation of the Islamic political parties during their interaction with the political process in Morocco, I employ El-Ghobashy's theory in which she lays out her case study of the Muslim Brotherhood's interaction with the Egyptian government beginning in the 1980s. She observes that the organization suffered from an ideological split during the last decade, causing a "capitalization on Egypt's sliver of electoral competition for seats in Parliament...[that has] had an especially profound effect on their political thought and organization" and the Brotherhood's inclusion of "moderate Islamist thinkers' works authenticating democracy with Islamic concepts" (El-Ghobashy 374). The Brotherhood has been shaped by institutional constraints in a bid for representative power that has forced it to moderate and even reshape its policies and ideologies, and to break with the old guard as a new generation has taken over the organization. This new ideology, as a result of interaction with the political process, has diverted its attention to more non-religious issues, such as freedom from political oppression and social issues and has all but abandoned the call for an Islamic state. Though it has been unable to bring about any real institutional change and despite its former hardline, Islamist ideology, it must compete within the framework of the semi-democratic institution in which it finds itself. In other words, the Muslim Brotherhood has recognized that political participation is the only way to gain a semblance of power, no matter how symbolic it might be at the moment. The Brotherhood has legitimized the democratic process for Islamic groups, though the government interferes with the democratic process and arrested members of the organization from time to time. This trend has been observed by many authors, including Carnegie Endowment researcher Leslie Campbell, who also argues that interaction with a competitive political system makes Islamists more practical (Campbell).

Indeed, her thesis has been supported by other authors, such as Ellen Lust-Okar, noting that in political systems in which the opposition is divided, "moderates who previously challenged incumbent elites may choose not to do so when radical groups enter, even if incumbents have not accommodated their own demands" (147). Such a theory can be applied



to the case of Morocco, in which the King has adopted a divide and rule strategy, pitting oppositional groups against one another in hopes to keep them busy politicking while he acts as the final arbitrator. In such a system, moderates will do better or risk being excluded from the legitimate political process. This culture of self-moderation in pushing for party issues advanced by Lust-Okar is produced so as not to “force the regime to punish the moderates by further constricting their avenues of participation” (Enduring 132).

### Strategic Considerations of the King and the PJD

In supporting El-Ghobasy’s thesis, and perhaps adding to the understanding of why Islamists chose to participate in the bleak political process, *Getting to Pluralism* also points out that decision to participate on their part is tactical. Such tactics are important for understanding why Islamists would participate if the possibility of real political change is impossible as dictated by current institutions, such as the Moroccan Constitution. In Carnegie’s *Getting to Pluralism*, Islamists are said to run in elections that are rigged with little or no chance of a success at the risk of their parties appearing weak in the face of defeat. They also risk alienating supporters who already believe that their ideology is being compromised through by political participation (*Getting* 87). The decision, however, could be justified if the group plans to show that they are committed to the democratic process, despite the inevitable loss. The refusal to participate, however, could deal a double blow to the group’s image and to any possibility of change. A group that does not participate would appear to be flippant to democracy when results will not return in their favor, and a group which does not condone violence and has refused political participation is left powerless to influence politics on any level (*Getting* 87).

To return to and apply El-Ghobasy’s theory of eventual political moderation to Morocco, I have chosen to use the Justice and Development Party (PJD) to illustrate the interaction between the state and the Islamist parties and the strategies that both groups use in this political game. The PJD currently constitutes the second largest opposition party, after securing 46 of the 325 seats in Parliament during the 2007 elections (Al-Khalfi). The basic platform has “focused most of its parliamentary activities on increasing transparency and fighting corruption, issues that appeal to Islamist and non-Islamist voters alike” while using Islam as a “point of reference” (Wegner, Hamzawy, Interview). The party, however, tends to put forth a relationship of “rapprochement” with the government and “accepts the monarchy’s religious and legal status as well as the existing political order” (Kaye 146). This position, illustrating the strategic decisions mentioned above, have costed the party, however, especially in terms of votes in the 2007 parliamentary elections. By choosing a path of rapprochement with the government in order to be allowed an Islamic voice in parliament, the party has been criticized by other Islamic organizations in Morocco, such as the Movement for Justice and Charity. The Movement claims that reforming the political system is impossible due to its inherent

corrupt nature, and has thus not participated in politics since its founding (The 2007, 4). According to Carnegie author Amr Hamzawy, “the popularity of the fundamental opposition rhetoric of Justice and Charity among Islamist constituencies has kept the PJD from mobilizing wide segments of the disenfranchised population”, who elect to boycott the elections (The 2007, 4).

As far as the monarch is concerned, the strategy of inclusion of the Islamists can be viewed in two lights. The first is what Brumberg refers to as dissonance politics and is a survival technique, using inclusion as an *instrument* of preserving power. This view is also shared by the authors of *Getting to Pluralism*, who write that reform introduction is “a controlled process to introduce change only where and when it suits the goals of the ruling establishment” (*Getting* 32). This contrasts to Volpi’s thesis, which rests upon the assumption that the nature of this type of government is a *natural* development that can be found in most governments around the world. The inclusion of Islamic parties is a natural phenomenon as they enjoy a wide-range of support, and the partial autocracy is to be considered a byproduct of a unique political experience that should not be compared to Western expectations or models of democracy. Given the evidence, one should be cautious of adopting one view wholeheartedly over the other. Certainly, the region does not have very successful interactions with democracy after colonialism. The region’s interaction, therefore, with and interpretation of democracy, along with its recent political history, does not bode well for democratic experiments. The prominence of strong security apparatuses that possess the *will* and *ability* to suppress dissenters, however, only mean to perpetuate the phenomenon of the autocrat in the Arab world, as pointed out by Bellin. Both views should be considered together, as the politics of the region have a long, intertwined history with colonialism, failed and successful political experiments, and attempts at political ruling models that have been imposed from within and from without. These autocrats are the product of the Arab political and historical experience.

#### Point and Counterpoint: Islamic Threat to Democracy or Arab Democrats?

To depart from El-Ghobashy’s encouraging view of the evolution of extremist Islamist groups to more moderate ones with interaction with the political system, I return to the observations and conclusions of Gregory Gause. In his article, “Can Democracy Stop Terrorism?”, Gause focuses on his observation that democracy in the Middle East may produce regimes that are unfavorable to US interests, with particular emphasis on the Islamists coming to power. He cites several examples of Islamists coming to power through the electoral process. For examples, he writes of Hamas’s victory in the 2004 municipal elections, and the PJD victory in Morocco in 2002, which took 42 of the 325 parliamentary seats, writing that “the trend is clear: Islamists of various hues score well in free elections” and “the more democratic the Arab world gets, the more likely it is that Islamists will come to power” (Gause). Another of the most frequently-cited examples in literature under the banner of this theory is the case of Algeria during the 1990-91 election, in which the Islamic FIS

party, which had promised a radical and extremist agenda, would have won parliamentary elections, had it not been for the army's intervention to annul the electoral results.

In addition to being contradicted by El-Ghobashy, Gause's theory does not hold up to further proof presented by Professor Mark Tessler, who points out that the success of many Islamic groups across the Arab world can be attributed to their willingness to adapt and conform to the rules of the political game in which other oppositional groups must operate. In supporting El-Ghobashy's thesis about the eventual moderation of Islamic groups in interacting with the government and other political parties in parliament, Tessler comments that "participation in the democratic process may even to some degree alter the views and leadership structure of Muslim political movements, further moderating and "normalizing" those Islamist groups that acquire a share of legitimate political power" (Handelman 283). In addition to Professor Tessler, Marina Ottaway writes in another article that "there is ample evidence that participation in an electoral process forces any party, regardless of ideology, to moderate its position if it wants to attract voters in large numbers and avoid a backlash" (Ottaway, Islamists). She, along with other optimists, confirm El-Ghobashy's observation of the moderation of Islamist groups the more they interact with the constraints that democratic processes present these groups and the actual needs of their constituents.

Again, the experience of the Justice and Development Party in Morocco also seems to contradict the prediction of Gause's theory that as Islamists are included into the government, instability and will ensue and that democracy would bring about an intolerant, anti-Western Islamic government. In all cases, Islamists have failed to obtain enough votes in parliamentary elections to constitute powerful enough oppositional forces to the incumbent regime or to have been included in the government, such as has been done with many liberal groups, as is pointed out in *Getting to Pluralism*.

Gause's theory also underestimates the actual real power that the executive branch holds over their governments, as presented earlier in this paper, and thus ignores the central tenant to what current Arab pseudo-democracies are bound. King Muhammad is able to marginalize or co-opt any party he wishes into his government, and has the executive power to curb Islamic political activity if he wishes. One such example of the exercise of his authority is the requirement "that mosques close to the public shortly after Friday services to prevent use of the premises for unauthorized political activity" (United States). It is a system that only tolerates moderate voices and means to limit the space in which Islamists can gather.

Gause's argument is therefore based on a narrow interpretation of what it means for a political system to be democratic; namely that the whole system, including the election of executives in addition to parliament, must hold free and fair elections. He also does not mention that the power does not rest in the hands of these political parties and the people, as it does in say the United States and other Western democracies, but that it is uniquely and unassailably in the hands of the executive, as previously mentioned above, and is a feature of Volpin's semi-autocracy.

As consequence of this executive reality, Islamic parties in the Arab world have been forced to make tactical decisions, such as how many candidates to field. In *Getting to Pluralism*, the authors cite parties like Morocco's PJD as fielding candidates "in just over half of the 91 election districts before fielding candidates in 94 districts out of 95 in the 2007 elections (*Getting* 80). In summary, this tactical dilemma that faces Islamists is that, "unlike

most parties...they cannot afford to win too many seats-and can even less afford to win the elections for fear that the government will take drastic action against them" (*Getting* 80).

Gause, and scholars that hold his pessimistic view of Islamists and their participation in parliamentary politics, conjecture the outcome of participation without thought to the means Islamists must use to obtain election or sustained political involvement. Gause gives no consideration is given to El-Ghobasy's theory, and it is assumed these groups will continue on extremist platforms, stagnant and unevolved, an unrealistic conjecture given the competitive nature of parliamentary politics. No consideration is given to the variety of Islamic groups that appear in the Arab world, as previously mentioned. Like Volpi, there is no focus on the possible specific nature of groups that want to compete politically, and a broad, poisonous generalization is cast over the term "Islamist". Unlike Gause, however, however, Volpi *does* recognize the political reality of the semi-autocracy and who controls political power. Both, however, underestimate the power of political competition and its effects on those involved in the process.

The main problem that lies in this theory of the eventual abrogation of the democratic processes is that it is mostly hypothetical. As pointed out in *Getting to Pluralism*, the evidence provided about the outcome of Islamists coming to power is mixed. The authors make a distinction between participation under "normal" and "siege" conditions. Under normal conditions, Islamists operate under "the same conditions that affect all opposition actors in that country" (*Getting* 82). Under siege conditions, Islamists are blatant targets of government oppression, including raids on group meetings, arrests by the security forces, and even rendering religious parties illegal, as in Egypt (*Getting* 85-6). In reference to the oversights above, Gause seems to assume that the inherent nature of these groups is more important than the conditions under which they are forced to operate. The environment is so important in determining the course of political action taken by a group not only because "it can provide incentives or erect obstacles to participation but also because most Islamist parties and movements are quite divided internally. Thus, external circumstances easily alter the internal balance of power between reformist and hardline factions" (*Getting* 82). Moderation, therefore, as proposed by El-Ghobashy, would depend on external factors. She assumes participation is possible, so her theory would be valid under "normal" conditions. It is under siege conditions that Islamist opposition remains dangerous. The question would be, therefore, whether or not the nature of the party (Islamist or liberal) would matter under such hostile conditions when trying to gauge their possible responses to political repression. The response generated has nothing to do with an Islamic character, but rather that of an brutally repressed political group.

Even if the executive's role comes under the oversight of the legislative branch, the internal structure of the PJD are democratic and committed to the political process and a vision of pluralistic, politic body as demonstrated by their continued political participation after they failed to gain majority opposition status after the 2007 election. Instead of "boycotting elections, abandoning political participation, or even engaging in clandestine activities" like other disenfranchised Islamist parties, the PJD resisted "the temptation to withdraw from politics to signal its grievances over the political and electoral process" (Al-Khalafi). Unlike radical Islamists who reject the authority of the state, "the legalized...Islamists see...lawful electoral mobilization as their tools and exhibit a strong will to participate in the political system" (Zeghal). In addition to this commitment to the democratic process, Islamic leaders, according to Amr Hamzawy, "desire to show their

constituencies the role they can play as active participants in the process of political and social reform” as was the focus of the PJD during the 2007 election (Boon).

This commitment to the democratic process is necessary because the possible fragmentation of the group in the event of a drastic change in party ideology and goals would fracture it to the point of ineffectiveness, causing it to lose the wide-ranging support it holds over the varying religious and non-religious groups in the country. A deviation from its moderate ideology could possibly fragment the PJD and render it ineffective at implementing Shari’a or an Islamic state if it indeed did turn radical. Gause’s theory falls short of reality when confronted with the Moroccan example, and even the Muslim Brotherhood, the case from which El-Ghobasy draws her ideas about the nature of Islamist inclusion.

### Breaking the Political Deadlock: A Proposed Alliance

The political situation does indeed seem frustratingly hopeless for democrats. In the paper “Incumbent Regimes and the ‘King’s Dilemma’ in the Arab world”, Marina Ottaway and Michele Dunne assert that “power...remains firmly where it was: in the hands of kings and presidents” (Incumbent Regimes 1). In the case of Morocco, for example, the reform process...is not meant to lead to democracy but only to a more liberal environment and better governance” (Incumbent Regimes 10). In sum, the actual institutions of Moroccan politics, namely total control by the King, have remained untouched while a policy of controlled *social* and *economic* reforms have been implemented in order to modernize the country and allow more inclusive party policies. True political reform that would distribute more political power and controls to the parliament is not the King’s intention (*Getting*, 25). Gause assumes that democratic reforms in the Middle East would mean that the government would totally relinquish its power to such parties, if they were indeed popular enough. Moroccan politics show the opposite and that their inclusion into the political apparatus is possible without a shift in executive power, and is a perfect illustration of what Volpin refers to as semi-autocracies of the Middle East, caught somewhere on the political spectrum between autocracy and democracy.

This bleak political outlook for democratization and the redistribution of executive power, however, does not mean that democratic reforms cannot be implemented. Indeed, personal freedoms in Morocco have been enhanced with the new personal status law, a true victory for human rights activists (Incumbent Regimes 9). Concerning oppositional forces, one of the most important positions that they occupy in countries such as Morocco is that they keep pressure on the government to fulfill promised obligations by being allowed to

compete in the political arena. This political arena, however divided and manipulated by the ruler, is an important stage for publicly voicing concerns about the direction of their country politically, socially, and economically, and their participation acts as a block that keeps the door to political pluralism and discussion open, and not closed like the autocracies and police states of Saudi Arabia and Syria.

Identified as one of the three key political players Arab politics, Islamists also possess the necessary support to foment formidable opposition to the regimes and push for reforms. Islamic groups such as the PJD often provide necessary social services that the government cannot or does not, and they also derive their support from the those who often vote for Islamic parties as protest to rigged elections and to the regime in general. While these voters do not necessarily constitute a core support pillar for groups like the PJD, they are important to consider for understanding why Islamists are so popular. No matter the the reasons for voting for such groups, it is support nonetheless.

Moderate Islamic groups, such as the PJD also show promising prospects for the perpetuation of the few democratic tendencies that can be observed in semi-autocracies across the Arab world. They have effectively legitimized the modern nation state and relinquished notions of a unified *ummah* under the Caliphate system (*Getting* 70). They have also legitimized the democratic process by participating and attempting to adhere to democratic principles within their organizations, unlike many of the secular groups, which have their own forms of internal authoritarianism, suffering from “old leadership, ossified cadres, and lack of internal democracy” (*Getting* 44). Many Islamists take what Ottaway calls a “maximalist” position. Such groups, such as Morocco’s PJD, assume that they have to “participate in order to prove themselves responsible political actors” (*Getting* 93).

Another advantage that this position has brought is the dedication to a rather uniform position on the political process for groups like the PJD. This allays internal rumblings between moderates and hardliners, a symptom of Islamic political groups that often keeps them weak. When a clear position is taken and stances on issues are clearly identified, the opposition can effectively mobilize against the regime. Also, unlike the secular groups, they have not been co-opted by the regime, especially in Morocco, in which the PJD forms the largest independent oppositional force. This independence has won them a great deal of credibility, and offers a possible stepping stone towards a more democratic future. What keeps the PJD in Morocco weak is not attributed to the many internal divides that keep other Islamist groups weak, but rather the Moroccan parliamentary system of proportional representation. As mentioned earlier, the government allows for over 30 political parties to participate in elections. In addition to this, the group was not invited to join the government in the past 2 elections even after a surprising victory in 2002.

It is clear that in order for the PJD to have a larger impact of the political process and perhaps open up the democratic process further, there needs to be reform of the legislative branch. But this would of course lead to a circular argument: in order for the opposition to be more effective, the ruler must decide to open up the political process, and in order to effectively pressure him to do so, it would require an effective and powerful opposition, which is currently kept weak by a carefully manufactured political arena to distance the monarch from power contestation. As these semi-autocrats in the region do not have a history of committing political suicide, the conversation goes nowhere. Yet the authors of *Getting to Pluralism* suggest that

“the decision of Islamist parties and movements to participate in the legal politics of their countries triggers a set of complicated processes: within the leadership of the

parties and movements involved; between them and their followers; and of course between the participating Islamists and the ruling establishments and secular opposition parties of their countries. It is the outcome of these three different sets of processes that will determine the future trajectory of participating Islamists” (95).

This assertion is rather broad and general, and thus leaves the possibility open to a more detailed analysis of regime-opposition relations, as well as deeper study into the relationship between oppositional forces of the secularists and Islamists. Perhaps a breakthrough in uniting the secular and Islamist forces could be an effective strategy for pushing for democratic change in countries such as Morocco. Such an alliance would have to overcome years of mistrust and stereotypical assessments about the other. The secular parties would have to rethink their relationship of dependence on the regime for protection against the Islamists, reform their internal organizations to become more democratic, and identify solid party platforms that could be agreed upon with the Islamists.

The fear of Islamists derailing the democratic process must also be set aside. As mentioned earlier, groups like the PJD who have dedicated themselves to the political process and elections and have legitimized diverse political groups through competing with them, have little incentive to abrogate democracy, as this could potentially destroy their party from the inside out and lose their broad base of support. Islamists would be left a much weaker, discredited group in the eyes of citizens already largely politically apathetic. Such an alliance between the two groups could also spur mass support and political mobilization, giving the population hope that breaking this deadlock would allow a voice in addressing their economic, social, and political problems that these partial autocracies have thus far been unable to address effectively. A unified opposition, made up of Islamist and secular elements would better represent the spectrum of political opinions found in the Arab world, adding to a richer, more vibrant form of democracy unlike Western models of democracy, and one that is uniquely Arab.

#### Conclusion: The Complexities of Arab Semi-Authoritarianism

This paper has attempted to shed light upon the discussion concerning what the Carnegie Foundation for International Peace’s *Getting to Pluralism* calls a political “stalemate” between the three important actors of Arab politics: the regime, Islamists, and secularists (*Getting* 11). In order to do this, it was necessary to first prove that the region must be viewed as not progressing upon the path of democratization, and that arguments contrary to this were ignoring the uniquely fundamental roots of Arab regimes in power. Without contestation of executive power or restraints upon that power, democracy cannot flourish.

It was then necessary to address the history of how the phenomena of authoritarianism has been studied in the region and its until-recent-absence in the literature of

comparative politics, along with two discussions about democracy in the region. The first addresses popular attitudes towards the system of governance and challenge common political stereotypes and orientalist approaches that lead to dead end conclusions that Islam is the anti-democratic culprit. The second example of how to view democracy in the Arab world was that of a uniquely-produced experience that has been shaped by political history, culture, and evolutionary necessity. Though not a perfect vision of how to consider democratic experiences in the Arab world and to which there are many criticisms, the most important lesson from this vantage point is to provide an alternative to Western expectations of democracy and the rejection of absolutes in the process of democratization, identifying regime types like Morocco moving on a spectrum somewhere between autocracy and democracy, or a pseudo-democracy.

After a discussion of democracy, I focused on the the phenomenon of the Arab autocrat, analyzing essays that address institutions as reasons for the robustness of Arab autocracies such as security apparatuses, election rigging, divide and rule tactics, and the importance of international permission on restraining or validating the actions of Arab autocrats.

I then discussed the practical application of these concepts to the monarchy of Morocco. Morocco was chosen because of its abnormally rich parliamentary tradition for the region, along with its lively political culture and diversity, and the allowance of Islamists to compete rather freely in elections. Such conditions are the most conducive to taking advantage of political openings during the process of democratization. I discussed Morocco's recent political history that led to a political opening for parliamentary politics to flourish, and the experience of Morocco's Justice and Development Party (PJD) and their interaction with a political game ill-defined by the regime. I addressed the strategies used by both this Islamist party and their considerations for participating in the political process, as well as strategies that the monarch considers when allowing such potentially-powerful opposition groups to compete. I also discussed the institutions that keep the opposition in Morocco weak, such as the Constitution and the parliamentary politics that take advantage of the pluralistic nature of Morocco.

After addressing Morocco's political experience and the strategies employed by two of the most powerful political players in the Arab world, I addressed the widely-held fear of Islamist participation and the possible detriment they may pose for democracy. I countered this argument with the observed trend of their moderation after sustained interaction with the democratic process under "normal" conditions. After discussing the nature of Islamist participation, I discussed the benefits that Islamists provide to democratization, and the possibility of an Islamist-secularist alliance in breaking the political stalemate and fomenting an effective, political status-quo-altering division of power that could come with the two principle opposition groups uniting.

In the end, the political situation in the Middle East is one of great complexity that can only briefly touched on in a paper of this scope. The field of research is in need of more study of the nature of Arab semi-autocracies, more surveys concerning the political attitudes and tendencies of the average citizen, and a deeper understanding and study of regime-opposition dynamics and even the dynamics between oppositional groups. This emerging field in political science is encouraging at getting to the root of the last vestiges of authoritarianism in the world. It also shows that all three actors, the Islamists, secularists, and the incumbent regimes have difficult decisions to make concerning the futures of their society and people. The stalemate cannot be broken without one of the groups making a political move. Without it, the people who are governed by the whims of authoritarian



regimes and their regime-perpetuating tactics will continue to suffer economically, politically, and socially in a world that is moving ever forward towards integration and democratization.

## Excerpts of the Moroccan Constitution (Original Text)

### **TITRE II**

#### **DE LA ROYAUTE**

##### ARTICLE 23:

La personne du Roi est inviolable et sacrée.

##### ARTICLE 24:

Le Roi nomme le Premier ministre.

Sur proposition du Premier ministre, Il nomme les autres membres du Gouvernement, Il peut mettre fin à leurs fonctions.

Il met fin aux fonctions du Gouvernement, soit à Son initiative, soit du fait de la démission du Gouvernement.

##### ARTICLE 35:

Lorsque l'intégrité du territoire national est menacée ou que se produisent des événements susceptibles de mettre en cause le fonctionnement des institutions constitutionnelles, le Roi peut, après avoir consulté le président de la Chambre des Représentants, le président de la Chambre des Conseillers ainsi que le président du Conseil Constitutionnel, et adressé un message à la Nation, proclamer, par dahir, l'état d'exception. De ce fait, Il est habilité, nonobstant toutes dispositions contraires, à prendre les mesures qu'imposent la défense de l'intégrité territoriale, le retour au fonctionnement des institutions constitutionnelles et la conduite des affaires de l'Etat.

L'état d'exception n'entraîne pas la dissolution du Parlement.

Il est mis fin à l'état d'exception dans les mêmes normes que sa proclamation.

### **Titre V**

## **DES RAPPORTS ENTRE LES POUVOIRS - DES RAPPORTS ENTRE LE ROI ET LE PARLEMENT**

### **ARTICLE 71:**

Le Roi peut, après avoir consulté les présidents des deux Chambres et le président du Conseil Constitutionnel et adressé un message à la Nation, dissoudre, par dahir, les deux Chambres du Parlement ou l'une d'elles seulement.

### **TITRE VII**

#### **DE LA JUSTICE**

### **ARTICLE 82:**

L'autorité judiciaire est indépendante du pouvoir législatif et du pouvoir exécutif.

### **TITRE XII**

#### **DE LA REVISION DE LA CONSTITUTION**

### **ARTICLE 103:**

L'initiative de la révision de la Constitution appartient au Roi, à la Chambre des Représentants  
et à la Chambre des Conseillers.

Le Roi peut soumettre directement au référendum le projet de révision dont Il prend l'initiative.

### **ARTICLE 106:**

La forme monarchique de l'Etat ainsi que les dispositions relatives à la religion musulmane ne peuvent faire l'objet d'une révision constitutionnelle.

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[1] Freedom House uses scores from 1-2.5 to signal as "free", 3-5.5 as "part free", and 5.5-7 as "not free". The scale's formula is based on a complex questionnaire developed by the group that gauges civil liberties and political freedoms within a country.

[2] See sources page for original text of these articles from which I translated