Arab Spring and Democratic Transition in the GCC: Continuity amidst Change

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Did the Arab Spring effect democratic transition in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries? What are the implications for institutional transformation? This article focuses on legislative autonomy vis-à-vis the executive branch. The authoritarian regimes have continued their strategy of resistance amidst a modicum of reform, within the twin policies of institutional restructuring and security control, which reveals four trends: institutional preservation, status quo concessions, stalled power-sharing, and repressive countermeasures. There has been a growing sectarian dimension to the opposition. Frustrated and disillusioned, the younger generation has infused energy into the protest movement both in the streets and in cyberspace. With a firm hold on the security services by rulers, incremental policy shifts in the social realm will outpace institutional transformation in the political arena.

Keywords GCC, Arab Spring, democratization, democratic transition, institutional transformation, political reform

Introduction

The Arab Spring had an anti-republican regime change effect (Hazran 2012, 117). However, the contagion also challenged the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) monarchies. The ruling families have been resisting domestic political pressure for institutional change. This article addresses the internal dynamics of the GCC countries for democratization from the fallout of the Arab Spring. An inquiry into democratization can be at one of three levels: transition, consolidation, and perfection (Denk and Silander 2012, 26). With Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation on December 17, 2010 in Tunis, 2011 was the first full year of the Arab Spring. In view of the very recent occurrence of that event, this study is limited to the first-tier of democratic transition, which examines the process of change in political institutions. For the GCC authoritarian regimes, the transition is along the path of transaction that entails hegemonic negotiations at the behest of the power elite. The transaction road to democratic transition for the GCC

shaykhdoms is expected to move through three stages: political opening through pact, dialogue with political opposition, and legislative autonomy (Baaklini, Denoeux, and Springborg 1999, 29-43).

The focus here is on ascertaining the substance of legislative autonomy vis-a-vis the executive branch, particularly the chief executive—the monarch. Did the Arab Spring affect democratic transition in the GCC? In particular, what are the implications for institutional transformation? What have been the strategies and tactics for coping with demands for political change? In other words, this work examines the structural factor of "institutional reform" (Tessler 2007, 107) and the structural mechanism of "control and security" (Puranen and Widenfalk 2007, 173). Given that the ubiquitous rentier-state theory is not applied here, the broader framework for this study is addressed below.

Paradigm Shift?

Political culture (religion) has been supplanted by political economy (rentier-state theory[1]) in explaining the "democracy deficit" of the GCC oil monarchies. Oil revenues flipped the taxation-representation linkage ("rentier effect"), undermined the growth of a middle-class ("modernization effect"), and coopted political loyalty by patronage or silenced opposition through coercion ("repressive effect") (Brynen et al. 2012, 193-198; Ross 2011, 18-20; Gray 2011, 9; Puranen and Widenfalk 2007, 161, 173-174). Thus, reforms became *makrama* (fringe benefits) at the discretion of the royal family (Quilliam 2008, 84; Parolin 2011, 25). Although revisions (Kuhn 1996, 25-27; Popper 2002, 248, 259, 280) were made (Gray 2011, 5, 19; Brynen et al. 2012, 201),[2] the rentier-state theory remains the reigning paradigm (Springborg 2013, 304; Gray 2011, 17) in the West. However, the GCC monarchies shun the rentier-state framework in propounding the tradition of *majlis* (council) and *shura* (consultation) for public policy.

Michael Herb (1999, 256-263; Brynen et al. 2012, 6) challenged the rentier-state theory in arguing that democratic shortfall was because of a lack of the "threat of revolution" and that a change in public attitude will induce the Gulf monarchs to engage in power-sharing negotiations. However, the predicted demise of the GCC shaykhdoms by Christopher Davidson (2013, 121-134, 156-163, 193, 240) under the twin pressures of welfare burden and megaprojects is not convincing. Also, the GCC royal families have maintained firm control over their security apparatus (Gause 2011, 84; Council on Foreign Relations 2011, 7). In spearheading the March 2011 military intervention in Manama, furthermore, Riyadh illustrated its own version of the Brezhnev Doctrine (Guzansky and Berti 2013, 148; Mabon 2012, 90, 93; Kamrava 2012, 100). Separate from both the rentier and revolution explanations, an alternative perspective directs attention to political Islam that identifies the burgeoning opposition (Davidson 2013, 193).

Concentric Dilemmas

This paucity of democratic transition in the GCC is explained by three concentric dilemmas facing the ruling families (Mainuddin 1999, 126-127). What makes it concentric is Islam. These are not only Muslim majority states, but also located on or around the Arabian Peninsula, particularly with the two holiest places for Muslims located in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA).

The security dilemma is that while military arrangements with Western powers have been reassuring, protection from non-Muslim (and non-Arab) states has been embarrassing in revealing defense weakness and, thus, politically costly at home. When dissidents seized the Grand Mosque in Makka in 1979, the Saudi regime invited French special operations forces to quell the armed rebellion (Jones 2013, 95; Ulrichsen 2011, 67). The 1991 Riyadh Declaration ensconced Western military cooperation with the GCC (Mainuddin, Aicher, and Elliot 1996, 39-41). The religious dilemma is that whereas the ruling families have hitherto used Islam to silence political opposition by invoking *fitna* (disorder), Western educated devout Muslims are well versed in Islam and democratic principles in questioning absolute monarchy. What Jerrold Green (1985, 315) had called "popular Islam" has in practice implied "democratization of religious authority" (McLarney 2011, 433). The political dilemma is that having shielded and liberated authoritarian regimes in the 1991 Persian Gulf War, public opinion in the West wants to see reforms, but the ruling families are afraid of change and being pushed out of power. For them, institutional reforms along both liberalization and democratization dimensions (Brynen, Korany, and Noble 1995, 3) are problematic. As the Arab Spring has shattered the notion of democracy deficit in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, it is worth noting the religious arguments used by the monarchy and the political opposition regarding democratic transition.

Disagreement Is Disorder

For *khilafat* (leadership succession), a nostalgic political system of a bygone era encompassing the larger Muslim *umma* (community), Muslim scholars have advocated *shura* for *ijtihad* (interpretation) through *ijma'* (consensus) (Esposito and Voll 1996, 23-26; Mainuddin 1999, 130). Tribal shaykhs in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) regularly hold open-door *majlis* which allow the *hoi polloi* (the masses) direct access to the leadership for help or to express grievances (Forstenlechner, Rutledge, and Al Nuaimi 2012, 56). The ruling families in the GCC states have resisted multiparty, competitive elections as Western (and, by implication, un-Islamic) though there have been some limited accommodations since the 1991 Persian Gulf War. Taking their caution a step further, the GCC governments have disparaged *ikhtilaf* (disagreement) in invoking Qur'anic injunction against *fitna* to silence political opponents challenging their authority (Esposito and Voll 1996, 19, 41-44; Mainuddin 1999, 130-131).

Demonstrations Are Not Sacrilegious

During the Arab Spring, *fatwa* (decree) against *fitna* itself became contested, however. In March 2011, Shaykh Ahmed bin Hamad al-Khalili, Grand Mufti of Oman, lambasted demonstrations earlier on February 26 in the northern industrial port city of Sohar (Worrall 2012, 100-101). The same month, the Council of Senior Ulema (Council of Senior Scholars) in the KSA issued a *fatwa* endorsing a statement by the Minister of the Interior about the illegality of protests. According to the *fatwa*, demonstrations were *fitna* and banned under *fiqh* (jurisprudence) in Islam (Wehrey 2013, 13). Later in March, seventy-five Shi'a *ulema* (scholars, read clerics) in Al Ahsa signed a statement for youths to stop protests and not foment further sectarian tensions. Also, Sunni critics of brute force by the authorities against 20,000 people attending the burial of two slain demonstrators in Qatif on November 23 were rebuked by Abd al-Aziz al-Shaykh, the Grand Mufti of the KSA. However, Shi'a cleric Nimr Baqir al-Nimr publicly endorsed protests as acceptable within *fiqh*. Given that small protests continued, some clearly did not see the *fatwa* by the Council of Senior Ulema as binding (Matthiesen 2012, 638, 640-642, 650, 652).

People Are the Legitimate Ruler

Aside from *reform* within the prevailing political framework, Ibrahim Hatlani (2013) discerned two different perspectives on *transformation* of the political system itself in the KSA. One camp envisaged a limited transformation from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy. The Umma Islamic Party, which was established in March 2011, holds this position. Another camp envisioned a complete transformation from a monarchy to a republic. The Movement for Islamic Reform in Arabia, led by Saad al-Faqih from exile, holds this viewpoint. Tawfiq al-Amir, a popular cleric from Al Hofuf, was arrested on February 26, 2011 for demanding a constitutional monarchy (Matthiesen 2012, 635; Wehrey 2013, 11). Nimr Baqir al-Nimr straddled between reform and transformation while also considering secession. He situated himself at the forefront of uprisings in exhorting "political and religious" reforms in his *khutba* (sermon) on February 25, 2011 (Matthiesen 2012, 635). When the Ministry of Interior published a wanted list of twenty-three Shi'a "rioters" in January 2012, Al Nimr vehemently opposed the list (ibid., 653). With Shi'a protesters continuing to be killed by the heavy-handed police response, on February 10 he demanded elections and declared the ruling Al Saud family illegitimate (ibid., 654)—a view also shared by Hassan al-Saffar, the most prominent Shi'a cleric in the KSA (Zdanowski 2011, 143). Earlier in 2009, Al Nimr publicly raised secession from the KSA for the predominantly Shi'a populated oil-rich Eastern Province (Jaffe and Miller 2012, 27).

The Saudi political system with its focus on behavior control through religious persuasion, founded on an alliance between the Al Saud ruling family

and the Al Asheikh religious family (descendants of Muhammad Abdul Wahhab), is unsustainable. A noteworthy number of intellectuals, activists, and clerics have embraced alternative *fiqh* interpretations that question the credibility of the regime. The idea of the king as the *wali al-amr* (legitimate ruler)—Qur'an 4:59—was no longer sacrosanct. Abdullah al-Hamed, a co-founder of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association, retorted to a judge during his trial on November 11, 2012 that the "people" were the *wali al-amr* (Hatlani 2013).

In 1993, Muhammad Faour (1995, 36) had found political changes a "facade" in the MENA region following the 1991 Operation Desert Storm. The following year Gregory Gause (1994, 79, 115) had observed that the legislature was ineffective or nonexistent in the GCC monarchies. Twenty years after Desert Storm, in 2011 Mary Ann Tetreault, Andrzej Kapiszewski, and Gwenn Okruhlik (2011, 5-7) remarked that political reforms have been "cosmetic" and the GCC states have been "stuck in transition" and were moving along divergent paths toward nebulous destinations. That uncertain trajectory continued into the Arab Spring. What emerged in the aftermath of the Arab Spring in the GCC were four trends: institutional preservation, status quo concessions, stalled power-sharing, and repressive countermeasures (see Table 1).[3]

Institutional Preservation

Absolutist Executive
At present, the issue is not about the GCC monarchies transitioning into republics. A more pertinent question in the aftermath of the Arab Spring is whether these varying degrees of absolute monarchies would transform into constitutional monarchies. The answer is in the negative for the near future. By the first half of the 1990s, Bahrain, Qatar, and the UAE had signed defense cooperation agreements with the United States. In 2006, the Gulf Security Dialogue had started coordinating GCC-U.S. defense initiatives (U.S. Senate 2012, 7-8, 12, 15, 17-18; Hanieh 2013, 74). In view of the vital U.S. interest of safeguarding the flow of oil through the Persian Gulf, Washington is not enthusiastic about regime transformation—let alone regime change—in the GCC countries. Furthermore, the concentration of authority in the executive branches of GCC states includes royal family members holding strategic cabinet posts (Zunes 2013, 152) and intrusive reach into the legislative branch (Monroe 2012, 415). The chief executives resemble a more powerful version of the presidential system in Mexico.

Whereas demonstrators initially shunned direct criticism of King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa of Bahrain, villagers in Aali voiced a preference for abolishing the monarchy (Mabon 2012, 86, 89). Furthermore, Laurence Louer (2013) underscored an intergenerational shift: Al Wefaq (National Islamic Society)

Table 1. GCC Trends

Country	Institutional Preservation	Status Quo Concessions	Stalled Power-Sharing	Repressive Countermeasures
Bahrain	Ban questioning regime legitimacy; demographic gerrymandering	Monetary compensation; national dialogue; constitutional amendment	Effectively loyalist veto from appointed upper chamber in legislature	Imprison opposition leader; imprison Shi'a; citizenship cancellation
Kuwait	No tolerance for questioning regime legitimacy	Ministerial resignations	Electoral gerrymandering	Imprisonment for boycotting legislature; imprisonment for anti-government internet postings and tweets
Oman	Hierarchical and patriarchal political system	Job creation; monetary compensation; consumer price monitoring	Effectively loyalist veto from appointed upper chamber in legislature	Imprison human rights activists; imprisonment for anti-government internet blogs
Qatar	Rule by decree	High per capita income helpful	Effectively loyalist veto from appointed half of the chamber in legislature	Imprisonment for praising Arab Spring
Saudi Arabia	Absolute power; red line against criticism of religious establishment; demographic gerrymandering	Housing project; monetary compensation; job creation; gender opening; reconciliation toward Shi'a	Effectively loyalist veto from all appointed chamber in legislature	Imprison human rights groups; imprisonment for anti-government internet postings; executions for anti-government violence
United Arab Emirates	Hierarchical and patriarchal political system	Construction projects	Effectively loyalist veto from appointed half of the chamber in legislature	Imprison opposition members; imprisonment for anti-government internet postings; place opposition leader under house arrest

had called for a constitutional monarchy during the 2011 national dialogue; that became the stand taken by the February 14 Coalition regarding the 2013 dialogue.

Earlier in 2002, Shaykh Hamad al-Khalifa declared himself king in asserting Bahraini independence, reneging on transition to a constitutional monarchy, and ignoring the 1973 constitution (Parolin 2011, 30, 40; Quilliam 2008, 82-84). Under Article 120, Paragraph C of the 2002 constitution, any questioning of the legitimacy of the Al Khalifa family as the monarchy, including review of its finances, was banned. No bill becomes law without the king's signature. Also, only the cabinet, which is appointed by the king, can initiate legislation (Hanieh 2013, 72; Parolin 2011, 30). Furthermore, the council of ministers has legislative power in all areas not yet covered by the law. In addition, the cabinet has emergency legislation power. Interestingly, a new 2002 law permitted other GCC nationals to hold dual citizenship in Bahrain. The king used that law to grant Bahraini citizenship to both stateless Bedouins and expatriate Sunni-Arab workers (Brynen et al. 2012, 81; Parolin 2011, 26, 32, 35). This demographic gerrymandering benefitted the minority Sunni merchant and ruling political elites to the disadvantage of the two-thirds majority Shi'a, who are mostly rural date farmers and fishermen (Hanieh 2013, 66, 77; Parolin 2011, 39).

In November 2011, Kuwaiti Prime Minister Nasser bin Muhammad al-Sabah was forced to resign for attempting to amend the 1962 constitution following public demonstrations which began in December 2010 (Davidson 2013, 216-219). Appointed by the amir, only the prime minister—who is traditionally also the crown prince—can propose a legislative bill. Although not elected to the legislature, the council of ministers forms a royal voting bloc and occupies one-third of the parliament (Brynen et al. 2012, 76; Ismael 1993, 82-83).

A bill passed by the Kuwaiti legislature must be sanctioned by the amir to become law. Also, any criticism of the amir or questioning the legitimacy of the Al Sabah ruling family is not tolerated. The hereditary nature of the amirate is enshrined in the 1962 constitution. Unique among the GCC countries, the crown prince must be approved by the parliament and the amir swears an oath in the legislative body (Brynen et al. 2012, 78; Ismael 1993, 82-83; Salem 2008, 214). Given the expected parallel and supportive relationship between the political and economic spheres, however, the amir is presumed to rule within a *shura* framework. That is because unlike the other GCC countries, a historic bargain had created a division of labor between *imara* (governance) and *tijara* (commerce) in Kuwait. Back in 1752, the *asil* (original) merchant families of the Bani Utub tribe accepted a member of the Al Sabah family, Shaykh Abdullah al-Salem al-Sabah, as the amir (Al Nakib 2006, 163-164; Roberts 2011, 89; Salem 2008, 211-212). In the 2000s alone, the amir dissolved parliament in 2006, 2008, and 2009 (Roberts 2011, 96). Thus, for Mary Ann Tetreault (2011, 91) the Kuwaiti amir's strategy of repeatedly dissolving the parliament has made elections "instruments

of authoritarianism."

Oman is unique among the GCC countries in being ruled by the Ibadi denomination. The predominantly Sunni populated Dhufaris have some continuing tension with northern Omanis, but there are no explosive sectarian grievances. The state is hierarchical and patriarchal, and tribal bonds are strong. As opposed to the impressive growth in administrative capacity, however, political changes have been slow (Peterson 2011, 107-110, 112). The amir of Qatar guided reforms from the top in consolidating his accession to power through a coup. Even under the new 2003 constitution, the amir is empowered to rule by decree, override legislation, and dissolve the legislature. In 2005, a new personal status law was standardized for all residents following unification of the *shari'a* and secular dual court system the previous year (Crystal 2011, 120, 122, 132).

As both the head of state and head of government, the monarch has absolute power in the KSA. As the prime minister, the king also heads the council of ministers. The cabinet and provincial authorities are directly under Al Saud princes or their bureaucratic allies. The reform wing of the ruling family has been comprised of King Abdullah, Prince Faisal, and Prince Talal. The conservative wing consists of the "Sudairi Seven" which includes King Fahd, King Salman, Crown Prince Sultan, and Prince Nayef.[4] As a pragmatic administrative step, the 2007 Law of the Judiciary created a new Supreme Court and decoupled it from the Ministry of Justice (Hamzawy 2008, 189-191; Ulrichsen 2011, 68, 71, 73-74). In view of the Arab Spring, however, in March 2011 officials reestablished a red line against criticism of the Wahhabi religious establishment (Jones 2013, 96). Characterized by tribal loyalty, the political system is patriarchal and hierarchical in the UAE. Power is centralized in the ruling families of the seven amirates. In contrast to the emphasis on improving executive performance, political reforms have been miniscule (Koch 2011, 172-173, 178).

Subordinate Legislature

The Majlis al-Nuwwab (Council of Representatives) in Bahrain and the Majlis al-Shura (Advisory Council) in Oman are the only two lower chambers in the GCC that have all elected representatives (see Table 2). Members of the Majlis al-Shura (Advisory Council) in Bahrain and the KSA and the Majlis al-Dawla (State Council) in Oman are all appointed by the monarch. The Majlis al-Umma (Community Assembly, read National Assembly) in Kuwait has roughly two-thirds of its members elected and the other one-third appointed. The Majlis al-Shura in Qatar and the Majlis al-Ittihad al-Watani in the UAE each has half of its members elected and half appointed (U.S. Central Intelligence Agency 2013a).

As promised earlier in January 2012, King Hamad ratified constitutional amendments on May 3. This gave the National Assembly, the Bahraini parliament, the power to approve cabinet appointments by the monarch and to question ministers. However, it is the king who has the last word. The Majlis al-

Table 2. GCC Regimes

Country	Regime Character	Legislative Structure	Legislative Chamber		Legislative Composition
			Lower	Upper	
Bahrain	Kingdom	Bicameral	*Majlis al-Nuwwab* (Council of Representatives	*Majlis al-Shura* (Advisory Council)	All elected in lower chamber; all appointed in upper chamber
Kuwait	Amirate	Unicameral	*Majils al-Umma* (Community Assembly, read National Assembly)		Two-thirds elected; One-third appointed
Oman	Sultanate	Bicameral	*Majlis al-Shura* (Advisory Council)	*Majlis al-Dawla* (State Council)	All elected in lower chamber; all appointed in upper chamber
Qatar	Amirate	Unicameral	*Majlis al-Sura* (Advisory Council)		Half elected; half appointed
Saudi Arabia	Kingdom	Unicameral	*Majlis al-Sura* (Advisory Council)		All appointed
United Arab Emirates	Federation of Amirates*	Unicameral	*Majlis al-Ittihad al-Watani* (National Assembly)		Half elected; half appointed

*The President of the Federation is not elected by the people.

Nuwwab is limited to making a motion, asking questions, or requesting facts (Kingdom of Bahrain 2013). The 2002 constitution in Bahrain established a bicameral legislature in place of the earlier unicameral Majlis al-Watani (National Assembly) under the 1973 constitution. The surface coequality of the elected Majlis al-Nuwwab and the appointed Majlis al-Shura masks the weakness of the elected chamber. Thus, there have been demands by the political opposition for restoration of the 1973 constitution (Brynen et al. 2012, 80; Hanieh 2013, 68; Parolin 2011, 24, 28-30).

A bill must be passed in both chambers before being signed into law by the king in Bahrain. This effectively gives the Majlis al-Shura loyalists a veto power over the Majlis al-Nuwwab. After two deadlocks on a bill between the chambers, a joint session of the National Assembly must pass the bill by an absolute majority—again, giving the Majlis al-Shura an implicit veto power. Also, Article 120(c) of the constitution safeguards these advantages for the monarchy in prohibiting any amendment to the bicameral structure. Furthermore, emergency legislation initiated by the executive branch can be defeated only by an absolute majority—an absent member is counted as a negative vote. In addition, Article 87 allows the legislative process to be bypassed for an economic or financial bill if the National Assembly fails to reach a decision within fifteen days. While an

individual minister must resign following a vote of no confidence by a two-thirds majority in the Majlis al-Nuwwab, this rule does not apply to the prime minister or the cabinet as a whole (Parolin 2011, 30-33; Kingdom of Bahrain 2013).

On February 18, 2013, the financial and economic committee of the Majlis al-Umma in Kuwait tentatively approved a plan to forgive roughly US$6 billion in interest on consumer debt by Kuwaitis. Earlier in 2010, the National Assembly made a similar attempt. In February 2012, the Majlis al-Umma accused Mustafa Jasim al-Shimali, Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister, for failing to address financial irregularities in his ministry. Al Shimali, who had held his position since 2007, resigned in May. When the *majlis* members summoned Shaykh Ahmad Hamoud al-Jaber al-Sabah, the First Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister—and a member of the royal family—for questioning about corruption allegations, they crossed the threshold of the amir's tolerance. It prompted Shaykh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah to suspend the Majlis al-Umma for a month on June 18.

Instead of facing more questions in the Majlis al-Umma, the Kuwaiti cabinet resigned in March 2011. The exercise of interpellation and vote of no confidence, including against the prime minister, makes the Mujlis al-Umma unique among the GCC states (Brynen et al. 2012, 76, 79; Salem 2008, 214). Given that individual members can raise questions on any issue, for David Roberts (2011, 97-98), interpellation in the 2000s exposed a structural flaw of the Kuwaiti parliamentary system. Earlier in December 2010, Prime Minister Nasser al-Sabah survived a vote of no confident by three votes, twenty-five to twenty-two votes, after a nine-hour interpellation over public freedom. About a year prior to that in December 2009, after Speaker Jasim al-Khorafy mediated differences between the National Assembly and the ruling Al Sabah family, the prime minister underwent interpellation over financial irregularities (Roberts 2011, 97; Tetreault 2011, 89). Perhaps, two factors contributed to this executive-legislative turmoil. After becoming amir in 2006, Shaykh Sabah al-Sabah appointed his half-brother and nephew as the crown prince and prime minister, respectively. That broke the unwritten rule of alternating between Jabir and Salim branches among descendants of Shaykh Mubarak al-Sabah. With the health of Crown Prince and Prime Minister Shaykh Saad al-Sabah deteriorating, in 2003 the title of prime minister was transferred to Shaykh Sabah al-Sabah. This decoupling between crown prince and prime minister broke a tradition and removed the deference hitherto accorded to the office of the prime minister (Roberts 2011, 96; Tetreault 2011, 75, 82).

Having replaced the earlier unicameral State Consultative Council, Oman is the only GCC country where the elected chamber is called the Majlis al-Shura. With the subsequent establishment of the appointed Majlis al-Dawla, the bicameral Majlis Oman is essentially ceremonial (Peterson 2011, 109-110). According to Article 18 of the Legislative Internal Law in Oman, the Majlis al-

Shura is limited to preparing studies for implementation of socioeconomic development, making suggestions for promoting industrial and service sector investments, providing ideas on capital and human resource development, and giving opinions on matters referred to it by the sultan or the council of ministers. The opportunity to express opinions on draft laws prepared by the council of ministers does not extend to "public interest" laws—read national security—submitted to the sultan (Sultanate of Oman 2013). Since 2003 there has been a direct election to the Majlis al-Shura from each *wilayah* (district) instead of the sultan selecting one among three from a multiple-member plurality system (Peterson 2011, 109-110).

In Qatar, a vote of no confidence on a minister involves a two-step process. It is permitted only after an "interpellation" of that minister by at least a one-third vote in the Majlis al-Shura (State of Qatar 2013). However, a vote of no confidence cannot be exercised against the entire cabinet. The new 2003 constitution did not bring institutional change in Qatar. In spite of credible elections in 1999, 2003, and 2007, the Municipal Council is limited to an advisory role (Crystal 2011, 120-121, 133).

With uncensored televised broadcasts, the Majlis al-Shura in the KSA serves as a venue for public debate (Hamzawy 2008, 199). Except for the authority to revise laws, regulations, and international treaties and agreements, the situation is not any different in the KSA under Article 15 of the Shura Council Law. Under Article 17, it is the king who is the gatekeeper between the Majlis al-Shura and the council of ministers in deciding what resolutions are passed along to the cabinet from the legislature (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia 2013). A revision of Article 17 in 2005 permitted recommendations to be submitted directly to the king in bypassing the cabinet. Also, Article 23 was modified the same year to give the *majlis* greater freedom with internal regulations. Although Shi'a members have been added to the legislature, there has not been a Shi'a on the council of ministers. In spite of the 2003 initiative for national dialogue following a series of Shi'a petitions for reforms that year, Shi'a-Sunni relations have worsened since 2006 (Ulrichsen 2011, 71; Zdanowski 2011, 141, 147-148, 155).

There is a lack of transparency and accountability in the UAE. Members of the Majlis al-Ittihad al-Watani, the Federal National Council, were elected under a new federal law in 2006. From 2003, the Majlis al-Ittihad al-Watani started to elect its speaker by secret ballot. Without an increase in its legislative capacity, the Majlis al-Ittihad al-Watani remains a purely consultative institution. Even though individual citizens can voice their grievances in the *majlis* of an amirate, district councils introduced beginning in 2003 did not impact policy decisions (Koch 2011, 169, 177-180).

There is a continued dearth of legislative sovereignty in the GCC monarchies after the Arab Spring. The legislatures do not make laws, but at best can revise them. They do not exercise a vote of no confidence against the cabinet, but at

best against an individual minister. And it goes without saying that there are no legislative checks and balances against the chief executive, the monarch. The power to appoint some or all members serves to undercut the legislature. Notwithstanding the hitherto token representation, the Arab Spring exerted pressure from the grassroots for more substantial reforms. Unyielding when it comes to the executive-legislative relationship, the GCC regimes have made additional concessions to pacify the people in the aftermath of the Arab Spring.

Status Quo Concessions

The GCC governments took a three-fold strategy to pacify popular discontent: public projects benefiting the population, greater acceptance of women in the public sphere, and a policy of divide and rule to weaken the opposition. Various public projects promoted employment, national pride, and welfare.

In June 2012, the Bahraini government offered to pay 1,000 dinars (about US$2,600) in compensation to families of seventeen people killed during political unrest (Zunes 2013, 154). The money would come from a fund created in November 2011 under the recommendation of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI). Earlier in March 2011, Sultan Qaboos bin Said al-Said of Oman promised 50,000 new jobs, a monthly unemployment benefit of 150 rials (roughly US$390), and increased stipends for students. Also, he raised social insurance pensions by 100 percent and pensions in general by 50 percent. Furthermore, he established the Public Authority for Consumer Protection for monitoring prices. In dissolving the disrepute Ministry of National Economy, the sultan created the National Audit Committee for checking corruption (Worrall 2012, 106-107). In February 2011, King Abdullah of the KSA announced a US$130 million economic package that included two extra months' salaries for civil servants, inflation allowance, unemployment benefits, study abroad scholarships, 500,000 units of low-income housing, and significant funding increase for religious institutions. Also, 299,000 Saudi nationals were hired in the public sector by September 2012 (Kamrava 2012, 98; Wehrey 2013, 12-13).

The 2013 government budget in the KSA, presented by Finance Minister Ibrahim bin Abdel Aziz al-Assaf in December 2012, was a record 820 billion rials (roughly US$219 billion). It was a 19 percent increase over the previous year. One long-term objective was expanding the capacity of the Prophet's Mosque in Madina from 200,000 worshippers to 1.6 million by 2040. On September 24, King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz al-Saud laid the foundation stone for the project. As part of a strategy of harnessing solar energy, another undertaking was to build a huge renewable energy plant for Makka. In January 2013, the UAE government confirmed a US$90 billion program on housing, schools, infrastructure, and leisure projects over the next five years. The plan included a US$3 billion new

airport terminal.

The Arab Spring did not usher in an avalanche of women into the cabinet, however. According to the websites of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the GCC states (including their embassies in Washington, D.C.) and U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (2013b), there was a total of seven women with full cabinet rank in 2013: two in Bahrain, one in Kuwait, two in Oman, and two in the UAE. That was different in 2010 only for Oman (3) and UAE (1). Thus, the Arab Spring did not change the total number of women full cabinet ministers in the GCC.

Given the political repression and violence in Bahrain, an interesting development in December 2012 was the election of Aysha al-Mubarak as chairwoman of the new human rights committee in the Majlis al-Shura. Since ascending to the throne of the KSA earlier in January, King Salman allowed women to nominate themselves, run for elections, and vote in the December 2015 local council elections (Spencer 2015). Earlier, King Abdullah had been facilitating women in the public domain while reigning in the powerful religious establishment (Meyer 2010). On September 11, 2011, King Abdullah declared in a speech that Saudi women would be allowed to vote and run for municipal elections starting in 2015 (Chulov 2011). That would mark the last holdout in the GCC closing the gender gap on democratization. In the meantime, a royal decree from King Abdullah on January 11, 2013 appointed thirty women to the 150-member Majlis al-Shura, which was a dramatic development from a puny six and three token women in 2006 and 2005, respectively (Doumato 2011, 198-199). The ongoing social changes in the KSA raised the hope of lifting the ban on driving by women when in March 2013 the Majlis al-Shura agreed to debate the issue. With women members on board since January, the Advisory Council came to that decision after receiving a petition with over 3,500 signatures for allowing women to drive. The Majlis al-Shura in 2008 had already recommended driving by women (ibid., 204), but any discussion has yet to mark a significant move forward.

The Saudi government devised a long-term employment strategy within the tradition of strict gender separation through industrial cities exclusively for women. The Industrial Property Authority in August 2012 confirmed plans to build the first women-only industrial city, to be located next to Al Hofuf in the Eastern Province. The city will focus on textiles, pharmaceuticals, and food processing. In September 2012, the labor ministry closed about 100 lingerie shops with male sales clerks in Riyad. The step was in keeping with a 2006 royal decree that reserved those lingerie sales clerk jobs for women. The royal decree was enforced in 2007 in Jeddah despite objection from Grand Mufti Abd al-Aziz al-Shaykh (ibid., 205).

In the area of personal freedom, Saudi women have been able to travel alone to other GCC states since September 2012. Using only an electronic photo-identity card, originally made a requirement in 2006 (ibid., 197), Saudi women

can now visit neighboring oil monarchies without a passport or an exit permit signed by a close male family member. The 2012 London Olympics marked another watershed for Saudi women. With Prince Nawaf bin Faysal al-Saud as the head, the Saudi Olympic Committee decided in April to allow women athletes to compete in the games. The following May, thirty women were the first female officers hired by the Saudi *mukhabarat*. They have been stationed at the eastern border crossing points to process security checks for women.

While gender relations receive attention in the West, improvement in sectarian relations is more urgent in the GCC. With a minority Sunni regime ruling over a Shi'a majority, who account for 70 percent of the population (Guzansky and Berti 2013, 146; Mabon 2012, 96fn3), the demands for political reform in Bahrain became a special case. What began as a pro-democracy demonstration on February 14, 2011 turned into a mass movement for change when the government used force on February 17 to retake the Pearl Roundabout at the center of Manama. Events took on an international dimension in March with the deployment of Saudi and Emirati security forces under the umbrella of the Peninsula Shield Force (Guzansky and Berti 2013, 147; Mabon 2012, 90). This only hardened the resolve of the Shi'a opposition.

In June 2011, King Hamad established the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) to resolve the crisis. Headed by Mahmoud Cherif Bassiouni, an internationally reputed Egyptian-American legal expert, the BICI report issued in November confirmed the use of repressive tactics by the regime after interviewing over 5,000 witnesses. It documented thirty-five deaths by the *mukhabarat*, and many of these security personnel were Sunni expatriates from Pakistan, Iraq, Jordan, and Yemen. Also, it noted that 4,400 people were fired from their jobs for sympathizing with the pro-democracy movement. Furthermore, the report repudiated alleged instigation by the Iranian government (Guzansky and Berti 2013, 147; Mabon 2012, 91). The BICI report was not well-received by the king (Zunes 2013, 156). While the opposition demanded power-sharing, King Hamad opted for a national dialogue to surmount the political crisis.

Election laws and gerrymandering became tools for undermining opposition strength. In October 2012, the Kuwaiti government introduced an electoral reform law that changed multiple-member plurality districts to single-member plurality districts. Under the new Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV) system (Barwig 2012, 431fn20), people would elect one candidate per voting district instead of the four allowed previously by the block vote system. Thus, the opposition forces could no longer field multiple candidates from safe districts to increase their political weight in the Majlis al-Umma. The change in the rules of the game would make coalition-building more difficult among opposition groups. At least 50,000 people demonstrated against the new election law in Kuwait City in November. In September 2011, the Constitutional Court rejected a bill by the Kuwaiti government to change district boundaries for elections to the Majlis

al-Umma. That gerrymandering tactic for impeding the election of religious opponents of the regime to the legislature failed. The Court upheld the 2006 electoral law that created five electoral districts designed to retain weight of urban strongholds favoring traditional elites over tribal districts (Monroe 2012, 423).

In 2013, the Saudi monarchy took some conciliatory steps toward the kingdom's Twelver Shi'a, accounting for about 10 percent of the population and residing mostly in Al Ahsa and Qatif in the Eastern Province. Prince Muhammad bin Fahd, the governor of the Eastern Province since 1985, was removed. Also, television networks airing anti-Shi'a rhetoric were closed. Furthermore, an additional Shi'a member was appointed to the Majlis al-Shura. Postponed since October 2009, in March 2011 the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs announced that elections for the 219 municipal councils would commence on April 23. However, bulk appointment of Sunnis to the municipal councils in Al Ahsa and Qatif that year did not assuage Shi'a anger (Matthiesen 2012, 630, 644; Wehrey 2013, 13, 19).

Stalled Power-Sharing

When it comes to power-sharing, the GCC monarchies are not willing to transition to a West European-style constitutional monarchy. Nowhere in the GCC was it more evident than in Bahrain with the Sunni minority Al Khalifa ruling family. To that end, civil society in the GCC became a target of the government.

A national dialogue took place in Bahrain on January 15, 2014 between Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa and leaders of the five main opposition groups. It was promising to have participation by the hardline Minister of the Royal Court, Shaykh Khaled bin Ahmed bin Salman al-Khalifa. Although the talks were cordial, they did not resolve the issues (Law 2014). Earlier, on February 10, 2013, a national dialogue and reconciliation conference was convened in the western resort town of Sakhir. The conference was attended by members of the Majlis al-Nuwwab and the Majlis al-Shura, representatives from opposition societies, and government officials. The renewed dialogue ended with a stalemate on February 24. The uncompromising position of the opposition on direct involvement of the king unraveled the dialogue. Without the king present, the opposition National Unity Assembly, a ten-member coalition from mainly Shi'a religious groups, was concerned that ministers would not be actively involved in the dialogue. That sentiment was shared by the opposition bloc of six groups headed by the leftist Wa'ad (National Democratic Action Society) and the religious Al Wefaq. The national dialogue was originally launched on July 1, 2011 by King Hamad.

In June 2012, a retrial opened for Wa'ad before the Supreme Criminal

Appeals Court in Manama. The previous year, twenty-one members of Wa'ad were convicted of attempting to overthrow the government and sentenced up to life imprisonment, including seven in absentia. Ibrahim Sharif, the secretary general of Wa'ad, denied inciting violence and affirmed that he was not opposed to constitutional monarchy. During the same month of the retrial of Wa'ad, the Justice and Islamic Affairs Ministry announced the filing of a lawsuit for dissolving the Amal Islamic Action Society for legal violations. The crime that Amal committed was to be part of the protest movement against the regime. Muhammed Ali al-Mahfudh, Secretary General of Amal, had been arrested and sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment for subversion against the state. Amal was in alliance with Al Wefaq, another Shi'a opposition group, which also faced a lawsuit from the government.

Earlier in May 2012, Nabeel Rajab, head of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR), was arrested upon returning from a meeting in Lebanon with a representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Rajab was already facing charges of promoting and participating in an illegal gathering. Later in August, a Manama court convicted Rajab of instigating and participating in several illegal demonstrations and sentenced him to a three-year prison term.

During the Formula One motor racing championship on April 22, 2012, a lot of attention was garnered by the Shi'a activist Abdulhadi al-Khawaja. He had been on a hunger strike since February 9 in order to protest his life sentence by a military court. On April 30, the highest Appeal Court ruled that Al Khawaja and twenty other imprisoned Shi'a dissidents were to be retried by a civilian court. Without much progress in the national dialogue, in October 2012 Major General Shaykh Rashid bin Abdullah al-Khalifa, the Interior Minister, banned all protests on the grounds of national security. In a way, that was a prelude to repressive countermeasures.

Repressive Countermeasures

According to the Freedom House, democratic institutions in the GCC declined in 2012. Undermining political opposition, restricting freedom of expression on the Internet, arresting advocates of reform, and persecution through lengthy prison sentences have become the hallmark of repressive tactics in the oil-monarchies. Freedom was trampled in Kuwait, Oman, and the UAE; lengthy imprisonment of opposition members and "social controls" placed the KSA among the "worst of the worst" (Puddington 2013, 2, 5). With a loss of eighteen points in its total aggregate score, Bahrain demonstrated the largest decline among GCC countries. Bahrain, the KSA, and the UAE were also listed among worsening countries in the MENA region for 2011. Liberty came under fire in the UAE with constraints

on expression and civil society; Shi'ites faced persecution in the KSA. Forceful breakup of Shi'a protesters in Bahrain left the impression of a sectarian conflict (ibid., 7; Puddington 2012, 2-3, 5). The juxtaposition of "demands for change" and "authoritarian response" created a "pattern of protest and repression" (Puddington 2013, 1; Puddington 2012, 1). Repressive countermeasures by GCC governments were experienced both in the streets and on social media.

Social mobilization in the 1970s for the Islamic Revolution of Iran involved audio cassettes to secretly spread message from Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini self-exiled in France. In the 1990s, the Committee for the Defense of Shari'a Rights utilized fax machines to surreptitiously send messages to sympathizers in the KSA from self-exile in London. During the Arab Spring of 2011, the world witnessed deft use of the Internet in the MENA region to spread information globally. Civil societies have a special affinity for the Internet as both the group and the media share a strong sense of autonomy from the state. In fact, online civic engagement takes on a new life when formal political parties are outlawed. Under those circumstances, the Internet plays the dual role of venue and instrument for civil society (Howard 2011, 132-134).

As the "*information society*" became the highest tier of development, argued Emma Murphy (2008, 185), oil-rich monarchies were forced to include new information and communication technologies (ICT) in their development plans. With Kuwait leading online public access in 1994, Bahrain and UAE also opened Internet access in 1995. Qatar and Oman joined the trail in 1996; the KSA caught up in 1999 (Murphy 2008, 200). As commerce drives the spread of ICT in GCC states, this "*virtual*" space will become the newly contested frontier between repressive regimes and civil societies (Howard 2010, 132; Murphy 2008, 186-187). This cat-and-mouse game for the Internet is in play in GCC countries; the state resorts to penal countermeasures in its attempt to regain control. Charges and arrests became noteworthy on two counts: plotting to overthrow the government and insulting the royalty.

Sedition

The fear of government overthrow has led to national security concerns in GCC states. On January 7, 2013, the Court of Cassation in Bahrain rejected appeals by thirteen Shi'a activists against five years to life imprisonment sentences for plotting to overthrow the government. The verdict precipitated riots in Manama. Brushing aside criticism from Amnesty International, on November 7, 2012, the Bahraini government cancelled the citizenship of thrity-one men on the charge of endangering national security. They included London-based dissidents Saeed al-Shehabi and Ali Mushaima—son of Hassan Ali Mushaima, the imprisoned leader of the Haq Movement for Democracy and Liberty. Also included were Jawad Fairooz and Jalal Fairooz of Al Wefaq, both former members of the Majlis al-Nuwwab.

Earlier on June 14, 2012, the highest Appeal Court in Bahrain upheld prison sentences of nine Shi'a medical personnel for anti-government activities. The medics claimed that they were doing their duty in treating the injured from confrontation between demonstrators and the police. The previous month a civilian court in Manama upheld convictions by a military court in 2001 of twenty Shi'a activists on the charge of plotting to overthrow the regime. Eight of those convicted, including Abdulhadi al-Khawaja, had been sentenced to life imprisonment by the military court. Eight people were convicted of terrorism charges, three of them in absentia, in May. One of those convicted in absentia was Hassan Ali Mushaima, a UK resident.

On February 5, 2013, Bader al-Dahoom, Falah al-Sawwagh, and Khalid al-Tahoos, three former members of the Majlis al-Umma, received three years of imprisonment for lobbying to boycott the legislature in Kuwait. In November 2012, the National Assembly in Kuwait voted to repeal immunity from prosecution for nine of its members for storming the Assembly on November 17, 2011, which had forced the cabinet to resign later that month (Olimat 2012, 181). Omani authorities arrested twenty-two human rights activists in June 2012 for protesting outside the central police station in Muscat. On November 29, 2012, a court in Doha sentenced the Qatari poet Mohammed ibn al-Dheeb al-Ajami to life imprisonment for seeking to overthrow the government. Detained for a year pending trial, Al Ajami's offense was praising the Arab Spring in a poem.

The Interior Ministry of the KSA announced on January 2, 2016 the execution of forty-three Sunnis for the 2003-2006 Al Qaeda attacks on Western compounds, diplomatic missions, and government buildings that killed many people. Also executed were four Shi'ites, including the prominent cleric Nimr Baqir al-Nimr for the 2011-2013 anti-government shooting and petrol bomb attacks that killed several policemen in Qatif district in the Eastern Province (McDowall 2016). Abdullah al-Hamed and Muhammad al-Qahtani, two of the seven co-founders of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (Hatlani 2013), were sentenced to ten years in prison by a court in Riyadh on March 10, 2013 for establishing a human rights group without a license. Earlier on January 5, police arrested women and children for gathering in front of the Board of Grievances in Buraydah to demand release of relatives held for a long duration without a trial. The Umma Islamic Party criticized King Abdullah and Prince Ahmed ibn Abdul Aziz al-Saud, the Interior Minister, for arrests in Buraydah. Founded in February 2011 by intellectuals and religious conservatives, the unprecedented event was a daring move by the Umma Islamic Party because political parties are banned in the KSA.

On the charge of threatening national security, in forming a clandestine group for opposing the political system, ninety-four UAE nationals were put on trial in March 2013 in Abu Dhabi. Earlier in February, Kristian Coates Ulrichsen from the London School of Economics was denied entry to attend a

conference on Bahrain in the Emirate of Sharjah. Mansour al-Jamri, the editor of *Al Wasat* newspaper, and his wife Reem Khalifa, two Bahraini journalists, were also prevented from attending the conference. For plotting to overthrow the government, some members of the Islah movement were arrested in August 2012 in the UAE. Shaykh Sultan al-Qasimi, chairman of Islah, was placed under house arrest.

Defamation

The digital age has extended anti-government protests into cyberspace. Consequently, GCC authorities cracked down on defamation of royal images on the Internet. On March 20, 2013, the Court of Appeal in Kuwait increased the prison sentence of Bader al-Rasheedi from two to five years for undermining authority of the amir with Internet postings. Earlier in January, Mohammed al-Juwayhal, a former member of the Majlis al-Umma in Kuwait, received three years of imprisonment and a hefty fine of 2,000 dinars (roughly US$7,000) for insulting the Mutayr tribe in his Internet posting. Although subsequently released, Shaykh Abdullah Salim al-Sabah and Shaykh Nawwaf al-Malik al-Sabah of the Kuwaiti royal family were arrested in November 2012 for tweets supporting the opposition in Kuwait.

In January 2013, the Appeal Court in Muscat upheld sentences of seven men, including Mukhtar al-Hinai, for insulting Sultan Qaboos in their Internet blogs. Al Hinai, a journalist for the daily *Al Zaman* newspaper in Oman, received a one-year prison sentence and a fine of 1,000 rials (about US$2,600) in September 2012 for defaming the sultan in his Internet blog. In August 2012, eight men were each sentenced to one-year prison terms and given 1,000 rials (roughly US$2,600) fines by a court in Muscat for defaming the sultan. On December 3, 2012, a government commission in the KSA announced draconian penalties of up to ten years of imprisonment and estimated US$8,000 fines for repeat offenders spreading insults on Internet social networking sites—and fines could even reach up to US$130,000 (Davidson 2013, 215). Earlier on November 13, the UAE government announced that authorities will have expanded powers for stricter monitoring of online space to extirpate dissent.

Conclusion

In sharp contrast to the top-down approach of the 2003 Iraq War, the Arab Spring had ushered in bottom-up demands for reform in the MENA region. The events since 2011 have demonstrated that there is no democracy deficit with the Arab people, but with the authoritarian rulers. The Arab Spring precipitated regime change in some MENA republics. Alarmed by the contagion effect, the GCC oil-monarchies pursued a strategy of resistance amidst limited concessions.

The Arab Spring has not nudged the GCC shaykhdoms along on a path toward constitutional monarchy. What they continue to display are varying degrees of absolute rule. The legislative institutions reveal three-tiers of membership: fully elected, partially elected, and fully appointed. Irrespective of the membership composition, there is very little legislative autonomy.

With the historical division in Kuwait between governance and commerce, the two-thirds elected members of the parliament from the mostly merchant families are assertive in grilling individual cabinet members. The often acrimonious executive-legislative relationship over interpellation and vote of no confidence has resulted in the amir repeatedly dissolving parliament. Thus, the stable political system in Kuwait has demonstrated remarkably unstable politics. Hardly contentious given the greater concern with the Shi'a opposition, Bahrain requires a two-thirds parliamentary majority for a vote of no confidence. Qatar has avoided raucous parliamentary politics with a two-step process: a vote of no confidence is allowed only after interpellation, which itself requires at least a one-third parliamentary vote. It is noteworthy that this legislative power can be exercised only against individual ministers and not the cabinet as a whole. Also, only in Kuwait is this permitted against the prime minister. In contrast, this mechanism of a vote of no confidence as a legislative check-and-balance against the executive is absent in Oman, the KSA, and the UAE.

Legislation can be initiated by only the cabinet in Bahrain and the prime minister in Kuwait, respectively. While both are appointed by the monarch, parliamentary approval of the prime minister in Kuwait serves as a legislative check-and-balance against the executive. Although Bahrain has an elected lower chamber, legislative deadlocks make it vulnerable to being bypassed or a *de facto* veto from the unelected upper chamber under the absolute majority requirement. Likewise, the appointed half has a *de facto* veto effect on the elected half in the unicameral legislature in Qatar. In spite of their surface nuances, the legislature in Oman, the UAE, and the KSA are outliers as advisory bodies.

Given that the aforementioned dynamics reflect continuity from before 2011, the Arab Spring did not impact institutional change in the GCC. What the Arab Spring has done was to bring the issue of majority rule to the forefront in Bahrain. Public sentiment forced the monarch to initiate a national dialogue, but progress is unlikely given the aversion to power-sharing with the Shi'a majority population. The KSA and the UAE intervention in Bahraini civil discord further demonstrated a regional containment strategy through a monarchial alliance. What has been remarkable were concessions to women for active participation in the public square in the KSA. Even though the legislature has only an advisory role, women's representation may give voice to gender issues in the kingdom.

With the GCC states having moved into the digital era in the 1990s, the opposition has taken to combining on the ground demonstrations with anti-government expressions in the virtual realm. Invoking national security threats,

governments have reacted with arrests and fines to both challenges. Given the continuing cycle of postings on the Internet, prison and financial penalties have become harsher since the Arab Spring. While grassroots civic engagement has been energized for sociopolitical change, political change is likely to be outpaced by social transformation. In full control of security institutions, the GCC ruling families will resist substantive political reforms. Any change in the political arena will be incremental in the foreseeable future despite confrontations in the street and in cyberspace by the pro-democracy movement.

Notes

1.   Although Hazem Beblawi and Giacomo Luciani are generally considered the founding fathers, the fundamentals of rentierism are attributed to Hussein Mahdavy in a study of Iran (Gray 2011, 5).
2.   Matthew Gray (2011, 8-9, 37) identified the time-frames for the three phases of the rentier-state theory as the 1950s-1980s, 1990s-2000s, and the twenty-first century, respectively—referring to the third phase as "late rentierism" (ibid., 23-36).
3.   The author benefited from *Keesing's Record of World Events*.
4.   Following the death of Abdullah bin Abdulaziz, in January 2015 Salman bin Abdulaziz ascended to the throne in Saudi Arabia. Prince Muqrin bin Abdulaziz became the Crown Prince. King Salman appointed his son Mohammad bin Salman as the Defense Minister. The appointment of Mohammad bin Nayef, another grandson of Abdulaziz ibn Saud, as the Deputy Crown Price ensured a smooth succession of power to the next generation of the royal family (*BBC News* 2015).

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