



Arab Reform Bulletin: September 2005

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Insights and Analysis

Arab Electoral Commissions: Making the Vote Freer and Fairer?

Amy Hawthorne

Iraq: Constitutional Process Goes Awry

Joost R. Hiltermann

Lebanon: The Paradox of Hezbollah's Arms

Amal Saad Ghorayeb

Yemen: Economic and Political Deterioration

Sarah Phillips

Morocco: Internet Making Censorship Obsolete

Mohammad Ibhahine

News and Views

Egypt: Presidential Election

Lebanon: Security Chiefs Arrested

Palestine: Countdown to Legislative Elections

Algeria: Referendum on Amnesty Law

Tunisia: Authorities Crack Down on Civil Society

Bahrain: Controversial Political Associations Law

Saudi Arabia: Reformers Released

Upcoming Political Events

Views from the Arab Media

Read On

New publications on U.S. policy, Iraq, Egypt, civil society, and Islamist movements in the Middle East.

Subscriber Information

Insights and Analysis

Arab Electoral Commissions: Making the Vote Freer and Fairer?

Amy Hawthorne

With its July 2005 establishment of supposedly autonomous commissions to oversee this fall's presidential and parliamentary elections, Egypt joined several Arab countries that have created election management bodies. The ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) has touted the commissions, headed by judicial figures, as enhancing constitutionally-mandated judicial supervision of the electoral process. The new bodies help soften the image of voting in a country where the Ministry of Interior has long been the intimidating public face of elections, and contain the seeds of meaningful institutions. But as currently structured, the commissions lack the power and independence required for more fair and transparent elections. In fact, the commissions' setting-up illustrates the current dynamic in Egypt: opposition forces can press the regime to enact reforms, but are too weak to influence the substance of those reforms.

The role of the Presidential Election Commission that oversaw the September 7 vote included vetting candidates, setting campaign dates, encouraging citizen participation, supervising campaign spending and access to state-run broadcast media, overseeing balloting and vote-counting, and declaring the results. The Parliamentary Election Commission has similar tasks for upcoming elections, and in future elections will advise the government on updating the voter registry and redrawing constituencies. While these duties are a step in the right direction, the commissions do not have authority to tackle the most serious problems plaguing Egyptian election administration: a deeply flawed registry that should be fully revamped, a poorly-trained election bureaucracy often loyal to the regime (and by extrapolation the ruling party), and widespread public ignorance of registration and voting procedures.

Commissions are instead confined to advising the Interior Ministry and other agencies that do the actual preparations for elections and to supervising the final stages of the process. NDP officials explain that the commissions are based on the French model, in which a judicial committee oversees the government's implementation of elections. Such a model is unsuitable for Egypt, however, which lacks France's professional civil service and needs an overhaul of election infrastructure by a neutral body. In addition, the commissions' last-minute formation and inadequate resources hinder them from executing even their assigned duties; the presidential commission reportedly met only twice before election day.

More important, the commissions' membership does not meet the minimum standard for independence. The judicial officials selected are not known for taking public stances against the government; the Minister of Justice, who heads the parliamentary commission, is an executive branch employee. The other members—retired judges and nonpartisan public figures hastily chosen by the NDP-dominated parliament—have little political clout. Thus Egypt's commissions lack what is most essential: strong figures who can push back against executive-branch interference.

Indeed, key decisions taken by the presidential commission did little to project an image of impartiality. Chairman Mamdouh Marei (head of Egypt's Supreme Constitutional Court) prevented domestic election monitors from playing any meaningful role, disqualified one thousand judges (who had criticized past elections and pushed for judicial reforms) from overseeing polling stations, and devised a patently nontransparent vote-counting system. Most troubling, by law the commission's decisions cannot be appealed, thereby inoculating President Hosni Mubarak's landslide against being overturned by the courts.

A few other Arab countries have recently established electoral commissions, but none has a perfect record. Algeria has a judicial commission much like Egypt's, along with a party-based committee that mainly receives complaints and monitors media access. Morocco has a similarly toothless committee. Only Iraq, Palestine, and Yemen have fully-empowered commissions. In contrast to the situation in Egypt, these three emerged in a context of state formation, in which no one group could control election management. Iraq's nonpartisan commission displayed admirable competence in organizing the January 2005 vote under extremely trying circumstances. It remains to be seen, however, if it can withstand pressure from powerful Shiite and Kurdish parties to manipulate upcoming votes. And the commission is unlikely to be emulated by other Arab governments, who would view the extensive U.S. and UN involvement in its operations as a violation of their sovereignty. The committee that oversaw unified Yemen's first elections, in 1993, was the region's most striking experiment in pluralistic election administration. The main parties were represented at all levels, an approach that caused gridlock as they had to agree upon every decision, but that fostered public confidence. Regrettably, in recent years the ruling party has stacked the commission with loyalists.

Palestine's commission is perhaps the most promising. It features a mix of partisan and technocratic members and has built a skilled staff who successfully revised the voter registry. Allegations of some commissioners' favoritism toward the ruling Fatah party in the recent presidential contest, however, have marred its reputation. Nonetheless, Palestine remains a relative bright spot in a region where electoral commissions are becoming more common, but are not yet necessarily making a critical difference in the freedom and fairness of elections.

Amy Hawthorne, the former editor of the Arab Reform Bulletin, is currently an independent consultant specializing in Middle East political reform.

[Return to table of contents.](#) [Printer-friendly version.](#)

Iraq: Constitutional Process Goes Awry

Joost R. Hiltermann

After several missed deadlines, Iraq's constitutional process has yet to produce a draft acceptable to Shiites, Kurds, and Sunni Arabs, and prospects are bleak. Both process and content, currently, are highly problematic. The U.S. government intervened early with two imperatives: to gain consensus support of the final draft; and to adhere strictly to the timetable prescribed by the Transitional Administrative Law (TAL), i.e., a final draft by August 15, a popular referendum by October 15, and general elections by December 15.

As the process reached its apparent denouement on September 13, the Bush administration evidently sacrificed the principle of inclusiveness for the sake of an arbitrary deadline. Sunni Arabs, fifteen of whose representatives had been added to the Constitutional Committee in July but were then sidelined after negotiations moved from the committee to an informal leadership council of Kurds and Shiites, refused to embrace a document they saw as inimical to their interests. The Shiites and Kurds then declared the draft final and submitted it to the national assembly.

The only hope now lies in the fact that the process may still be open, at least until October 15. That deadline is truly immutable to a U.S. administration set on a major troop rotation in January and a partial drawdown shortly afterwards.

Is compromise possible? Perhaps, assuming strong U.S. pressure on the drafters to achieve it. With Kurds and Shiites broadly in agreement, the key lies in accommodating fundamental Sunni Arab concerns. As the new underdog after decades of lording it over Iraq's other communities, they can only indicate their red lines, all three of which were crossed in the current draft:

- *Federalism*: Sunni Arabs now accept the idea of a Kurdish region (along pre-April 2003 boundaries) but see the possibility of a Shiite "super" region as leading to the break-up of Iraq, leaving them landlocked and bereft of resources. A possible compromise: besides the Kurdish region, decentralize power in the rest of Iraq by existing governorates and create a fixed formula for the fair distribution of oil wealth.
- *The Baath Party*: By outlawing the "Saddamist Baath," the draft judges Iraqis not by past conduct but by mere membership in a party the regime had commandeered as an instrument of political control. Sunni Arabs protest that this blanket ban can be used to exclude or otherwise punish them arbitrarily. A possible compromise: ban the party but indicate that the criterion for disqualification from managerial positions or public office will be crimes committed, not mere party membership.
- *National Identity*: Iraq, the draft says, is part of the Islamic world, "and is a founding member of the Arab League and is committed to its charter." This language reflects a demand from the Kurds, whose long suffering has made them allergic to all things Arab, but infuriates Sunni Arabs (and also some Shiites), who read it as a denial of Iraq's identity and thus as ratification of the country's inevitable break-up. A possible compromise: simply omit this phrase as too divisive. The problem remains, however, that the draft fails to emphasize an Iraqi identity to which all three major communities can subscribe.

Two scenarios present themselves as October 15 approaches. One is a doomsday scenario in which no compromise is reached, the constitution is adopted largely in its current form, and a government is elected that will lack a social compact underpinning its legitimacy (even if Sunni Arabs decide to participate in the elections this time). The country will slowly dissolve into civil war and disintegrate amidst scenes of horrific sectarian and ethnic "cleansing" in the many areas of mixed population, including Baghdad and Kirkuk. Unfortunately, this scenario now seems likely. Those who pin their hopes on Sunni Arabs' ability to muster a two-thirds majority in three governorates to vote down the constitution should think again. The community is too divided—over whether to vote and thereby legitimize the process or stay home and suffer a constitution harmful to their interests—to be able to mobilize sufficient turnout. And while other disaffected Iraqis, such as Moqtada Al Sadr's followers, may well come out in droves to vote no, they are largely absent in predominantly Sunni Arab governorates. Furthermore, they, along with the Sunni Arabs, are unlikely to clear the over fifty percent threshold needed nationwide to defeat the constitution.

A more promising scenario would involve a re-energized U.S. diplomatic effort at bringing the three sides around the table to forge a durable compact. Even then, a constitution embraced by Shiites, Kurds, and Sunni Arabs, while necessary for stabilizing the country, would be insufficient. Iraq's new rulers would have to take concrete steps to tackle growing sectarian strife and find a broadly acceptable solution to the question of Kirkuk. One hopes they will do so and succeed, as the alternative is dire.

Joost Hiltermann is Middle East Project Director for the International Crisis Group.

[Return to table of contents.](#) [Printer-friendly version.](#)

Lebanon: The Paradox of Hezbollah's Arms

Amal Saad Ghorayeb

There is no easy solution to the predicament of Hizbollah's armed status. Thus far, the organization and the new Lebanese government have resisted calls by the United States and the international community to implement United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559, which urges the state to disarm all militias. If anything, Hizbollah's resolve to keep hold of its weapons indefinitely has only hardened over the past months, with the party now claiming that its resistance role surpasses that of mere "liberation" and includes ongoing strategic "defense," while rejecting any notion of subsuming its arms under the central command of the Lebanese army. For its part, the Lebanese government has followed the path of its predecessors by endorsing the resistance in its policy statement, thereby perpetuating the uneasy yet thus far stable formula of an armed group that is at once auxiliary and extraneous to the Lebanese army.

In response, the Bush administration has anchored its demands for Hizbollah's demilitarization within the framework of its democracy agenda for the region, by repeating the "there can only be one authority in a democracy" mantra while continuing to brand the movement a terrorist organization. Yet, as problematic as the preservation of Hizbollah's arms is, the prospect of attempting to disarm the organization against its will through the use of force or immense political pressure risks further radicalizing the organization and the Shiite community behind it. Such a development would not bode well for Lebanon's stability, or by extension for the U.S. democratic initiative in the region.

The paradox is that Hizbollah's arms actually have been conducive to its full political integration and resultant moderation in several ways. The need to legitimize its resistance was one of the principal motivations that induced Hizbollah to enter the political mainstream in 1992, when it contested the first post-war parliamentary elections. With the recent withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon and the consequent loss of Syrian political cover, Hizbollah's arms lay exposed to the pressure brought on by Resolution 1559. In order to transform the Lebanese state into a substitute security net that could allow Hizbollah to shield its resistance to Western diktat, Hizbollah was compelled to reach out to other groups during the latest parliamentary elections, for example striking electoral alliances with constituent groups of the Sunni-Christian-Druze coalition in exchange for securing their public pledges to support its resistance priority. In this connection, Hizbollah opened up to all major forces across the political spectrum, even reconciling with the right-wing Christian Lebanese Forces, a one-time ally of Israel. Hizbollah then took the unprecedented step of participating in the Lebanese government both indirectly, through a minister close to the party and directly, by appointing a minister from within its own ranks. In effect, the preservation of Hizbollah's arms has necessitated its adoption of a two-pronged strategy of full submersion in the democratic arena and rapprochement with groups of all political persuasions.

If Hizbollah's arms are the condition for, rather than the obstacle to, its political moderation, it logically follows that any attempt to bring about the group's involuntary disarmament will deprive it of an incentive to maintain this stance. Subjected to strong pressure to disarm, the party might threaten to pursue radical changes in the political system such as redressing Shiite political under-representation by pursuing the abolition of political confessionalism, a move sure to meet with strong protest from Lebanese Christians. It is also possible that Hizbollah and the Shiite community might not content themselves with political steps to resist disarmament, or might decide that no political measures could compensate for the loss of arms. Hizbollah's armed activities have fostered a culture of resistance among the Shiites, some 95 percent of whom support the resistance according to a survey conducted in June by the Beirut Centre for Research and Information. Hizbollah leaders have repeatedly raised the specter of renewed civil war should the organization be driven underground.

So long as the United States actively pursues the disarmament of Hizbollah alongside its promotion of democratic reforms, it runs the risk of achieving neither. Hizbollah's disarmament should be the voluntary result of an internal Lebanese dialogue that is free from foreign intervention. Such a dialogue can only come about once the justification for Hizbollah's arms—the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict—is resolved via a comprehensive regional peace agreement.

Amal Saad Ghorayeb is Assistant Professor at the Lebanese American University and author of Hizbollah: Politics and Religion (Pluto Press, 2002).

[Return to table of contents.](#) [Printer-friendly version.](#)

Yemen: Economic and Political Deterioration

Sarah Phillips

There is a traditional saying that to rule Yemen is like riding a lion, and President Ali Abdullah Saleh is no stranger to the demands of political survival. His twenty-seven years in power have refined his skills as a master of compromise among the disparate interests of tribal groups, Islamists, socialists, Saudi Arabia, and the West. He has remained in control throughout the unification of the former North and South Yemen, the international isolation that followed Yemen's refusal to support the U.S.-led coalition in the 1991 Gulf War, the 1994 civil war, and U.S. demands for cooperation in counter-terrorism efforts after 2001. Yemen is now once again facing a host of internal political and economic challenges, in the face of which Saleh is opting to reel in political freedoms in order to maintain control.

A number of incidents since the spring of 2004 have demonstrated the government's decreasing tolerance for dissent. In March 2004, it was reported that Saleh's son and widely-assumed successor Ahmed (commander of the Republican Guard

and Special Forces to Combat Terrorism) had been shot and injured by one of his own officers. The journalist who wrote the story was promptly arrested and detained for printing false material aimed at destabilizing the country. Local observers suspected that the heavy-handed response was driven by the need to appear in control before implementing long-awaited IMF-mandated removal of fuel subsidies. To the surprise of the government, late last year roughly 100 deputies from the ruling party had signed a protest against the removal of the subsidies and diesel smuggling by top government officials, an unprecedented move in a parliament that generally complies with government initiatives.

Then, in June 2004, former parliamentary deputy Hussein Al Houthi launched an armed challenge to the government's authority in the northern province of Saada. Calling Saleh "a tyrant...who wants to please America and Israel, by sacrificing the blood of his own people," Al Houthi attracted a level of popular support that unnerved the government. The military had expected to crush the rebellion quickly, but in fact it took three months and cost an estimated 1000 lives and \$1 billion to put down the initial fighting, which resumed in March 2005, with many more lives lost and villages destroyed. As with the incident involving Saleh's son, the government turned on those who criticized government handling of the uprising, arresting several prominent journalists—one of whom was held for seven months and subjected to regular beatings, reportedly on presidential instructions.

Deepening frustration and despair are evident among Yemenis as the once-promising process of political reform has failed to bring improvements to the standard of living. Dozens were killed in riots when fuel subsidies were finally lifted in July 2005, increasing fuel prices by 100 to 150 percent overnight. Poverty levels have nearly doubled since unification in 1990, and this year GDP growth is set to be significantly lower than population growth. The 2004 international corruption survey by Transparency International found that Yemen ranked 112th of the 146 countries surveyed, a dramatic drop from the 88th ranking that it received just one year previously.

Yemen's budget is based primarily on revenue from oil and foreign aid. Windfall oil revenues generally have not benefited the budget, significant amounts being siphoned off by government officials or used to buy short-term political acquiescence from potential detractors. The larger problem, however, is that current oil reserves will run out in just seven years, President Saleh confirmed in early 2005, a decade earlier than previously thought. When oil revenues dwindle, the government will find itself short of the money that it uses to incorporate people into patronage networks and in need of a more stable source of legitimacy as well as new sources of income.

In an apparent attempt to shield himself from public anger, President Saleh announced just three days before the July fuel price hikes that he would not run for re-election in 2006. Most Yemenis remember, however, a similar announcement prior to the 1999 election, which Saleh then contested and won with an alleged 96.3 percent of the vote. Despite such maneuvers and the ongoing crackdown on journalistic freedoms, Saleh continues to win plaudits from the West, such as a January 2005 U.S. House of Representatives resolution congratulating President Saleh for his commitment to reforms and citing Yemen (along with several other countries) as a model for democratization in the Arab world. What Yemen really needs, however, is fewer rhetorical bouquets and more assistance from the United States and other donors to get the country on a sound economic footing. This will require putting the spotlight on the corruption that is rampant within the government; failing this, there is little hope that Yemen's already faltering democratic experiment will succeed.

Sarah Phillips is a doctoral candidate at the Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies of the Australian National University, currently researching political reform in Yemen.

[Return to table of contents.](#) [Printer-friendly version.](#)

Morocco: Internet Making Censorship Obsolete

Mohammad Ibahrine

While satellite television often attracts the lion's share of analysis about new media and their effect on prospects for democratization in the Middle East and North Africa, another technology may already have had at least as large an impact: the Internet. In Morocco, where the regime has severely constrained, controlled, or silenced independent print media through direct and indirect censorship, the Internet has become an important instrument for unrestricted flows of information, which in turn are leading to the emergence of a more vibrant public sphere.

The degree of Morocco's connectivity to the Internet is surprising. For a country that established its first Internet connection in 1995, Morocco has now about one million users among a population of about 32 million, one of the highest growth rates in the Arab world. The spread of cybercafés (now numbering over 1500), as well as of Voice Over Internet Protocols for inexpensive long-distance phone calls, are helping to spread Internet use.

Since the introduction of the Internet into the political field in Morocco in the late 1990s, government ministries, political parties, and the parliament are online. The same holds true for activists and civil society groups, who have a long tradition of developing and using independent media to promote their interests and facilitate communication.

Among the most important cases of political use of the Internet in Morocco is that of Abdul Salam Yassine, leader of Al Adl wa Al Ihsan (Justice and Charity), a leading Islam-oriented political organization. Internet use for political purposes gained momentum in 2000 when Al Adl wa Al Ihsan launched a website (<http://www.yassine.net>) to publish an open letter in

many European languages after the regime banned independent newspapers for publishing it. Entitled "To whom it may concern," the voluminous memorandum criticized King Hassan II's regime and urged King Mohammad to redistribute the late king's wealth. Yassine's website featured information resources, news, and audio and video clips, thus breaking the chains of censorship.

A separate but related recent case that shows how the Internet is facilitating political communication in the face of growing authoritarian tendencies is that of Nadia Yassine, daughter and unofficial spokesperson of Abdul Salam Yassine. In an interview published on June 2, 2005 in *Al Usbuiyya Al Jadida*, a Moroccan weekly, Nadia Yassine criticized authoritarian regimes and expressed support for a republic. Nadia Yassine was charged with damaging the monarchy and if found guilty, may face heavy fines and up to five years in prison. Following the charges, Nadia Yassine launched a website in Arabic, English and French (<http://www.nadiayassine.net>) containing detailed information about her biography, ideas, and activities (including audio clips of her public lectures, for example one given at the University of California at Berkeley), as well as the full text of the interview that resulted in the case against her. The website has received numerous e-mail messages of support, mostly from highly educated Moroccans.

Nor have Islamists been the only ones to use the Internet to circumvent government constraints. Since January 1998 progressive intellectual and human rights activist Mahdi Elmandjra, denied access to regular Moroccan media, has used his website (<http://www.elmandjra.org>) and e-mail lists to disseminate information and alternative viewpoints. Elmandjra recently launched the "Baraka Movement," similar to Egypt's Kifaya Movement, which opposes despotism and monopoly of authority. In using his electronic networks with international and national human rights organizations, he is able to publicize abuses, rights violations and repressive practices quickly. He perceives information sharing as an important feature of political participation, as it empowers marginalized individuals and civil society groups to overcome regime censorship. Since 1998 his website has had more than 400,000 hits, a large number of visitors for a personal website in the Arab world.

Internet-based political activism in Morocco is still nascent, but is growing at a fast pace and is likely to play an increasingly important role in accelerating political pluralism. The Moroccan regime is not ignorant of the power of the Internet and is attempting to stifle its effectiveness via legal constraints such as the 2003 anti-terrorism law as well as technical methods such as filtering and blocking websites. But such methods ultimately are ineffective; even when a website is shut down, there are still e-mail list serves and blogs to take up the cause.

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[Return to table of contents.](#) [Printer-friendly version.](#)

News and Views

Egypt: Presidential Election

Opposition candidates and civil society organizations challenged the legitimacy of Egypt's first-ever presidential election, claiming that limited access by monitors to the polls and extensive problems with voter lists called results into question. The Presidential Election Commission at first said that election monitors trained and organized by civil society organizations would not be allowed inside polling stations, and won an appeal against an initial court ruling in the monitors' favor. Although the Commission relented at the eleventh hour, it was too late for instructions to reach judges supervising polls or monitors to acquire written credentials, so most monitors did not gain access to polling stations. A preliminary **report** by the Independent Committee for Election Monitoring (organized by Ibn Khaldoun Center for Development Studies) argues that election administration authorities have failed to install the necessary legal provisions to ensure the independence of the electoral process. Another report by the Arab Center for Independence of the Judiciary and the Legal Profession asserts that the elections were free but lacked integrity and transparency. In its **evaluation** of the elections, the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights requested that the judiciary enjoy full electoral oversight in future elections and recommended the creation of an independent commission to discuss constitutional reforms. Egypt's National Council for Human Rights announced it will release a report shortly.

Approximately 23 percent of Egypt's 32 million registered voters turned out for the September 7 presidential election, with President Hosni Mubarak winning 88.6 percent of the vote, according to official results announced by the Presidential Election Commission. Al Ghad Party leader Ayman Nour was in second place, with 7.6 percent, and Wafd Party leader Noaman Gomaa was third with 2.9 percent.

The Egyptian government released thirteen members of the Muslim Brothers in late August, including senior member Mahmoud Ezzat detained since May 22. Several other leaders of the organization remain in detention.

[Return to table of contents](#)

Lebanon: Security Chiefs Arrested

In an unprecedented event in the Arab world, Lebanese police arrested three former security chiefs on August 30 as suspects in the UN investigation into the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri. The detained include former chief of general security Jamil Sayyid, former director general of the internal security forces Ali Hajj, and former director of military intelligence Raymond Azar, all of whom resigned in April due to mounting political and popular pressure. Commander of the Presidential Guards Mustafa Hamdan was also summoned to appear before the commission. The arrests have renewed calls for the resignation of President Emile Lahoud, an ally of the former chiefs.

[Return to table of contents](#)

Palestine: Countdown to Legislative Elections

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas announced that legislative elections will be held on January 25, 2006. Click [here](#) to read the text of the presidential decree. The elections were originally scheduled for July 2005 but were postponed partly due to controversy over the electoral law. The law passed on June 18, 2005 (too late to hold elections in July) mandates that half the seats will be elected by direct ballot based on electoral districts and half chosen from party lists by proportional representation. Click [here](#) for a description of the new law in Arabic.

[Return to table of contents](#)

Algeria: Referendum on Amnesty Law

Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika announced a referendum will be held September 29 on the "Draft Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation," an amnesty law that would grant exemption from prosecution to any member of an armed group, state-armed militia, or the security forces for crimes committed in the conflict that began in 1992. The charter denies state responsibility for "disappearances" and claims that any wrongful acts committed by state agents have already been punished, but promises families of the disappeared compensation and recognition as "victims of the national tragedy." Algerian media report that Madani Mezrag, head of the outlawed Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) backs the charter, but the Socialist Forces Front called for a boycott of the referendum because the law would "consecrate impunity for atrocities committed in the civil war." Click [here](#) for the French text of the charter and [here](#) for a detailed analysis of the charter by Human Rights Watch.

[Return to table of contents.](#)

Tunisia: Authorities Crack Down on Civil Society

Tunisian authorities closed the office of the Association of Tunisian Judges and banned the Union of Tunisian Journalists from holding its first conference on September 7, which was to host hundreds of independent Tunisian journalists as well as representatives of international journalists' associations. Click [here](#) to read Amnesty International's commentary. A Tunisian tribunal also ordered the Tunisian League of Human Rights not to hold its congress that was scheduled for September 9. The International Federation for Human Rights and the World Organization against Torture have expressed their concern for what they consider a serious infringement of the freedom of speech, expression and association. Click [here](#) to read Amnesty International's commentary.

[Return to table of contents.](#)

Bahrain: Controversial Political Associations Law

King Hamad ratified a controversial law for political associations in August despite vehement opposition from Bahrain's political societies. The new law stipulates that associations can be formed as long as they are not based on class, profession, or religion and raises the minimum age of society members from eighteen to twenty-one. It also imposes restrictions on foreign funding and requires all existing political societies to re-register with the Ministry of Justice by November 2, 2005. Political associations have been protesting the law since it was passed by parliament in July and established a coalition to push for amendments. The Bahrain Center for Human Rights is urging all societies to defy the law and continue their activities without re-applying for a license. Al Wafaq National Islamic Society, Bahrain's largest political society, is witnessing a split in its ranks over whether to comply with the law or reject it, and will decide by a general assembly vote in October. Political groups operate in Bahrain as associations due to a continued ban on political parties.

[Return to table of contents.](#)

Saudi Arabia: Reformers Released

Saudi reformers Ali Al Domaini, Matrook Al Faleh, and Abdullah Al Hamed were released from prison after receiving a pardon from King Abdullah on August 8. A general court in Riyadh had sentenced them on May 15 to prison terms of between six and nine years on charges of sowing dissent, distributing political leaflets, using the media to incite opposition against the government, and causing political unrest, after they circulated a petition in January 2004 calling for the establishment of a constitutional monarchy.

[Return to table of contents.](#)

Upcoming Political Events

- Algeria: Referendum for Amnesty Law, September 25, 2005.
- Palestine: Municipal Elections, 105 districts in the West Bank and Gaza, September 29.
- Iraq: Referendum on Draft Constitution, October 15, 2005.
- Egypt: Parliamentary Elections, November (exact dates not yet set).
- Palestine: Legislative Elections, January 25, 2006.

[Return to table of contents.](#)

Views from the Arab Media

Al Jazeera's "**Al Ittijah Al Mu'akis**" (The Opposite Direction) hosted an August 30 discussion on the question of Arab political reform. Tunisian human rights activist Munsif Al Marzuqi argued that a process of real reform is not yet underway in the region; regimes either entirely reject the idea of reform or just pay lip service to the notion to appease domestic and international pressure. Maida Al Daqaq, Editor-in-Chief of Egypt's *Al Hilal* magazine, disagreed, insisting that a reform process has been launched in the region and many countries are experiencing changes.

On his August 24 **program** on *Al Jazeera*, Ahmad Mansour discussed the recent tension between the judiciary and the government in Egypt with prominent Egyptian judges, including head of the Judges Club Yehya Al Rifai. Al Rifai explained that the Judges Club mission is to press the government to observe judicial independence as mandated by the constitution and to abide by fair electoral procedures.

An August 20 episode of "**Hiwar Maftooh**" (Open Dialogue) on *Al Jazeera* explores the future of the relationship between Hamas and Fatah after the Israeli disengagement from Gaza. Hamas Senior member Osama Hamdan defined Hamas's strategy as threefold: continuing the resistance against Israel; ensuring good living conditions for Palestinians in Gaza; and putting the Palestinian house in order. When pushed by host Ghassan Bin Jidou on the question of how Hamas would react to calls of disarmament by the Palestinian Authority, he replied that the decision would ultimately be made by the Palestinian public.

On another *Al Jazeera* live show, "**Bila Hudud**" (Without Limits) on August 17, Ahmad Mansour hosted a senior member of the Syrian Muslim Brothers Ali Sadreddine Al Byanuni. Al Byanuni asserted that the Muslim Brothers are advocating regime change in Syria because Bashar Al Asad has proved he has no interest in reform. Al Byanuni also asserted the Muslim Brothers cooperate with other opposition forces inside Syria and are engaged in dialogue with European officials.

In a **commentary** in the pan-Arab daily *Al Hayat* on September 9, Syrian writer Wael Al Sawah argues that the notion of democracy cannot be separated from that of secularism. Political Islam does not abide by the conditions of a democratic society because it does not guarantee equal opportunity for all. While Islamists recognize other religions, they do not accord them equal status.

Writing in **Al Sharq Al Awsat** on September 6, Abdul Rahman Al Rashed insists that regardless of their shortcomings, the Egyptian presidential elections augur a new chapter in Egypt and the region's history. The Egyptian elections should be taken seriously because they could spur reform in other countries (particularly Yemen, Sudan, and Tunisia), which will be embarrassed by their elections.

In a **commentary** in the UAE's *Al Bayan* on September 1, Sobhi Ghandour criticizes the U.S. administration's assumption that freedom in Iraq would bring stability to the region. Iraq stands on the brink of civil war and the situation is not likely to improve either after the constitutional referendum or the new elections. The U.S.'s endeavor in Iraq has brought neither democracy nor stability to Iraq or the region.

[Return to table of contents.](#)

Read On

Two new publications focus on the strategic implications of the **U.S. democracy promotion**:

- Gregory Gause challenges the premise that democracy in the Arab world will improve U.S. security in "Can Democracy Stop Terrorism?" (*Foreign Affairs*, vol. 84, no. 5, September/October 2005, 62-76), arguing that the Bush administration's push for democracy in the Arab world is unlikely to stop terrorism and could help bring to power governments much less cooperative with the United States than the current regimes.
- In "**The Strategic Implications of Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Middle East**" (*Parameters*,

Autumn 2005, 87-102) Chris Zambelis warns that the spread of democracy to the Middle East will likely be accompanied by serious setbacks and periods of instability, which will have negative repercussions for U.S. interests and the war on terrorism.

Several publications focus on developments in **Iraq**:

- Nathan Brown offers an article-by-article commentary on the proposed Iraqi constitution, exploring how it is likely to lead to a loose confederation rather than a tight federal structure and how its rights provisions are far less revolutionary than has been claimed (“**The Final Draft of the Iraqi Constitution: Analysis and Commentary**,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, September 8, 2005).
- In “How to Win in Iraq” (*Foreign Affairs*, vol. 84, no. 5, September/October 2005, 87-104) Andrew F. Krepinevich Jr. argues that success in Iraq requires a protracted commitment of U.S. resources, a willingness to risk more casualties in the short term, and an enduring U.S. presence in Iraq.
- Efforts at inclusiveness in Iraq, which were meant to produce a national unity government, tend to marginalize party competition and thus rob the democratic process of one of its essential elements, contends Adeed Dawisha in “Democratic Institutions and Performance” (*Journal of Democracy*, vol. 16, no. 3, July 2005, 35-49).
- Eric Davis argues that understanding how memory shapes Iraq's democratization is important not only in understanding Iraq, but in understanding the conditions under which democracy prospers (“The Uses of Historical Memory,” *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 16, no. 3, July 2005, 54-68).
- In “The Sistani Factor” (*Journal of Democracy*, vol. 16, no. 3, July 2005, 50-3) Ahmed H. Al-Rahim explains that for the Shiite majority and its senior religious leader, Grand Ayatollah Al Sistani, the January elections played out against the background of a longing for justice that has deep spiritual and historical sources as well as more recent sociopolitical roots.
- The *Third World Quarterly* published a double issue on the subject of reconstruction in Iraq (vol. 26, no. 4-5, October 2005):
 - Sultan Barakat argues that security will be achieved only through reconciliation of all parties in an accountable state-building process (“Post-Saddam Iraq: Deconstructing a Regime, Reconstructing a Nation,” 571-91).
 - Tareq Y. Ismael and Jacqueline Ismael propose scenarios that could emerge depending on actions by the regime and the resistance (“Wither Iraq? Beyond Saddam, Sanctions and Occupation,” 609-29).
 - Michiel Leezenberg examines the experience of Iraqi Kurdistan in reconstruction over the last ten years and its relevance to Iraq as a whole (“Iraqi Kurdistan: Contours of a Post-civil War Society,” 631-47).
 - In “Corruption, Reconstruction and Oil Governance in Iraq” (685-703), Philippe Le Billion contends that Iraq's political legacy, oil dependence, and transition under U.S. occupation suggests that the new regime may once again rest on corruption-based patronage.
 - Toby Dodge's “Iraqi Transitions: From Regime Change to State Collapse” (705-21) argues that U.S. administrators fundamentally misunderstood the size and nature of the task they were about to undertake, and that violence and sectarianism were direct outcomes of this failure.
 - Adeed Dawisha argues in favor of federal arrangements that bridge the ethno-sectarian divide and an economy that shifts radically to the private sector to lessen middle class dependence on the state (“The Prospects for Democracy in Iraq: Challenges and Opportunities,” 723-37).

Several new publications focus on aspects of opposition in **Egypt**:

- Mona El-Ghobashy argues that the Muslim Brothers' energetic capitalization on the limited opportunities available to compete in parliamentary and other elections has had a profound effect on their political thought and organization (“The Metamorphosis of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers,” *International Journal for Middle East Studies*, vol. 37, 2005, 373-95).
- In “How Can Opposition Support Authoritarianism? Lessons from Egypt” Holger Albrecht argues that instead of acting as a harbinger of democratization, political opposition movements have contributed to the stability and resilience of an authoritarian regime (*Democratization*, vol. 12, no. 3, June 2005, 378-97).

- In “**The 2005 Egyptian Elections: How Free? How Important?**” (Saban Center Middle East Memo no. 8, August 24, 2005), Tamara Cofman Wittes urges the United States to provide assistance to Egypt's NGOs, support demands for international monitoring of the elections, and try to ensure that opposition parties operate freely.
- A new book by Ellen Lust-Okar examines how ruling elites in the Middle East manage and manipulate political opposition. Using case studies from Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World: Incumbents, Opponents, and Institutions* demonstrates how rules determining participation in the formal political arena affect not only the relationships between opponents and the state, but also among opposition groups (Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Several publications discuss the role of **Islamists** in political reform:

- Reaching out to moderate Islamists must become part of the West's policy for promoting democratic politics in the Middle East, argues Amr Hamzawy in “**The Key to Arab Reform: Moderate Islamists**” (Carnegie Endowment Policy Brief no. 40). Hamzawy urges the United States and Europe to exert pressure on repressive Arab regimes, assist moderate Islamists at the grassroots level, and sponsor training programs for members of moderate Islamist parties in countries like Morocco and Jordan.
- Graham Usher traces the evolution of Hamas in recent years in “**The New Hamas: Between Resistance and Participation**” (Middle East Report Online, August 21, 2005). He argues that Hamas does not yet seek leadership, but rather hegemony in Palestinian politics in order to become a blocking majority against Fatah.
- See also article on the Egyptian Muslim Brothers by Mona El-Ghobashy cited above.

A number of writings focus on **civil society** in Arab countries:

- The *Middle East Journal's* special issue on “Democratization and Civil Society” offers several case studies (vol. 59, no. 3, Summer 2005).
 - In “The United Arab Emirates: Statehood and Nation-Building in a Traditional Society,” Frauke Heard-Bey describes the consensus-based style of UAE politics (357-75).
 - Jeremy Jones and Nicholas Ridout consider the central features of Oman's modern political development (“Democratic Development in Oman,” 376-92).
 - According to Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, implementation of Morocco's new family law remains a major challenge (“Women, Islam, and the Moroccan State: The Struggle over the Personal Status Law,” 393-410).
 - Sonia Cardenas and Andrew Flibbert examine the proliferation of national human rights organizations in the region and implications for democratic governance (“National Human Rights Institutions in the Middle East,” 411-36).
- Examining the results of national surveys in six Arab countries between 2000 and 2004, Mark A. Tessler and Eleanor Gao conclude that ninety percent or more of those interviewed would like to see a democratic political system in their countries (“Gauging Arab Support for Democracy,” *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 16, no. 3, July 2005, 83-97).
- An August 2005 report by the United States Institute of Peace “**Arab Media: Tools of the Government; Tools for the People?**” argues that reform that institutionalizes the rule of law and protects individual rights, including freedom of speech, is the necessary precursor for media reform.
- The annual report “**Civil Society and Democratization in the Arab World**” (July 2005) by Egypt's Ibn Khaldun Center for Development Studies argues that pro-democracy activists are becoming more aggressive in their demands as regimes allow greater freedom of speech and association.

Commenting on the military coup in **Mauritania**, Daniel Zisenwine argues that the new rulers will have to maneuver between competing domestic political forces, including diverse Islamist currents (“**The Military Coup in Mauritania: Domestic and International Implications**”, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Watch no. 1026, August 18, 2005).

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