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Special Issue: Inside Political Parties

Note from the Editor:

As opportunities for political participation in Arab countries evolve, so too do political parties and organizations. This issue of the *Arab Reform Bulletin* examines several cases in which political organizations have been forced to make difficult decisions—whether or not to contest elections, or to band with other opposition groups despite ideological differences—by changing political circumstances. It asks what Western assistance organizations can and cannot do for political parties in the region. The News and Views section includes a summary of the status of parties in Arab countries and a review of recent legislation on the subject, and Read On reviews recent publications on Arab political parties. We also include our monthly round-up of reform-related events, including the imminent Algerian elections, and new publications to keep you up to date.

—Michele Dunne

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Insights and Analysis

Yemen: Interview with Dr. Muhammad Abd al-Malik al-Mutawakkil, assistant secretary-general of the Federation for Popular Forces

What is the situation of political parties in Yemen? How would you describe the Federation for Popular Forces' (FPF) participation in the Joint Meeting Party (JMP) coalition?

The JMP effort was indispensable to create a balance between civil society institutions on the one hand and the military and tribal institutions on the other, which is critical to democracy. Five political parties formed the JMP: the Islah, Socialist, Nasserite, and al-Haqq parties, and the FPF.

Rulers accept political parties in developing countries on the condition that they do not press for a democracy that affects the rulers' privileges, limits their authority, or crosses red lines in criticizing them. Nonetheless, in time parties develop and become a double-edged sword. The Yemeni press also has begun to cross red lines, for example criticizing top officials during the presidential election.

When the ruling party—or rather the ruler's party, as that is all it really is—competes against another party in elections, there is no way that such elections can be fair, free, and equal. The ruling party exploits state resources such as the media, armed forces, and bureaucrats, and so the opposition is competing not against a party, but a state.

Despite that, I believe that the 2006 presidential election was crucial in terms of developing political culture; it introduced the idea of competition through the ballot box.

The real significance of the election was to deepen democratic culture and allow parties to put forward their platforms. The JMP participated so that its members could gain experience in electoral competition, despite the unfairness of the situation.

Do the parties in Yemen have constituencies?

I think that now the parties have a real popular presence, especially Islah and the Socialist Party (which has a long heritage) as well as the Nasserite Union Organization, the FPF, and al-Haqq.

In the past there were two types of parties. Some were underground and therefore incapable of addressing constituents openly. Their members were always worried about security and unused to democracy. With the advent of a multiparty system, such parties had to learn how to address constituents and to institute democratic practices internally. All this has taken time.

Then, there were government parties, such as the Socialist Party in the southern provinces and the General People's Congress. They are parties created from above. For these parties as well, transformation is not easy. Our society is the product of an authoritarian culture, with the ruler imagining himself king and the citizens seeing themselves as subjects.

How do the parties develop their popular base? Can this base put pressure on the government?

The goal of the parties is reform, and this will only happen one of two ways. Either there can be a political will on the part of our leaders to build a modern, democratic state or there can be a popular will for change that puts pressure on the leadership. The mission of the parties, especially the opposition, is to develop this popular will. The latest elections brought about a qualitative leap, and citizens today from Sada to al-Mahara are monitoring the president they elected and feel that

he and his government are accountable to them. This is a cultural shift of vast importance.

Yemen's problem is the lack of democracy, separation of powers, independent judiciary, and rule of law; so there is also no effective administration. The parties all see the same problem. What brought together the JMP—combining Islamists, socialists, and Nasserites? They all want to level the democratic playing field. The Islamists started out as sectarian groups, and gradually changed into political parties. Today, ideology no longer has a significant impact within the parties. They now focus on issues, a momentous development. Party members contribute somewhat to drafting programs, but mainly the parties shape their programs according to popular input and reactions.

To what extent do the parties work with civil society organizations?

In my opinion, civil society organizations at this point are more important than the political parties because they incorporate the elite and therefore can play a crucial role if they are independent. However, the security apparatuses and the political parties compete to influence these organizations. Each wants to take civil society under its wing for its own purposes, and this is destructive. And so the parties agreed among themselves to let civil society organizations remain independent. Practically speaking, however, there are many party members who still operate as they did when they were underground, and fail to differentiate their role in civil society organizations from their role as opposition members. The government, too, still tries to undermine civil society organizations.

Is there a national agenda for reform in Yemen?

The JMP has a national platform that views political reform as the gateway to comprehensive reform. With the poverty of Yemeni society, economic development is a must. But economic development requires good governance, which in turn needs a parliament able to hold the government accountable, as well as rule of law and an independent judiciary. So without political reform, economic reform is difficult.

Yemen is heading for parliamentary elections (Note: due in April 2009), and parties now need to focus on ensuring free and fair elections and strengthening their hand with the government. The parties have opened a dialogue with the ruling party, but what they really need is negotiations. Dialogue should take place with constituents. Parties need to focus on how to mobilize popular pressure against the government and how to work with acceptable foreign organizations.

Do all Yemenis enjoy equal rights as citizens?

There's no equal citizenship anywhere in the Arab world. There is discrimination by profession or religion and by economic or social status. People's rights depend on how they are seen by society. We have marginalized those whom we consider inferior, and we have only given them the rights that in our minds they deserve. Is there equal citizenship between men and women? The condescension with which men look at women translates into fewer rights for women. There is not equal citizenship.

Do parties suffer from some of the same problems seen in the government? If so, can they make a difference?

In the Arab world, parties call for democracy whether they are opposition or government, but do the parties truly practice democracy? They call for freedom and building institutions, but do not practice what they preach. Political parties and civil society organizations should become a model for our ideal state. For now, opposition parties and government parties to a certain extent are two sides of the same coin.

But there is change. Until recently, for example, women's voices went unheard. I recently attended a forum held by Young Women for Reform, where the women and Salafists held a dialogue. Women also were elected to the consultative council of the Islah party. This reflects an evolution in social awareness.

Most important and encouraging is the desire for social mobility. Our schools and universities today have entered the political battle. There are no fewer than 300,000 educated citizens, all eager to change their economic, social, and political positions. They may well find social and economic doors closed in front of them, and so they will turn to political struggle. If the parties are able to organize them and turn them into a powerful force, then I would give Yemen only ten years before arriving at an advanced stage of democracy.

This interview was conducted by Rafiah al-Talei, an Omani journalist and intern at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington. It was translated from Arabic by Paul Wulfsberg.

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Iraq: The Da'wa Party's Eventful Past and Tentative Future

Ali Latif

Founded by Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr and inspired by his ideas of *wilayat al-ummah* (rule of the community), the Iraqi Da'wa party has evolved from an underground movement espousing Islamic revolution to a major player in an Iraqi democratic government. The party has undergone tectonic ideological shifts but still faces major challenges in mobilizing support if it hopes to remain relevant.

Following Saddam Hussein's crackdown on Da'wa in the 1970s, most of its leadership fled to Iran. While given a safe haven, Da'wa's leaders came under pressure after the 1979 Iranian revolution to adopt Iran's brand of Islamic government, *wilayat al-faqih* (rule of the jurist). The strain started to show with the emergence of the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), an umbrella organization formed to bring all Iraqi Islamic opposition groups under one banner. Fearing the undue influence of Tehran, many Da'wa members left for exile elsewhere (ending up in the United Kingdom, Europe, or the United States) while others remained in Iran and adopted *wilayat al-faqih*. The fragmentation of the party both ideologically and geographically made it difficult to forge a coherent vision for a new Iraq, although some Da'wa members managed to publish in London *Barnamajunah* (Our Program) after the failed 1991 Shi'i uprising. This program represented a significant break from their previous stance of calling for an Islamic state in Iraq and focused on the need for a democratic framework reflecting the will of the people.

Following the removal of Saddam's regime in 2003, the major question Da'wa faced was whether disparate party factions could find common ground and if so which of them would emerge as dominant. Another question was how much support they still had inside Iraq, where a new player—Moqtada al-Sadr—had a following that seemed to dwarf those of Da'wa and SCIRI. The mainstay of Da'wa's original support lay in the Shi'i middle class, many of whom now resided in exile.

Da'wa members' early experiences in the post-2003 governing council and interim government had a profound impact on the party. Dealing with the practical affairs of state was a world away from opposition politics in exile and it quickly became clear that a more pragmatic outlook was needed for the party. Da'wa members from London gained the upper hand and successfully marginalized those from Iran who still advocated *wilayat al-faqih*. The party remained troubled, however, by a lack of consensus on how to reconcile its Islamist roots with a new democratic framework, leading to curious episodes such as Da'wa's conspicuous absence from the ceremonial signing of the Temporary Administrative Law that its members had helped draft.

Da'wa's position in post-Saddam Iraqi politics was a delicate one. While the party could rely on a solid reputation, it was clear that it did not have the mass following of Moqtada al-Sadr or the resources of SCIRI, which was busy building its party infrastructure in the south. The idea of joining the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), a national list composed of all the Shi'i Islamic parties, was an attractive option that promised significant leverage without the uncertainty of standing alone in 2005 elections. Furthermore through the UIA, Da'wa has managed to provide two Iraqi prime ministers (including current Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki) so far, much to the chagrin of SCIRI.

Having successfully passed the critical junctures of drafting the constitution and contesting national elections, the pressing need for Shi'i Islamic parties to keep a united front has diminished and the UIA's future is uncertain. Many parties are re-evaluating their interests and there has been speculation about possible alliances based on pivotal issues such as federalism rather than sectarian identity. The Da'wa party has belatedly begun to address the question of differentiating itself based on issues and policies rather than sectarian and ethnic identity; its first party conference held in Baghdad in April seemed to take a step in that direction.

While Da'wa has played its hand shrewdly in post-Saddam Iraq, it will be the party's ability to attract support based on a coherent political philosophy and robust public policy that will ultimately decide its fate in the coming years. Previous questions about Da'wa's commitment to democracy have largely disappeared but concern about the level of grass-roots support it can muster raises doubts about its future. Da'wa leaders are aware of this vulnerability. Their political maneuvering to placate the supporters of Moqtada al-Sadr might well stem from a plan to adopt the Sadrists eventually under their wing, thus casting a Da'wa "head" onto a Sadrist "body."

Ali Latif is a scholar at the Baghdad Public Policy Institute.

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Bahrain: Al-Wefaq and the Challenges of Participation

Abd al-Nabi al-Ekry

In a country where political parties are not permitted, al-Wefaq National Islamic Society has been the backbone of the Bahraini Shi'i opposition since its leaders returned from exile after King Hamad succeeded his father in 1999. Al-Wefaq initially supported Hamad's National Action Charter, which appeared to promise significant reforms. But the 2002 constitution weakened the powers of the elected Council of Deputies and provoked opposition from al-Wefaq and other groups. Ever since, al-Wefaq has faced a series of difficult decisions about whether to participate in electoral politics under unfavorable conditions—and how to maintain its popular support if it does so.

The 2002 legislative elections that followed the constitution split a coalition of opposition forces, with al-Wefaq leading a boycott and forming the Constitutional Alliance with the secular al-Wa'd, the Nationalist Rally, and the Shi'i Islamic Action Society. Meanwhile the anti-sectarian al-Wasat and al-Minbar al-Taqqaddumi left the opposition to run for elections. The Constitutional Alliance was reasonably successful in mobilizing opposition to the elections, as roughly half of eligible voters stayed home.

In the years after the 2002 elections, however, the Bahraini government wore down al-Wefaq and its allies. The beleaguered city councils controlled by al-Wefaq were unable to accomplish anything worthwhile, while new laws strictly regulating political societies and inhibiting mass political activism fettered al-Wefaq's activities. Throughout this period,

al-Wefaq encouraged the development of united opposition platform to confront the government, organizing an annual constitutional conference to oppose the 2002 constitution.

Al-Wefaq also worked on mobilizing Bahraini Shi'a, resorting to the mosques to spread its ideas and relying on religious legitimacy stemming from the Council of 'Ulama (Islamic clerics). Al-Wefaq and its allies took advantage of the space the government allowed to gather crowds on issues such as Palestine and Iraq. After initial leniency, however, the government increasingly began to suppress unlicensed activities, pursue activists, and arrest those collecting signatures for a petition on the constitution.

In view of new restrictions on political societies instituted in 2005, al-Wefaq faced the choice of registering as required by the law (and abiding by legal restrictions) or becoming an illegal organization. This question sparked debate within al-Wefaq between the camp of Hassan Mushaima, which opposed registering, and a larger camp that had the blessing of the Council of 'Ulama, which supported registration. Mushaima split from al-Wefaq over the issue and formed the Liberties and Democracy Movement (Haqq) as a mass, unlicensed organization with the slogan "The law of rights, not the rights of the law."

The next difficult decision for al-Wefaq was whether to take part in local and parliamentary elections scheduled for October 2006. After extensive meetings and conferences and the approval of the Council of 'Ulama, al-Wefaq decided to participate, leading many members to defect to Haqq. Al-Wefaq reorganized its ranks, and held its general congress, which approved an electoral program and a strategy of nominating candidates in every district where it had at least 50 percent support, which meant only in primarily Shi'i districts.

Al-Wefaq's internal coordination did not translate, however, into full coordination with its opposition allies in the elections. The government benefited from the opposition's fragmentation and sought in various ways to defeat candidates associated with secular and non-sectarian opposition groups. The result of the 2006 elections was an elected Council of Deputies comprised of two sectarian blocs facing each other: the Sunna (al-Assala, al-Minbar, and independents) with 22 seats, and the Shi'a (al-Wefaq plus one secular ally) with 18 seats. The pro-government bloc naturally took the offices of speaker and president of the Council.

Thus al-Wefaq, which undoubtedly gained more than 50 percent of the popular vote but lost a crucial few seats due to gerrymandering and official interference, found itself a minority in parliament, unable to achieve anything notable for its sect, its supporters, and the opposition at large. Consequently, its credibility took a blow. In fact al-Wefaq is now confronted by a double challenge. In parliament it faces a loyalist majority bloc and on the street it faces Haqq, which—free of the legal constraints endured by al-Wefaq since its registration—has been luring away its supporters.

Abd al-Nabi al-Ekry is a Bahraini human rights and civil society scholar. This article was translated from Arabic by Paul Wulfsberg.

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Arab States: Five Myths about Western Political Party Aid

Thomas Carothers

Until recently Western assistance programs aimed at strengthening political parties were less present in the Arab world than in almost all other areas of the developing world. As part of the heightened U.S. and European interest in promoting Arab political reform, however, such programs are multiplying in the region.

Some of the larger European political foundations such as the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and Sweden's Olof Palme Center have been present in various Arab countries for years and sponsor some party-related activities. The current increase in party assistance is coming mainly from the two U.S. party institutes, the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI). These are private organizations affiliated with the two principal U.S. political parties. Their Middle East work is funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development, Department of State, and National Endowment for Democracy. They are currently working with political parties in Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, and Yemen.

Externally-sponsored party assistance often triggers sensitivities given the centrality of parties to a country's political life. Last year the governments Algeria, Bahrain, and Egypt took steps to terminate U.S. party aid and other U.S. democracy-related programs in their countries out of concern about political interventionism. Such controversies are sometimes aggravated by misconceptions about party aid. Five such misconceptions are common in the Middle East:

1. *Western party aid involves cash transfers to political parties.* Party aid does not involve the transfer of money but rather the attempted transfer of knowledge about political party development. Party aid programs consist primarily of seminars, workshops, conferences, study tours, informal consultations, and other similar activities aimed at party activists, candidates, and parliamentarians.
2. *Western governments use party aid to favor certain parties and influence electoral outcomes.* U.S. party aid has in some cases in Latin America and the former Soviet bloc favored opposition coalitions challenging entrenched strongman leaders, such as in Chile during the presidency of Augusto Pinochet and in Serbia under Slobodan Milosevic. The current wave of U.S. party programs in the Middle East, however, largely follows a multiparty method

in which all legally registered parties in a country are invited to participate. Two exceptions are in Lebanon and Palestine where due to U.S. legal restrictions, U.S. party programs do not include Hizballah and Hamas. Where assistance is offered to an opposition coalition in the region, as with NDI's work in Yemen, assistance is also offered to the ruling party.

3. *Western party aid excludes Islamists.* The two U.S. party institutes include Islamist parties in their activities whenever such parties are present and legally registered, including in Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, and Yemen. Islamic parties do sometimes choose not to take part in U.S.-sponsored programs for their own reasons. The Moroccan Party of Justice and Development, for example, sometimes chooses not to participate in NDI and IRI programs. The exclusion of Hizballah and Hamas, mentioned above, is based on their connection to terrorism, not their Islamist character.
4. *Party aid focuses on preparing parties for electoral campaigns.* Some party assistance programs do help parties prepare for campaigning by helping them learn about message development, volunteer recruitment, and media outreach. Most Western party aid, however, seeks to strengthen the long-term organizational capacity of parties. This involves helping parties build a presence throughout the country, develop the ability to communicate effectively with and represent the interests of a significant constituency, and learn to formulate and implement a serious policy platform.
5. *Western party aid groups are wealthy, powerful organizations that have decisive political influence in other countries.* Western political foundations and party institutes are indeed well-funded organizations but their ability to shape the political life of other countries is limited. Their main method of operating—attempting to transfer knowledge and ideas—is an indirect method of influence that tends to have only modest effects. The record concerning the impact of political party aid is fairly clear in this regard: such assistance at most has only gradual, incremental positive effects, usually coming from the absorption of new ideas by younger party activists, and sometimes fails to have much effect at all when leaders of recipient parties actively resist party reform ideas, perceiving such ideas as threats to their power.

In short, it is understandable that Arab policy makers, political observers, and concerned citizens will watch Western party assistance carefully with regard to its political role in their societies. The key question in most cases for such aid, however, is not whether it is illegitimate interventionism but how such aid can be made effective in the face of challenging local realities, including the chronic weaknesses of parties in over-centralized political systems and a continuing lack of engagement by large members of citizens in daily political life.

Thomas Carothers, vice president for international politics and governance at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, is author of Confronting the Weakest Link: Aiding Political Parties in New Democracies (2006).

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Readers React

The [exchange](#) of views on Egypt's constitutional amendments between Karim Haggag and Ibrahim Eissa (April 2007) was illuminating, but did not go far enough in assessing where Egyptian politics are headed. Mr. Haggag suggested that the amendments are technical adjustments to improve the effectiveness of an already-functioning democracy, while Mr. Eissa's comments labeled them as more of the same window-dressing that Mubarak has put forward in the name of reform for the past several years. In fact, the amendments are deeply significant—for the enhancements they make to executive power at the expense of judicial independence, both in relation to the conduct of elections and to the basic rule of law. The codification within the framework of the constitution of what were previously extraordinary emergency powers, and the evisceration of judicial supervision of elections, effectively close down paths by which Egyptians had been working—peacefully and gradually—to expand their exercise of democratic rights. These amendments were neither progressive reform nor more of the same—they were a serious step backward, enshrining one-party autocracy in the country's basic law.

Tamara Cofman Wittes

Director, Project on Arab Democracy and Development
The Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution

In this ongoing debate on Sufyan Alissa's [article](#) "Corruption and Reform in the Arab World" (February 2007), the author makes in his [reply](#) (April 2007) two assumptions. First, he assumes that Palestine and Lebanon have strong democratic features. More importantly, he doubts the extent to which democracy is imperative in fighting corruption. I have never argued that democracy as a system of values and rules eliminates all forms of corruption, especially if we define corruption as the illegal form of rent-seeking. The difference between democratic systems and autocratic ones is the presence of institutionalized mechanisms of accountability or checks and balances in which corruption cases can be exposed. For example, when members of the political elite are involved in corruption cases, civil society and the media will be well equipped to monitor and expose these scandals. Whether it is in the public sector or the private sector, corruption cannot be fought unless there is a clear separation of powers among institutions, proper access to information, and whistleblower laws that ensure the rights of citizens to expose corruption.

Khalil Gebara

Co-Executive Director, The Lebanese Transparency Association

Send your views on what you have read in the *Arab Reform Bulletin* to the editor at arb@carnegiendowment.org.

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News and Views

Status of Political Parties

The status of political parties varies significantly across the Arab region. Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, and Yemen allow political parties—including Islamists (parties whose main goal is the establishment of an Islamic state or the implementation of sharia)—to compete in elections. In Morocco, however, the government blocks some parties, such as the Justice and Charity Association, from full participation. Tunisia has a multiparty system, but forbids religiously-affiliated parties. In Egypt, Islamist parties are banned, but members of the illegal Muslim Brotherhood have run for office as independents. Syria is effectively a one-party state and allows only candidates vetted by the ruling Baath party to run for office; these have not included any Islamists.

Yemen is the only country on the Arabian Peninsula to allow political parties. In Bahrain and Kuwait, all political parties are illegal, but candidates across the political spectrum compete in elections with the backing of political societies. Parties are also illegal in Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. Independent candidates run for posts in parliaments with limited powers in Oman and the UAE. Qatar will hold its first legislative elections this year. Saudi Arabia does not hold legislative elections but independent candidates participated in the country's first municipal elections in 2005.

Recent Developments in Political Party Laws

Jordan: A coalition of political parties is planning to appeal the constitutionality of the political parties law endorsed by parliament in March 2007. According to Secretary General of the Islamic Action Front Zaki Bani Irsheid, the law “violates the constitution and restricts political and party life.” The law raised from 50 to 500 the number of members necessary for registering or maintaining party status and raised the minimum number of districts from which parties must draw their members. Political parties have one year to comply with these requirements or they will be disbanded.

Egypt: Several provisions of the recent constitutional amendments, passed by parliament and approved in a referendum in March, affect political parties. An amendment to Article 5 stipulates that “It is not permitted to pursue any political activity or establish any political parties within any religious frame of reference (*marja'iyya*) or on any religious basis or on the basis of gender or origin.” A revision to Article 62 paves the way for a change to a mixed system of party lists and individual districts, which would disadvantage candidates who do not belong to recognized parties. Amendments to Article 76 stipulate that only registered political parties that hold at least one seat in either the People's Assembly or the Shura Council may nominate a candidate in any presidential election that takes place in the next decade. (Thereafter, a party would need to hold 3 percent of seats in each chamber, or the equivalent number of seats in one chamber).

Syria: There is speculation that a new political party law might be passed before the presidential referendum on May 27, 2007, but opposition groups and democracy activists are skeptical. The Baath Party conference in June 2005 announced that a law authorizing independent political parties would be issued soon but did not mention abolishing article 8 of the Syrian Constitution, which enshrines the Baath as the ruling party. Observers believe that a new law will enforce licensing conditions whereby new parties must be neither Islamic nor based on sub-Syrian nationalism (Kurdish for example).

Bahrain: King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa ratified a controversial new law of political associations in August 2005, which stipulates that associations may not be based on class, profession, or religion and raises the minimum membership age from 18 to 21. After months of protesting the law, the main political societies (al-Wafaq National Islamic Society and the National Democratic Action Society) decided to register under the new law in October 2005. The parliament's legislative and legal affairs committee has repeatedly rejected proposals to transform political societies into legal parties with official rights to operate in the Kingdom on the grounds that it is “premature” to legalize full-fledged parties as doing so could endanger the “newly launched democratic experiment in Bahrain, which favors a gradual practice of politics.” The government states it will accept the legalization of parties if parliament so decides. Such a development would make Bahrain the first Gulf country to allow political parties.

Morocco: Parliament endorsed new legislation in July and October 2005 that tightens controls on party registration and forbids the establishment of political parties with a religious, linguistic, ethnic, or regional basis. Some provisions have created heated debate between political parties in Morocco, particularly the stipulation that only political parties that win 5 percent or more of the vote in parliamentary elections are eligible for public funding.

Algeria: Run-Up to Elections

Nearly nineteen million eligible voters will choose among 12,229 candidates from twenty-four parties and independent lists competing for 389 seats in the People's National Assembly in elections on May 17. Algeria is one of the few countries that

provide legislative seats for citizens living abroad; eight seats represent the Algerian community abroad.

Algeria's ruling National Liberation Front (FLN) is expected to maintain its position of dominance in the new parliament; the National Democratic Rally (RND) is expected to take second place. Opposition groups are accusing the government of blocking the main opposition party, al-Islah, from contesting the poll. Minister Noureddine Zerhouni stated that Abdallah Djaballah was no longer the party's authorized leader because he had not held a party congress as required by law. Djaballah announced his party will boycott the elections, but a small faction of al-Islah that contests Djaballah's leadership may participate. Al-Islah won forty-three seats in the 2002 elections.

Algerian journalists Arezki Aït-Larbi, correspondent of the French daily *Le Figaro*, and Saad Lounes, former editor of the daily *El-Ouma*, are facing political and legal harassment according to the Paris-based Reporters Without Borders. Click [here](#) for details.

Egypt: Political and Legislative Update

The Egyptian Supreme Administrative Court overturned on May 15 a May 8 ruling by a lesser administrative court that President Hosni Mubarak's order to try thirty-four members of the Muslim Brotherhood before a military court was not valid and that they must be tried before a civilian court. The new ruling effectively clears the way for the resumption of the military trial of the detainees. The detained Muslim Brotherhood members, including second deputy leader Khairat al-Shatir, are facing charges of terrorism and money laundering.

In a separate case, two Muslim Brotherhood MPs, Sabri Amer and Ragab Abu Zeid, were arrested on April 29 in the governorate of Menufiyya and released twenty-four hours later. Parliament voted May 9 to lift both MPs' immunity. Twelve other members of the movement arrested with them remain in custody.

Parliament endorsed a law on May 8 that raises the official retirement age for judges from 68 to 70, in a move critics claim aims to keep long-time partisans of the NDP in key judicial positions ahead of Shura Council elections in June. The Judges Club, which has led a campaign for judicial independence since the 2005 parliamentary elections, opposed the change but announced that judges will abide by it. The government has repeatedly raised judges' retirement age over the past fourteen years.

The People's Assembly endorsed on April 21 a new military tribunals law that creates an appeals process for military personnel or civilians sentenced by military courts. Representatives from the Muslim Brotherhood, al-Wafd, and leftist parties opposed the law on the grounds that it is a superficial attempt to justify the recent amendment of Article 179 of the constitution, which gives the president the authority to remand civilians suspected of terrorism offenses for trial in military courts.

The government ordered on March 25 the closure of the headquarters of the Center for Trade Union and Workers' Services, which offers legal aid to Egyptian factory workers and reports on labor rights issues. The Ministry of Social Solidarity blamed the center for inciting labor unrest around the country. According to media reports, there were more than 200 labor protests in Egypt during 2006. Click [here](#) for details.

Al-Jazeera journalist Howaida Taha was sentenced by an Egyptian court on May 2 to six months in prison and a fine of 20,000 Egyptian pounds (US \$3,518) on charges of spreading false information "that could undermine the dignity of the country" in connection with an *al-Jazeera* documentary about torture in Egypt. Taha was briefly arrested in January and is currently free on bail in Qatar, pending appeal. Click [here](#) for details.

Egyptian blogger Abdel Monem Mahmoud was detained on April 15 for fifteen days on charges of belonging to the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood and defaming the government with his reporting. Mahmoud was detained for six months in 2006. Click [here](#) for details.

Palestine: Interior Minister Resigns

Palestinian Interior Minister Hani al-Qawasmi resigned on May 14 in frustration over a surge in factional violence in the Gaza Strip, casting the future of the two-month-old Palestinian unity government into doubt. According to al-Qawasmi, neither Fatah nor Hamas would give him the power necessary to integrate competing security agencies into a unified force capable of reestablishing order. Prime Minister Ismail Haniyya of Hamas will temporarily take charge of the interior ministry.

Mauritania: New Government

Mauritania's new president Sidi Ould Sheikh Abdullahi, elected on March 25 in the country's first free presidential election, appointed on April 28 a cabinet composed primarily of technocrats and led by Prime Minister Zeine Ould Zeidane, a former central bank governor who came in third in the presidential race. Most of the twenty-eight cabinet members are first-timers and have no previous association with the authoritarian rule of President Maaouiya Ould Sid Ahmed Taya, while two candidates served in previous governments. Click [here](#) for a list of cabinet members.

Syria: Democracy Activists Jailed; Results of Parliamentary Elections

Syrian courts sentenced four prominent activists to prison sentences. Michel Kilo and Mahmoud Issa were sentenced to

three years in prison each on May 13 on charges of weakening national feeling, fomenting sectarian rifts, and spreading false information. Kamal Labwani, a Syrian activist who was arrested in November 2005 after returning from a visit to the United States was sentenced on May 10 to twelve years in prison for contacting a foreign country and "encouraging attacks on Syria." On April 24, a Damascus court sentenced prominent human rights lawyer Anwar al-Bunni to five years in prison and a fine of 1,000 Syrian pounds (US \$2,000) for "spreading false or exaggerated news that weakens national sentiment" and for his membership in an unlicensed human rights center. Kilo, Issa, and al-Bunni were arrested in May 2006 after signing the Beirut-Damascus Declaration, which called for improved Lebanese-Syrian relations based on respect for each country's sovereignty. Click [here](#) for details. The Syrian government seized on May 2 the assets of former MP Mamoun Homsy who was arrested for five years in August 2001 for seeking to "illegally change the constitution."

The Nationalist Progressive Front (NPF), a coalition of the Baath party and nine other parties that has ruled Syria since 1972, won the majority of seats in parliamentary elections on April 22-23, an expected result as two-thirds of the 250 seats are automatically allocated to the NPF. The Baath party won 134 seats and other NPF members won 36 seats. Independent candidates, who have been allowed to run for parliament since 1990, competed for the remaining 80 seats. Syrian opposition groups boycotted the elections. The new parliament unanimously approved on May 10 the nomination of President Bashar al-Assad for a second seven-year term. A presidential referendum is scheduled for May 27, 2007.

Jordan: Former MP Arrested; Crackdown on Press

Former MP Ahmad Oweidi al-Abbadi, was arrested on May 3 on charges of "harming the state's dignity, slandering officials, and violating laws governing e-mail practices" after he accused Jordan's government of corruption in an e-mail to U.S. Senate Majority leader Harry Reid. Al-Abbadi will be detained for a fifteen-day renewable period pending interrogation. Click [here](#) for details.

Jordanian authorities banned the April 30 edition of the weekly *al-Majd* to prevent a front-page story about a "secret plan" to oust the Hamas-led Palestinian government. According to the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists, the weekly has been censored on two previous occasions because of sensitive articles. Click [here](#) for details. On April 18, the Jordanian government seized a taped *al-Jazeera* interview with former crown prince Hassan bin Talal. Click [here](#) for details.

Bahrain: Controversy over Minister Corruption Charges

MPs from the largest political society and the main opposition group, the Shi'i al-Wefaq National Islamic Society, walked out of the Bahrain parliament on May 8 in protest after their request for a corruption investigation of State Minister of Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Ahmad bin Ateyatallah al-Khalifa, a member of the royal family, was denied. The forty-member lower chamber dismissed the motion as only nineteen lawmakers voted in favor of the investigation, two votes short of the majority needed. The corruption charges were first brought to light in a report by former government advisor Salah al-Bandar describing a conspiracy led by Sheikh Ahmad to rig parliamentary elections to reduce the powers of Shi'a. On May 6, a Bahraini court sentenced al-Bandar in absentia to an additional year in jail, adding to a previous four-year jail term handed down in April on charges of sedition.

Saudi Arabia: Human Rights Watch Denounces Torture in Prisons

The New York-based Human Rights Watch (HRW) is calling on Saudi Arabia's government to conduct a comprehensive probe into alleged cases of torture, beatings, and deaths from ill-treatment at prisons across the kingdom. HRW conducted its first significant fact-finding mission in Saudi Arabia in late 2006. Click [here](#) for details.

Yemen: Government Closes Gun Markets

Yemen's cabinet decided on April 24 to close all arms markets selling weapons without a license as part of a campaign to collect heavy and medium weapons in a bid to neutralize rebels battling army troops in the north of the country. Authorities have accused the rebels, lead by Abdul Malik al-Houthi, of trying to topple the regime and establish an Islamic state. Unofficial reports indicate there are some eighteen arms markets, 300 small gun shops, and 40-50 million weapons in Yemen.

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Upcoming Political Events

- Algeria: Legislative Elections, May 17, 2007.
- Syria: Presidential Referendum, May 27, 2007; Municipal Elections, August 2007.
- Egypt: Shura Council Elections, June 2007.
- Jordan: Municipal Elections, July 17, 2007; Legislative Elections, 2007 (date to be determined).
- Morocco: Legislative Elections, September 2007.
- Oman: Shura Council Elections, October 2007.
- Qatar: Legislative Elections, 2007 (date to be determined).

Views from the Arab Media

The controversy over the presidency in Turkey spurred a vigorous debate in the Arab press:

- Arabs should respond to the crisis in Turkey by analyzing the clash between Islamism and secularism in their own societies, according to a May 9 opinion [article](#) in the UAE's *al-Khaleej* by Salaheddine al-Hafez, vice editor-in-chief of Egypt's state-run *al-Ahram* newspaper. Unlike in Turkey, Islamist movements in the Arab world continue to be secretive and ambiguous regarding their position on democracy. Thus, while Western countries theoretically support the adoption of the Turkish model in Arab countries, they are skeptical of Islamists and continue to be allied with autocratic ruling regimes.
- The Turkish army's threat to intervene to prevent the election of an Islamist president demonstrates that secularism can be the real danger to democracy, argues Mahmoud al-Mubarak in a May 7 opinion [article](#) in *al-Hayat*. It is clear that Turkey's brand of secularism established by force is on the decline and that the presidency will ultimately go to an Islamist.
- Islamist movements in the Arab world should learn from the current situation in Turkey, contends Isam al-Aryan, prominent member of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, in a May 3 [article](#) in *al-Hayat*. Unlike the 1992 Algerian crisis, the Turkish controversy is being resolved through legal means because, ultimately, all political actors share the goal of accession to the European Union.

The head of the Democratic Leftist Movement in Lebanon, Elias Atallah, calls for the creation of a Lebanese version of the Winograd commission established in Israel to investigate the Israel-Lebanon war in July 2006. In an [article](#) in *Asharq al-Awsat* on May 4, Atallah criticizes the lack of accountability for the war inside Lebanon and calls on Hizballah and its allies to resume parliamentary politics to discuss this and other issues. In an [article](#) in Bahrain's *al-Wasat* on May 5, senior Shiite cleric Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah calls on Arabs and Muslims to understand Winograd's lesson regarding the importance of an independent judiciary. He calls on Lebanese judges to be “responsible and faithful in preserving the state rather than loyal to a faction or confessional leadership, and to remain above the maze of sectarian politics which are destroying institutions.”

Commenting on the discovery of terrorist cells in Saudi Arabia in April, Mshari al-Zaydi argues that the roots of the problem of terrorism in Arab countries are yet to be addressed, in a May 1 [article](#) in *Asharq al-Awsat*. Until Arab societies are willing to engage seriously in solving this problem—which would entail profound self-criticism—all other strategies will simply amount to damage control.

Rather than engaging in futile battles over contentious issues such as the electoral law, political actors in Jordan should focus their energies on the pursuit of realistic and gradual measures, according to a May 2 [article](#) by Bassim al-Tawissi in Jordan's *al-Ghad*. Jordanians should try to forge a national consensus by discussing issues such as freedom of speech, higher education reform, and the role of the private sector in economic development.

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Read On

Arab political parties and movements have been the subject of a wide range of publications in English and Arabic in recent years, for example:

- The state of political parties at the moment of independence—not Islam, class structures, levels of development, or international factors—was key in pushing Turkey toward democracy but Arab states toward authoritarianism, argues Michele Angrist in *Party Building in the Modern Middle East* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006).
- The crisis of secular parties in the Arab world is partly of their own making and must first be addressed through a process of internal transformation, contend Marina Ottaway and Amr Hamzawy in a forthcoming Carnegie Paper (“Fighting on Two Fronts: Secular Parties in the Arab World,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Carnegie Paper no. 85, May 2007).

Much recent debate has focused on the implications of electoral participation by **Islamist parties and political movements**:

- In “[What Islamists Need to Be Clear About: The Case of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood](#),” Nathan Brown, Amr Hamzawy, and Marina Ottaway identify sharia, dual religious and political identity, organizational structure, universal citizenship, and women's rights, as issues on which the movement needs to achieve greater clarity if it is

to gain credibility in the West (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Policy Outlook no. 35, February 2007). Click [here](#) for Arabic.

- Kuwait's Islamic Constitutional Movement faces the challenge of reconciling a socially conservative agenda with the need to form cross-ideological alliances that are necessary for progress towards greater political reform (Nathan Brown, "[Pushing Toward Party Politics? Kuwait's Islamic Constitutional Movement](#)," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Carnegie Paper no. 79, February 2007). Click [here](#) for Arabic.
- In "[Mustaqbal jama'at al-ikhwan al-muslimin](#)" (The Future of the Muslim Brotherhood), Amr al-Shubaki examines the history of relations between the Brotherhood and the government and examines scenarios for the movement's future (al-Ahram Center for Strategic Studies, Strategy Paper, May 2006).
- There is no evidence that Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood would adopt more democratic values as a result of political participation, argues Magdi Khalil in "[Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood and Political Power: Would Democracy Survive?](#)" (*Middle East Review of International Affairs*, vol. 10, no. 1, March 2006).
- In "[Islamist Movements and the Democratic Process: Exploring the Gray Zones](#)," Nathan Brown, Amr Hamzawy, and Marina Ottaway discuss critical areas of ambiguity in Islamists' thinking including Islamic law, the use of violence, political pluralism, civil and political rights, women's rights, and religious minorities (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Carnegie Paper no. 67, March 2006).
- Rather than supporting democracy by focusing on new Islamic thinking and parties, the United States should promote institutional reform in the Arab world, argues Daniel Brumberg in "[Islam is Not the Solution \(Or the Problem\)](#)" (*The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 29, no. 1, Winter 2005-06, 97-116).
- 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).
- [Dalil al-harakat al-Islamiya fi al-alam](#) (Guide to Islamist Movements in the World) by Egyptian scholar Dia Rashwan outlines the history, goals, and agendas of violent and non-violent Islamist movements in several countries including Egypt, Turkey, Palestine, and Indonesia (al-Ahram Center for Strategic Studies, 2005).

Two new articles address the fortunes of parties in **Yemen**:

- The evolution of the Yemeni Joint Meeting Parties (JMP) through 2006 suggests the emergence of a credible opposition with the potential to press the government to effect reforms before the 2009 parliamentary elections, argue Robert D. Burrowes and Catherine M. Kasper in "The Salih Regime and the Need for a Credible Opposition," (*Middle East Journal*, vol. 61, no. 2, Spring 2007, 263-80).
- In "The High Water Mark of Islamist Politics? The Case of Yemen," April Longley examines the defeat of the Islamist Islah party in the 2006 local council elections, which could prove to be a major setback for the Yemeni opposition (*Middle East Journal*, vol. 61, no. 2, Spring 2007, 240-60).

Many publications focused on political forces in **Palestine** following Hamas's January 2006 electoral victory:

- In [Hamas: A Beginner's Guide](#), Khaled Hroub explains the reasons for Hamas's electoral success and provides an overview of the movement's attitudes toward Israel and its grassroots activities (London: Pluto Press, 2006).
- Fatah's weakness, and the difficulties facing Hamas provide a window of opportunity for a third and avowedly liberal-democratic option to emerge in Palestine, argues Riad Malki in "Beyond Hamas and Fatah," (*Journal of Democracy*, vol. 17, no. 3, July 2006, 132-7).
- [Palestinian Hamas: Vision, Violence, and Coexistence](#) places Hamas's ascendancy into context and shows that contrary to its violent image, it is a social and political organization that provides services and makes careful political choices (Shaul Mishal and Avraham Sela, New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

- In *Hamas: Politics, Charity and Terrorism in the Service of Jihad*, Matthew Levitt refutes the notion that Hamas's militant, political, and social wings are distinct from one another and warns that for Hamas, like Hizballah, political participation is just another means to achieve its goals (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

Many publications focused on parties in **Egypt**:

- The Cairo-based Ahrar Center for Strategic Studies has published a series of cases studies on political parties including al-Ghad (Tomorrow), al-Tagammu, and the ruling National Democratic Party among others. Click [here](#) to read cases in the series in Arabic.
- The 2005 parliamentary elections in Egypt have highlighted important internal power struggles with the country's ruling National Democratic Party. A shift in favor of party reformers may have a decisive effect on the future of the Egyptian regime (Virginie Collubier, "The Internal Stakes of the 2005 Elections: The Struggle for Influence in Egypt's National Democratic Party," *Middle East Journal*, vol. 61, no. 1, Winter 2007, 95-111).
- Manar Shorbagy contends that the Egyptian movement for Change (Kefaya) is a cross-ideological force that is creating a distinctive and promising form of politics for Egypt in "Understanding Kefaya: The New Politics in Egypt" (*Arab Studies Quarterly*, vol. 29, no. 1, Winter 2007, 39-60).
- In "Hizb al-Wasat and the Potential for Change in Egyptian Islamism," Bjorn Olav Utvik contends that the Wasat experience in Egypt has had a significance extending far beyond the meager results it achieved, for it marked the first distinct crystallization of the religious-political outlook of the generation that first experienced politics on university campuses in the 1970s (*Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3, Fall 2006, 293-306).
- Amr Hamzawy argues that the opposition's poor performance in Egypt's first multi-candidate presidential elections was due to internal weaknesses and miscalculations as well as its inability to present clear programs to its constituents ("**Opposition in Egypt: Performance in the Presidential Election and Prospects for the Parliamentary Elections**," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Policy Outlook no. 22, October 2005).
- 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).

Beside publications on political parties, recent publications on **Iraq** include:

- Unless the international community takes steps to help counter problems resulting from the influx of Iraqi refugees, Jordan may be compelled by its self interest to shut its borders, contends Nathan Hudson in "**Iraqi Refugees in Jordan: Cause for Concern in a Pivotal State**" (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Research Notes no. 13, April 2007).
- Iraq's neighbors are refusing entry, imposing onerous new passport and visa requirements, and building barriers to keep refugees out, points out a Human Rights Watch briefing paper by Human Rights Watch ("**Iraq: From a Flood to a Trickle: Neighboring States Stop Iraqis Fleeing War and Persecution**," Briefing Paper no. 1, April 2007).
- The United States needs to recognize the risk of an explosion in Kirkuk and press the Kurds, the Baghdad government, and Turkey alike to adjust policies and facilitate a peaceful settlement, warns a new International Crisis Group report ("**Iraq and the Kurds: Resolving the Kirkuk Crisis**," *Middle East Report* no. 64, April 19, 2007).

Recent publications address reform-related developments in specific Arab countries:

- In *Battling the Lion of Damascus: Syria's Domestic Opposition and the Asad Regime*, Seth Wikas examines the challenges facing the **Syrian** opposition and outlines past and potential missteps, such as strengthening already powerful Islamist factions, which U.S. policymakers must avoid if they hope to help the Syrian opposition (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, May 2007).
- In "**Demilitarizing Algeria**," Hugh Roberts analyzes the unprecedented political role and power of Algeria's military

since the advent of formal pluralism in 1989, President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's actions to reassert presidential authority, and the longer-term implications for democratic reform in **Algeria** (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Carnegie Paper no. 86, May 2007). Click [here](#) for Arabic.

- **Egypt's** electoral framework contains a number of serious flaws that contradict international legal obligations, and its legal framework and political context are not conducive to genuinely democratic elections, concludes a report published by Democracy Reporting International ("**Assessment of the Electoral Framework: The Arab Republic of Egypt**," April 2007).
- While the economic and foreign policy challenges facing **Saudi Arabia** can only be addressed through structural change, King Abdullah's accession to the throne may provide the means and incentives to change the pace of reform, argues Tim Niblock in ***Saudi Arabia: Power, Legitimacy and Survival*** (Gulf Research Center, April 2007).

Several recent publications address region-wide developments:

- In "**The Role of the West in Internal Political Developments of the Arab Region**," Usamah al-Ghazali Harb argues that the West must limit its support to the moral and political dimensions of transitions in Arab states, resort to conditional aid when necessary, and realize that the persistence of authoritarianism may result in the radicalization of opposition movements (Arab Reform Initiative, May 11, 2007). Click [here](#) for Arabic.
- Arab governments and established elites have little incentive to create reforms that could threaten their economic and political interests. Moreover, they have limited capacity to plan, implement and manage reform programs, argues Sufyan Alissa in "**The Challenge of Economic Reform in the Arab World: Toward More Productive Economies**," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Carnegie Middle East Center Paper no. 1, May 2007). Click [here](#) for Arabic.
- A new Freedom House report calls on the Congress to reserve proposed reductions in support to human rights defenders and civil society activists worldwide in the Bush administration's 2008 budget request for foreign operations ("**Supporting Freedom's Advocates? An Analysis of the Bush Administration FY2008 Budget Request for Democracy and Human Rights**," April 2007).
- The Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism at the U.S. Department of State released a series of country reports on terrorism on April 30. The **Middle East and North Africa section** includes information on counterterrorism and anti-money laundering legislation that has already passed or is under consideration in several Arab countries, including Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Kuwait.
- Commemorating World Press Freedom Day, **Bitter Lemons International**, **Freedom House**, and the **Committee to Protect Journalists** (CPJ) have published special reports on press freedom in the Arab world. CPJ's report singles out Egypt and Morocco as among the ten worst countries in terms of deteriorating press freedom.

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