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Making Sense of the Arab State

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MAKING SENSE
OF THE
ARAB STATE

Steven Heydemann and Marc Lynch
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MAKING SENSE OF THE ARAB STATE

Steven Heydemann and Marc Lynch, Editors

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Introduction

Making Sense of the Arab State

Steven Heydemann and Marc Lynch

For scholars of the Arab world, the state remains an elusive, unsettled, and unsettling presence. Since mandatory and then independent states emerged in the Arab world in the aftermath of World War I, theorizing the Arab state has been a central preoccupation for generations of regional specialists. The gravitational pull of the state is not surprising. As a product of war, imperial collapse, and colonial impositions—intertwined with local political struggles and crudely grafted onto an international order in which norms of state sovereignty favored some pathways while foreclosing others—Arab states have long challenged received wisdom about what states are and how they form, develop, and become organized. They complicate understandings of how states relate to regimes and to societies. Their formal borders often fractured the boundaries of existing communal identities, while their internal demarcation from society often remained ambiguous. These features are not necessarily unique to Arab states, yet arguably Arab states manifest particular characteristics—strengths and weaknesses, presences and absences, effects and affects—that set them apart from states in other postcolonial regions.

Thus, Arab states exhibit modes of governance, institutional formations, and processes of adaptation and change that are common attributes of stateness, a term we define as an indicator of state capacity—the effec-

tiveness with which state institutions and actors deliver various forms of governance—as well as the symbolic, performative, and spatial attributes through which states manifest themselves in and through societies.[1] Seen in these terms, Arab states stand as examples of what Meyer et al. define as a "worldwide institution constructed by worldwide cultural and associational processes," displaying high levels of isomorphism.[2] Arab regimes certainly embrace such attributes as affirmations of their sovereignty and legitimacy. Yet Arab states often defy expectations of stateness that are widely held not only among social scientists but, as chapters in this volume show, among Arab societies as well. What is more, they do so in intriguing ways that differ from the patterns observed in other postcolonial regions and areas of the Global South.

Navigating the tensions between the peculiarities that mark Arab states and the criteria we routinely encounter as essential in defining stateness weighs heavily on scholars of the region. Its impact is especially evident, however, in the *vernaculars of comparison* that scholars of the Middle East deploy and in the idiosyncratic concerns that have animated successive waves of research on the Arab state. This often means theories built around accounting for differences and explaining variation from what are presumed to be the modal experiences of non-Arab states—in other words, theories that explain the Arab state through what it lacks in comparison either to Western ideal types or to states in other postcolonial regions. Such "deficit" approaches have framed a vast range of research programs. Their presence is visible in the postwar rise of modernization theory; engagement with questions about the relative autonomy of states and the structure of state-society relations; work on the effects of war on Arab state formation; research that explores the distinctive features of rentier political economies; explanations for why the Arab region has not given rise to developmental states comparable to those in East Asia; and in research on problems of state failure and fragility. In addressing these questions, the analytical focus typically revolves around the extent to which Arab states mimic or diverge from Weberian ideal types.

To suggest that such comparisons construct non-Arab trajectories of state development as normative and Arab trajectories as deviant is too simplistic. More often than not, research of this type is undertaken precisely to highlight the limits of claims that universalize non-Arab models of state formation, state-society relations, and political development. Chapters in

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1. On the concept of stateness, see Beichelt, "Stateness." See also the approach to stateness in Haugbolle and LeVine, "The Remaking of the Political in the Arab World Since 2010."
2. Meyer et al., "World Society and the Nation-State," 144.

this volume offer ample evidence of how literatures that draw on the experiences of non-Arab cases can enrich and deepen our understanding of stateness in the Arab region. In doing so, moreover, they push back against forms of deficit research in which Arab cases are explored in light of their failure to produce outcomes that are present in non-Arab cases. In such research, as Toby Dodge and Jillian Schwedler emphasize in their chapters, the analytic emphasis is on attributes that Arab cases are missing, the specific features that explain their failure to produce developmental states, democracies, or Tocquevillian models of civil society. The deficit model routinely characterizes states in the Arab world as flawed, weak, fragile, and ineffective—even as they deploy fiercely effective repressive power over their own citizens.[3]

Chapters in this volume move beyond the deficit model to critically deploy foundational theoretical texts—such as Max Weber, Antonio Gramsci, Michael Mann, Charles Tilly, Pierre Bourdieu, J. P. Nettl, Timothy Mitchell, Joel Migdal, and James C. Scott—to develop empirically rich studies that, in the aggregate, reframe how we think about states in the Arab region.[4] By design, these encounters between theory and cases are notable for the breadth and diversity of their approaches. We did not begin, or emerge, with a single master theory of the Arab state. Not all Arab cases are represented here; one case, Jordan, is the subject of two chapters; and one chapter focuses on non-Arab Afghanistan. Our intent is not to provide comprehensive coverage but to showcase research that contributes to new comparative vernaculars in the study of the Arab state. Nonetheless, the chapters in this book convey shared perspectives in questioning what the Arab state is and is not. In their focus on trajectories of stateness in the post-2011 period, in particular, they provide crucial insight into fundamental questions about the interplay of states, regimes, and societies during one of the most tumultuous and politically formative periods in the modern history of the Middle East. They reflect crosscutting insights and elements of convergence that suggest important baselines for future research.

Four such elements stand out. First, authors highlight the centrality of regimes as crucial actors in analyses of the Arab state. As Dan Slater suggests in the volume's conclusion, scholars of the Arab region need to

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3. Ayubi, *Over-stating the Arab State*.
4. Weber, *Economy and Society*; Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*; Mann, *Sources of Social Power*; Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States*; Bourdieu, *On the State*; Nettl, "The State as a Conceptual Variable"; Mitchell, "The Limits of the State"; Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*; Scott, *Seeing Like a State*.

consider "regime-ness" rather than stateness alone as a driving force in accounting for trajectories of state development. Of particular importance in this regard is the priority that Arab regimes attach to their own survival. While survival is the default preference of rulers in general, among Arab regimes, we argue, it takes on an intensity that sets them apart from their counterparts in other world regions. Thus, as used in this volume, regime-ness refers to definitions of the term "regime" as it is widely applied in the social sciences, meaning the rules, norms, and practices that structure politics and help us distinguish between regime types. However, we also apply the term more narrowly to refer to ruling coalitions: the principal power holders who exercise definitive authority in a polity. Regime-ness thus refers to the capacity of rulers to establish the rules, norms, and practices that both constitute a regime type in the larger sense and define its particular features, practices, and characteristics. Using this approach, the convergence among Arab regime types in the 1990s and 2000s draws attention: presidential regimes came to resemble monarchies in their preference for dynastic succession, while in the 2010s monarchies in the Gulf cultivated forms of nationalism traditionally associated with republican regimes.

For several contributors to this volume, it is regimes and the determined pursuit of regime survival that have produced particular configurations of state capacities, influenced the domains in which stateness is most developed, and enabled us to understand how state capacities—institutional, legal, regulatory, technological, coercive, or distributional—are allocated or withheld. For Bassel Salloukh, Sean Yom, Schwedler, Dodge, and Dipali Mukhopadhyay, regime preferences in the organization and management of stateness—whether in the form of large-scale construction projects, the design of urban spaces, the delegation of authority to local actors, or the allocation of collective goods—have been decisive in structuring the political, social, economic, and spatial contexts in which actors struggle to advance competing understandings of the appropriate role of the state and bring their own agency to bear in shaping the terms of their relationship with state authorities. As in Raymond Hinnebusch's chapter on the regime-state distinction, operationalizing regime-ness as a variable through Mann's work opens up possibilities for addressing enduring puzzles in research on the Arab state, including the presence of strong regimes in states that are weak in developmentalist terms. In turn, Steven Heydemann explains variation in configurations of stateness as a result of the priority regimes attach to survivalist over developmentalist criteria. He cites the transactional strategies of state development that regimes adopted as an expression of their survivalist preferences. Both Lisa Anderson and

Marc Lynch explore how regimes exploit attributes of stateness and instrumentalize state capacities—whether as instruments of their own economic interests or in the form of newly developed surveillance technologies—to further consolidate and deepen their hold on power.

A second element of convergence emerges from those authors who underscore the imperative to move beyond considerations of state autonomy to focus instead on states as expressions of specific social actors. This state *as* society conception, emphasizing how closely the two are intertwined, expands on Migdal's useful "state in society" approach.[5] For decades, research programs on the state wrestled with concerns about the autonomy of the state, whether relative, embedded, partial, or otherwise. Research programs on the Arab state have pursued similar questions, notably in work on the state bourgeoisie.[6] Mitchell's Foucauldian approach to "state effects"—one of the few theories inspired by the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) to inform the broader state literature—sought to sidestep the issue of autonomy by conceptualizing the uncertain boundary between state and society not as a problem for conceptual precision but rather as precisely the phenomenon to be explained.

Theories of state autonomy developed for the specific historical experiences of capitalist state formation in the Global North have less to offer in making sense of the Arab state or, as Mukhopadhyay's chapter indicates, of peripheral, late-developing states in other world regions. In the African context, studies of the legacies of the postcolonial state have often emphasized the reproduction of forms of colonial violence and isolation from society by new elites who captured the mechanisms of the state. What stands out in the cases we explore in this volume is the extent to which state development manifests itself in large measure as an ongoing domain of social contestation and conflict, such that trying to identify where the social ends and the state begins is generally counterproductive. Embracing a state *as* society approach does not mean that stateness is therefore irrelevant or an empty category. Rather, it leads us toward research strategies that question how the social expresses itself *in and through* the state and how states manifest themselves as expressions of the social. This approach draws our attention to the role of social actors in shaping trajectories of state development, configurations of state capacity, how state policies and practices become constituted, and how state-society relations and modes of resistance to the state become organized.

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5. Migdal, *State in Society*.
6. Waterbury, "Twilight of the State Bourgeoisie?"; Haddad, "Syria's State Bourgeoisie."

The third element of convergence lies in how the authors give particular emphasis to the variability of the state's presence and the significance of its absence—both in defining everyday experiences of stateness and in understanding how regimes practice, manage, transcend, withhold, and even violate stateness in pursuit of regime interests. This variation in *presence* can be geographic, as with states opting to concentrate their capacity building in politically central areas such as cities while forgoing penetration of rural areas.[7] Rough terrain, distance from the capital, or organized societal resistance may frustrate efforts by states to extend their presence even if they attempt to do so. Or variation in presence can be cultural, ethnic, or religious, determined either by identity or by the opacity of existing societal structures. A Sunni-dominated regime such as Ba'thist Iraq may have difficulty gaining access to Shiʿa networks, while Kurdish areas may prove incomprehensible and inaccessible to either Turkish or Arab state agents due to language differences and strong social organization against state intrusion.[8] Lynch's chapter in this volume reads the state's variable presence through the lens of uneven societal legibility, with important political and security implications.[9] The seeming absence of the state does not necessarily mean an absence of governance, however. This insight marks a key distinction from earlier state theory, which might have ended the analysis at the point of demonstrating the limits of state penetration into particular areas or social sectors. But, as Lisa Wedeen argues elsewhere in the context of Yemen and Mukhopadhyay in this volume in the context of Afghanistan, local political orders can substitute for the state quite effectively, and efforts to expand state presence can be destabilizing by disrupting those already existing local orders.

This attention to state absences as a key variable is especially evident in Salloukh's chapter on Lebanon, where the phrase "there is no state" (*ma fi dawla*) marks the failure of state institutions to provide the essential functions necessary for public order. Yet as Salloukh emphasizes, the limits of state capacity in Lebanon are constructed, the intentional outcome of a process of limited, selective state development overseen and maintained by a deeply consolidated coalition of predatory ruling elites. Even the disastrous explosion at the Beirut port in August 2020 and the equally disastrous collapse of the Lebanese economy have failed to produce meaningful changes in Lebanese politics. Heydemann's chapter provides a longer-term, cross-regional view of the role of Arab regimes in the con-

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7. For a similar argument in the African context, see Boone, *Political Topographies*.
8. Blaydes, *States of Repression*.
9. Scott, *Seeing Like a State*.

struction of asymmetric forms of stateness in which the absence of state capacity can be mapped as an expression of regime priorities about how best to fend off potential rivals. Dodge and Mukhopadhyay explore the effects of elite contestation on configurations and limits of stateness in the cases of Iraq and Afghanistan, respectively. In contrast, as Yom's chapter shows, the Hashemite regime's attempts to expand the state's presence in ways that Jordanian tribes viewed as violating local prerogatives provoked a campaign of violence to restore a status quo the state had challenged. Anderson's chapter offers a regional perspective on the variability of stateness, highlighting how the transregional economic interests of rulers influence the form and content of state policies and elite practices. Increasingly, she argues, it is these economic interests that determine how state capacity is deployed, producing forms of stateness that are at times incommensurate with conventional notions of state sovereignty. In each case, unpacking the production of stateness, its absence, and its transformation is crucial for understanding political dynamics writ large.

Assessing stateness also means assessing citizenship, a crucial site of contestation around stateness. In Arab states, the bundles of rights, entitlements, obligations, and responsibilities that define formal citizenship are enshrined in constitutions and receive formal benediction from regimes that proclaim their adherence to the rule of law. Yet in practice, citizenship, like stateness, is highly variable, applied differentially or withheld arbitrarily. It is managed by regimes as a negotiated outcome dependent on a wide range of attributes, including sect, region, profession, ethnicity, or the perceived political or economic salience of a particular community for the security of a regime. Jose Ciro Martinez has shown how Jordan managed to create a remarkably effective state-run system for the provision of subsidized bread through licensed bakeries across every corner of the country.[10] This system, he argues, shows a pocket of strength in what is often seen as a weak state. It also generates citizen demands for more, not less, stateness: if the state can provide cheap, quality bread, then why can it not also provide decent education or health care?

As Lynch's chapter shows, the rights and the limits of citizenship are being transformed through processes of technological innovation as authoritarian regimes upgrade their repressive capabilities. The ability to render society legible is a key component of state power, in Scott's formulation, while citizens have good reason to remain illegible when confronted by a capricious or violent state. The growing use of innovative surveil-

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10. Martinez, *State of Subsistence*.

lance and data mining software expands the capacity of states to render citizens legible to their scrutiny and thus to their control. Still, the fluidity of actual citizenship aligns uneasily with its formal standing, contributing to the intensity of social struggles over conflicting conceptions of citizenship and its entitlements. Such conflicts are evident in Schwedler's chapter on the uses of urban planning to thwart citizen mobilization, in Yom's chapter on the struggle of Jordanian tribes to reclaim what they viewed as prerogatives of citizenship, and in Heydemann's discussion of transactional citizenship as a core component of asymmetric state-building strategies by Arab regimes.

Finally, chapters in this volume pay less attention than might be expected to the elusive concept of legitimacy, which dominated the comparative politics literature on the Middle East and North Africa for a generation following the publication of Michael Hudson's *Arab Politics* in 1977. Legitimacy has always been difficult to define or to directly observe. Still, as Ayubi reminds us, stateness requires *legitimation*, if not legitimacy, to move beyond despotic power and direct domination. Wedeen's work offers one productive guide for exploring the political culture of stateness from the dual vantage points of citizens and regimes.[11] The ways in which states legitimate themselves through the performance of stateness, and how citizens evaluate and experience those performances, run through the chapters in this collection.

Why the "Arab" State?

The chapters presented in this volume develop new comparative approaches to the elusive Arab state. Yet they also raise important questions about the distinctiveness of Arab states and whether the Arab state can be, or should be, singled out as an object of study. Why would one assume there is something unique and distinctive about Arab states as opposed to a wider universe of postcolonial states? Why would one expect to see the same pathologies or innovations across nearly two dozen countries in very different geographic regions, with very different resource endowments and demographic profiles, and following different historical experiences of colonialism and transitions to independence? Why would those distinctive characteristics stop with the borders of the Arab League? An earlier generation of scholars would perhaps have viewed attempts to address these

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11. Wedeen, "Conceptualizing Culture"; and Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions*.

Seeing the State or Why Arab States Look the Way They Do

Steven Heydemann

More than ten years ago, a wave of mass protests across the Arab world reanimated research programs on the Arab state. While the causes of the Arab uprisings continue to be debated, state weakness, state dysfunctions, and failures of the state loom large in explaining the most significant episode of anti-regime mobilization in the modern history of the Middle East.[1] Although the specific forms of state failure that researchers link to the onset of the uprisings differ, with some accounts highlighting economic factors and others focusing on political or social conditions, some common themes are evident. Perhaps most prominent are failures of governance by self-interested ruling elites. In such accounts, feckless leaders privileged their parochial interests over the hard work of nation building and ruled in ways that excluded and marginalized large segments of their societies.[2] They oversaw failed development strategies, pursued predatory economic practices, captured and corrupted state institutions, and proved unable to provide citizens with economic security or social mobility.[3]

Instead, state elites exacerbated social cleavages, undermined prospects for inclusive and equitable development, and corroded crosscutting

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1. For references to state weakness as a principal cause of the 2011 uprisings and their aftermath, see Salloukh, "Overlapping Contests," and Kamrava, ed., *Fragile Politics*.

2. Gause, "Beyond Sectarianism."

3. Achcar, *The People Want*.

bonds of citizenship.[4] These dysfunctions are on vivid display in this volume. They rendered states vulnerable to both the accumulation of domestic grievances and external pressure, notably demands to adopt neoliberal economic reforms that further weakened state capacity and exacerbated economic and social precarity.[5] For most Arab citizens, therefore, national identities are loosely held and easily discarded in response to states that appear incapable of meeting their needs. For rulers seeking legitimacy, state weakness has elevated the appeal of sectarian identity politics.[6] State elites exploit and instrumentalize sectarian identities to mobilize popular support, advance state interests, and undermine regional adversaries.

If the uprisings of 2011 are the proximate inspiration for these accounts, they have deep roots in earlier generations of research on the Arab state.[7] Claims of state weakness and failures of governance as causes of the uprisings resonate with broader comparative research programs on modernization, political development, and the conditions associated with the formation of developmental states, including work that explores why such states have not emerged in cases that exhibit the institutional dysfunctions seen as widespread in the Arab world.[8] Echoes of these accounts are evident as well in comparative literature on state failure and in practitioner literature on failed states and state fragility.[9] Post-uprising literatures thus fit neatly within a conceptual and theoretical landscape saturated with claims about conditions that contribute to weak and ineffective state institutions in general and to the weakness and fragility of the Arab state in particular.

To be sure, there are ample reasons to view Arab states as flawed and ineffective. Global indices routinely rank states in the Middle East poorly on control of corruption, rule of law, civic freedoms, education, service delivery, and any number of other indicators. Nonetheless, taking state failure as a starting point for research—establishing one or another deficiency as the outcome of interest—has come at a cost. To do so may bring some questions into sharper focus, such as accounting for poor economic performance, but obscures many others. In particular, state failure as a start-

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4. Kamrava, *Inside the Arab State*.
5. Hinnebusch, "Change and Continuity."
6. Gause, "Beyond Sectarianism."
7. Ayubi, *Over-stating the Arab State*; Hudson, *Arab Politics*; Salame, ed., *The Foundations of the Arab State*.
8. Greif, *Institutions and the Path to the Modern Economy*; Kohli, *State-Directed Development*; North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*; Waldner, *State Building and Late Development*.
9. Rotberg, ed., *When States Fail*; World Bank, *World Development Report 2011*; World Bank, *World Bank Group Strategy for Fragility, Conflict, and Violence*.

ing point falls short in accounting for the resilience of Arab regimes, in considering the variation in capacities across regimes and within regimes, or in explaining the transformations of authoritarian governance and the selective expansion of state capacity that regimes have engineered since the 2011 uprisings, issues that Lisa Anderson, Marc Lynch, and Raymond Hinnebusch all address in their chapters in this volume.

Questions of resilience and regime continuity, and the capacity of Arab regimes to effectively reconfigure elements of authoritarian governance as conditions change, are central for an understanding of the state of the Arab state. Simply put, if states are so weak, if state institutions are so ineffective, if governance is so poor, how did the majority of Arab regimes survive the largest wave of mass protests in the region's modern history? How can we explain the extraordinary continuity of regimes, which in Arab republics such as Algeria, Syria, and Egypt are now in their sixth or seventh decade of rule, even though they consistently produce suboptimal social and economic outcomes? Is it plausible to argue, as Hinnebusch does in this volume, that the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has strong regimes but weak states? If we begin by assuming state weakness or by assuming that what matters in assessing state capacity is whether states can promote social and economic development—what I term a developmentalist bias in literature on the state—how do we account for the puzzle of regime resilience in the context of weak states and ineffective institutions? Once we accept state weakness as a starting point we leave ourselves with few theoretical or conceptual tools for addressing such questions.

Perhaps not surprisingly, when we start from the assumption of state weakness, the explanatory focus in accounting for regime resilience turns toward coercion. Rather than asking how it is that purportedly weak states acquire the capacities needed to produce high levels of regime continuity, to sustain the loyalty of a social base, or to manage complex systems of social regulation, service provision, or a legal-juridical apparatus, scholars have often focused on narrower questions concerning coercive capacity.[10] Such work emphasizes the conditions under which regimes will resort to violence to contain the political effects of developmental weakness or social fragmentation and highlights the capacity of coercive institutions as a key determinant of regime resilience. It has less to tell us, however, about the noncoercive domains in which regimes have consolidated institutional mechanisms that provide for regime survival or how the presence of such

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10. Bellin, "The Robustness of Authoritarianism"; Bellin, "Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism."

mechanisms might inform our understanding of trajectories of state building, patterns of state-society relations, or how political economies are organized.

However, if we move beyond approaches shaped by developmentalist biases, alternative questions and alternative research agendas come into sharper focus. We have an opportunity to see Arab states as they are rather than to define them by what they lack—the "deficit approaches" familiar to us from earlier research on failures of democratization and developmentalism. We open up possibilities for exploring how the Arab state got to be the way it is—to account for actual trajectories of state development and consolidation in the Arab Middle East—rather than treat such states as flawed versions of their developmentally more successful counterparts in Europe or East Asia.[11]

For example, what hypotheses might follow if we assume that regimes in the Arab Middle East prioritize their security and continuity over developmentalist outcomes? How might regimes' perceptions of threats from within and without influence their choices about the design of state institutions? What kind of economic and social policies and what sort of state-society relations would be consistent with regimes that viewed the primary purpose of the state as facilitating regime survival, even while recognizing the importance of economic and social development as crucial for their stability? How would such regimes organize political economies? How would they construct notions of citizenship? Would the assumption that regimes act on the basis of "survivalist" preferences as opposed to developmentalist preferences help us understand why governance functions are often allocated to non-state mechanisms?[12] How might survivalist biases shape how regimes manage external pressures of various forms, whether economic, political, or strategic, including the pressures of economic globalization?

To begin to address such questions, I start from the assumption that state weakness and the closely related concept of state fragility offer unproductive starting points. Rather than trying to account for state weakness—with weakness defined in developmentalist terms as the dependent variable—I view it as more productive to ask a simple, straightforward question: How can we explain the configurations of state and non-state institutions that deliver governance in the Arab Middle East today? Or, more simply, how did the Arab state get to be the way it is?

With this starting point, what becomes evident is that states exhibit

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11. Waldner, *Late Development*.
12. Hibou, ed., *Privatizing the State*.

asymmetric institutional capacities, varying from higher in some domains, such as the capacity to surveil, coerce, and contain the populations they govern, and lower in others, including innovation, rule of law, or the capacity to foster inclusive economic and social development. In yet others, including service delivery, education, or health care, capacities vary but are often measured as comparable to, if not greater than, those of other regions in similar World Bank income categories.[13] As we emphasize in the introduction to the volume, however, state capacity is only one dimension of regime capacity, or regime-ness. In addition, it becomes evident that large domains of governance in the Arab world fall outside the state and operate through regime-controlled but non-state mechanisms that work in tandem with state institutions. Understanding the organization of asymmetric state capacity, therefore, requires expanding the scope of our research to encompass domains in which regimes have intentionally allocated state functions to non-state mechanisms and domains in which regimes have intentionally withheld the development of state capacity. *The key questions, then, focus on understanding the organization of asymmetric state capacity and accounting for patterns in the co-construction of state and non-state modes of governance.*

For those who see the state in the Middle East as weak, such patterns are often explained as the unintended outcome of failed state-building projects by regimes that embraced developmentalist logics. In this view, moreover, informal governance is often seen as a cause of developmentalist failures. Challenging this explanation, I treat institutional configurations—combinations of state and non-state modes of governance—as the expression of regime preferences about how best to ensure their stability and survival. The state institutional configurations we see in the Arab Middle East today reflect how regimes view the purposes of the state and how the region's autocrats thought—and still think—about the problems they need the state to solve. Among these purposes is the imperative of resolving what Milan Svolik identifies as the two principal challenges confronting any autocrat: mitigating challenges from within and preventing challenges from below.[14]

Challenges of both types were acute in absolute terms during the early phases of MENA's postcolonial state building and institutional development, perhaps even in relative, cross-regional terms. They were amplified for Arab regimes by the distinctive permeability of the Arab state system:

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13. The Worldwide Governance Indicators database of the World Bank shows the Middle East as performing at lower levels on government effectiveness measures than Latin America and at higher levels than South Asia and Africa. https://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/

14. Svolik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*.

the extent to which Arab societies and politics were subject to intense, transregional flows of ideas and political movements that rejected the legitimacy of both states and regimes—such as Arab nationalism or pan-Islamism—and to external interventions driven by regional competition and the Cold War.

In such an environment, the core dilemmas confronting Arab autocrats go beyond the two that Svolik highlights to include challenges from without. How to address these challenges provided the principal impetus that shaped the state-building strategies of ruling elites, giving a rationality and intentionality to configurations of stateness in the Middle East that are rooted in survivalist rather than developmentalist logics. This does not imply that today's Arab states emerged seamlessly, full blown, from blueprints in the heads of state builders. The weight I attach to survivalist logics is consistent with ad hoc, reactive, and even flawed decision-making. It simply emphasizes that such decisions are most heavily influenced by survivalist criteria.

Specifically, I argue that trajectories of state development can be understood as the result of three linked conditions.

First, postcolonial rulers in the Arab Middle East viewed state development as a means to strengthen regime-ness above all: to consolidate regime power, mitigate threats, control the extraction and allocation of resources, and provide for the continuity of their rule. Developmentalist outcomes were seen as a means to these ends.

Second, these rulers—the immediate predecessors of those who hold power today in most Arab countries—deployed the allocation and development of state capacity instrumentally to advance regime interests. Stateness was extended or withheld based on criteria reflecting the survivalist preferences of rulers rather than those associated with "good governance" or economic and social development.

Third, rulers viewed citizenship as transactional and segmented and treated legitimacy as a contingent outcome of transactional relationships that defined and organized state-society relations. State development was used to ensure the quiescence and loyalty of citizens. It provided mechanisms to manage and contain possibilities for social mobilization from below while structuring and restructuring the boundaries of political and economic inclusion to favor privileged categories of citizens and marginalize others.

Embracing this transactional-instrumental view of stateness, ruling elites pursued flexible, adaptive, and plural strategies of state development. As Arab political economies took shape, these strategies led to what Stef-

fen Hertog calls segmented market economies, with distinctively rigid "insider-outsider" divides that are deeper in the Arab world than in any other region.[15] At times, rulers asserted the exclusive authority of the state in Weberian terms, both internally and externally. At other times, they cultivated non-state frameworks of rulemaking and governance, often exploiting formal institutions as sites within which non-state, personalistic, and clientelist practices were grafted onto and interwoven with formal bureaucratic rules and procedures. Consistent with postcolonial experiences of state building in other regions, Arab ruling elites adopted developmentalist ideologies that expressed inclusionary conceptions of economic and social rights yet managed access to such rights on a contingent, transactional basis. The result—my own dependent variable—is the distinctive configurations of asymmetric stateness we see in the region today.

Trajectories of Stateness in the Arab Middle East

To unpack configurations of asymmetric state capacity, this chapter first assesses historical patterns in the development of stateness as a variable that expressed the survivalist priorities of regimes. I then assess the informal mechanisms of non-state governance that stabilize and sustain asymmetric stateness, which can also be seen as forms of limited statehood.[16] In a closing section, I show how Arab regimes have responded to rising mass mobilization since 2011 by amplifying existing patterns of asymmetric stateness and redefining state-society relations to manage and contain the threat of newly mobilized publics. By tracing what I refer to as *trajectories of stateness* in the MENA region, it will be possible to examine the development of limited and asymmetric statehood along key dimensions— territorial, sectoral, temporal, and social.

My focus on the MENA region does not imply that the interactions of interest are unique to the Arab Middle East. The odds are high that comparable interactions are present in different forms across the Global South. Yet the specific arrangements that define political, social, and economic orders in the MENA region nonetheless exhibit distinctive attributes. Not least, these include the persistence and resilience of authoritarian regimes—a factor that matters more than is understood in the literature on governance in areas of limited statehood—to a degree that is unique

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15. Hertog, "Segmented Market Economies in the Arab World."
16. Börzel and Risse, *Effective Governance under Anarchy*.

among world regions.[17] They also include distinctive patterns in the interactions between regimes, states, and societies that are central to understanding modes of contestation and why these have produced crises of governance, cases of violent conflict and state collapse, and the subsequent restructuring of asymmetric state capacities by Arab regimes since the 2011 uprisings—for example, in the expansion of state capacity to surveil societies, as highlighted by Lynch in this volume.

The states we see today in the Arab Middle East thus reflect the path-dependent outcomes of the preferences and strategic choices of rulers in the period following decolonization. Initially, the nationalist elites who governed in the immediate aftermath of independence, typically representatives of landed and business interests, worked with and adapted institutions they inherited as legacies of colonial rule. As new cohorts of autocrats seized power and pushed established elites aside, they modified these formal institutions, weaving them into and making them more permeable to informal mechanisms for exercising authority, allocating resources, and privileging some social groups while excluding others. They melded ascriptive and other forms of social identity linked to combinations of family, sect, class, clan, region, and profession—each with their own distinctive norms, practices, and hierarchies—to state-based, formal rules, norms, and practices. Whether we call the resulting frameworks social pacts, political settlements, or rent-seeking coalitions in closed access orders, they gave Arab rulers a widely varied, flexible, if sometimes unwieldy, set of tools they could deploy to overcome the problem of power sharing among potential rivals, manage the effects of external pressure, and build institutional frameworks of social control to suppress potential threats from below.[18]

All three sets of challenges abounded in the postcolonial Middle East. Across the region, decolonization, however it was achieved, ushered in extended periods of political turmoil, social conflict, and struggles for power and legitimacy.[19] Coups and countercoups; assassinations of rulers both attempted and successful; "years of lead," as the period under King

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17. Research programs on limited statehood and contested orders note that limited forms of statehood and multilayered governance are present in many types of regimes and thus discount the relevance of regime type (Börzel and Risse, *Effective Governance under Anarchy*). I hope to show that there is a correlation between regime type and forms of limited statehood, with meaningful implications for governance and contestation. I argue that it is not possible to understand "interactions between order contestations and areas of limited statehood," a central focus of research on governance in areas of limited statehood, without taking regime type into account. See Börzel and Risse, "Background Paper Elaborating the State of the Art."

18. Khan, "Political Settlements"; North et al., eds., *In the Shadow of Violence*.

19. Hudson, *Arab Politics*; Kerr, *The Arab Cold War*.

Hassan II is referred to in Morocco; external interventions; bitter ideological struggles among competing political factions in Algeria, Egypt, Syria, and Iraq; the nationalization by newly empowered reformist regimes of land and other assets held by notables, landlords, and major capitalists; experiments in unification; and episodes of armed popular resistance were prominent features of the region's political landscape for several decades. So were the episodes of popular resistance to the intrusion of state authority by local communities, as detailed by Jillian Schwedler, Sean Yom, and Dipali Mukhopadhyay in their chapters. Layered onto and interacting with these conditions were the pressures of Arab nationalist ideas and movements, a deeply destabilizing "Arab Cold War," and the effects of global Cold War rivalries on regional dynamics.[20] These struggles took place in the context of ambitious attempts to transform societies and economies, using states as instruments to overturn and remake the political and social orders of the colonial and immediate postcolonial eras.

To do this, Arab regimes built states and political economies that rested on transactional models of governance, reflecting what I define as dual logics in the provision of collective goods. The first of these logics is clientelist and neopatrimonial. It is organized around the allocation of selective benefits to key constituencies. The second consists of authoritarian bargains—modes of "coercive distribution" that define broader patterns in state-society relations across the Arab Middle East (and beyond).[21]

In both respects, the organization of asymmetric stateness can be traced through the distribution of social provision and of state institutional capacity. Further, the resulting forms of asymmetric governance have given rise to distinctive modes of contestation. Across MENA, these most often take the form of bargaining between regimes and citizens over access to collective goods and the benefits of social provision, over the distribution of selective benefits, and, as we see in the chapters by Sean Yom and Bassel Salloukh, over the distribution of state capacity itself. Counterintuitively, in some cases, notably Yemen, Lebanon, and Libya, this bargaining was characterized by regimes *withholding* state development and limiting state capacity while social actors demanded state expansion.[22]

The states that have resulted from these processes are not fragile but fierce.[23] They are states in which ruling elites elevate survival above devel-

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20. Kerr, *The Arab Cold War*.
21. Albertus, Fenner, and Slater, *Coercive Distribution*.
22. Alley, "The Rules of the Game."
23. Heydemann, "Beyond Fragility." I define fierce states differently than Ayubi in *Overstating the Arab State*. To Ayubi, the hard or fierce states of the Arab world relied heavily on

opment and design institutions to support this aim. In fierce states, the consolidation of such institutions and the effectiveness with which they contribute to regime survival are often in tension with the attributes that developmentalist and fragility-based models associate with state capacity and good governance, including accountability, voice, equity, transparency, and inclusion. Instead, ruling elites in fierce states construct stateness as an expression of a zero-sum existential struggle in which conflict reinforces their determination to defend existing institutional arrangements, including by force if necessary.

Privileging regime security, however, does not imply that fierce states are indifferent to development. Across the region, postcolonial regimes confronted a vast array of social and developmental needs neglected by colonial powers. In every Arab republic, newly empowered ruling elites were deeply committed to ideologies of social and economic transformation and viewed the state as an indispensable instrument for achieving developmental goals. Even conservative, pro-Western monarchies adopted state-centric development strategies following independence. Moreover, regimes understood the threat that disaffected populations could pose. They well understood the benefits they derived from authoritarian bargains that offered social provision in exchange for political quiescence. They were attentive to the value of popular legitimacy, despite their reliance on repression. Regimes in fierce states also valued the international benefits they secured by adopting developmentalist discourses and engaging instrumentally with international financial institutions and Western governments as partners.[24]

In addition, authoritarian regimes in fierce states have constituencies. They rest on a social base. Through the widespread use of constituency clientelism, regimes construct alliances and coalitions based on transactional loyalty that generates, at best, contingent legitimacy. They also benefit from the loyalty of social groups cultivated on the basis of ascriptive ties, whether ethnic, sectarian, or both, creating bonds that link transactional benefits and dependencies to deeper forms of legitimacy and loyalty.

Both strategies contribute to the construction of asymmetric stateness and non-state forms of governance, with mixed effects. They weaken national, citizenship-based identities and dilute the rulemaking and rule-enforcing role of the state. They push significant aspects of governance

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coercion and repression to remain in power but were nonetheless vulnerable, brittle, and unable to adapt to changing environments. He argues that their reliance on coercion masked an underlying weakness, a view I challenge in this chapter.

24. Randeria, "Cunning States."

into informal, non-state channels. Yet they can strengthen *regime* legitimacy by tightening the transactional ties that bind regimes to privileged social groups. Thus, when challenged by mass protests or insurgencies, fierce states may prove more resilient than fragility-based models of state weakness and vulnerability assume. Not all fierce states survive when challenged from below. Those that do, however, like President Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria and King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa's regime in Bahrain, credit their survival to the very institutions, norms, and practices that fragility-based models treat as causes of poor governance and symptoms of institutional weakness.

Transactional Stateness and the Construction of Asymmetric State Capacity

Postcolonial forms of asymmetric stateness in the MENA region have emerged through what can best be described as transactional processes of state building. Notwithstanding the commitment of virtually all postcolonial regimes in the Middle East to state-led development strategies, the expansion and strengthening of state institutions, inclusive and redistributive social policies, and egalitarian conceptions of citizenship, such processes were (and in most cases continue to be) managed by authoritarian regimes that have used state mechanisms to extend, consolidate, and secure their own political and economic power at the expense, in developmentalist terms, of the societies over which they rule.[25]

This conception of states as subordinate to, and the instrument of, regimes that were typically dominated by elites associated with specific regional, sectarian, ethnic, and professional (typically military) identities led to transactional and asymmetric processes of state development that were widespread not only in MENA but across the Global South. In the wake of decolonization, Arab regimes claimed the prerogatives and privileges of both international and domestic sovereignty, asserted their monopoly over the legitimate use of force, demanded the exclusive right to make and enforce collectively binding rules, and embraced developmentalist aspirations.[26] Yet the state-building strategies pursued by these regimes reflected an alternative set of priorities, flowing from their determination to consolidate their grip on power, defeat potential rivals, and strengthen

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25. I include Saudi Arabia here though it was neither colonized nor governed under a League of Nations mandate during the interwar period.

26. Krasner, *Sovereignty*.

their hold over societies viewed as fractious if not rebellious. They invested most heavily in state capacity in areas they saw as essential for achieving these aims, especially security sectors, expansive state corporatist systems of social control, redistributive frameworks that served as instruments of coercive distribution, and educational systems that became platforms for the construction of compliant citizens.[27] At the same time, rulers built parallel constellations of informal, clientelist mechanisms to bolster their legitimacy and authority among key constituencies, empowering alternative, non-state modes of rulemaking and resource allocation that were both exclusionary and selective.[28]

How these parallel processes unfolded determined patterns of asymmetric state capacity and non-state governance. In Egypt, for example, the small cohort of officers who led the 1952 coup that brought Gamal Abdel Nasser to power dominated these parallel processes for six decades. The armed forces became their principal beneficiary, consolidating durable patterns of military-bureaucratic privilege that continue to structure Egypt's political economy.[29] Algeria's military has occupied a similarly dominant position since it achieved independence from France in 1962.[30] In Syria after 1963 and Iraq after 1968, secretive cliques of officers within the leadership of the Ba'th Party seized power, engineered the capture and transformation of state institutions, and developed elaborate non-state governance networks based on ties of sect, region, and family. In other cases, from republican Tunisia to the monarchies of Jordan, Morocco, and the Gulf, we see similar processes at work. Ruling elites oversaw asymmetric processes of state building that produced uneven state capacity, while consolidating extensive informal networks that served as alternative sources of rulemaking, legitimacy, coercion, and resource allocation.

One effect of these processes was a dramatic expansion in the size of states in the postcolonial Middle East. State capacity increased significantly across the MENA region as the scale of public expenditure and the scope of state activity grew. Reversing decades of low public spending by colonial regimes, MENA states spent a higher percentage of GDP by the mid-1960s than their counterparts in any other world region. They would continue to do so for the next two decades. The positive effects of expanding stateness were experienced by tens of millions of people in the form of tangible, visible improvements in their everyday lives. Moreover, the impact

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27. Ismail, *The Rule of Violence*.
28. Ruiz de Elvira, Schwarz, and Weipert-Fenner, *Clientelism and Patronage*.
29. Sayigh, *Owners of the Republic*.
30. Werenfels, "Obstacles to Privatisation of State-Owned Industries in Algeria."

of these developmental gains in the 1960s–1980s was formative in shaping popular expectations about the levels of governance that citizens looked to regimes to provide—and for which they mobilized to hold regimes accountable in 2011. Populist and redistributive social policies may have embedded citizens in systems of coercive dependence on regimes, but they also created deeply held norms of state social provision and citizen entitlement that regimes found it near impossible to discard even as their costs became unsustainable.

Parallel Trajectories, Asymmetric Stateness, and Segmented Citizenship

Even as states expanded, however, the distribution of stateness—the extent to which regimes built their capacity to make and enforce binding rules across a national territory, the presence of state institutions such as schools or hospitals, the opportunities for participation in state-owned and -controlled sectors of the economy, as well as access to the benefits of social policy—developed along two distinct and parallel paths. On the one hand, regimes invested in the capacity of states to enforce binding rules and deliver nominally public goods, establishing entitlements to education, housing, employment, subsidized energy and basic subsistence goods, and health care. These investments increased literacy, life expectancy, and incomes; reduced poverty and inequality; and produced large increases in GDP.

On the other hand, access to the benefits of state expansion and social provision was unevenly and selectively allocated, based on the specific political and economic calculus of regimes intent on ensuring their own survival. Annika Rabo and Sulayman Khalaf both note, for instance, the extension of state-managed peasant unions created by the ruling Ba'th Party into the Syrian city of Raqaa during the 1960s.[31] These organizations empowered small-scale farmers but also served to integrate them into transactional, clientelist relations with the state that included access to selective benefits. With the appearance of corporatist peasant unions—regime-controlled "popular organizations"—the authority of established notables and large landowners over local politics and economies diminished. Targeted as adversaries by the Ba'th Party, these "Cotton Sheikhs" of the pre-Ba'th period were marginalized through processes of state building that nationalized the property of the largest landowners and appropriated

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31. Rabo, "Anthropological Methods"; Khalaf, *Social Change in Syria*.

larger shares of the surpluses that landowners had previously extracted from peasants and smaller landholders.[32] With the arrival of the state, these surpluses were now redistributed through mechanisms that discriminated against former elites, who were also excluded from the selective benefits provided to members of peasant unions and the Ba'th Party. In exchange for these benefits, however, newly empowered peasants and small land-holders, public sector employees, state functionaries, and members of the ruling party were required to demonstrate loyalty to the regime and to act on its behalf as needed.

Regime-led processes of state expansion thus restructured local governance, producing new configurations of winners and losers, new patterns of inclusion and exclusion, and a politicized, transactional conception of entitlement to collective goods. The net effect was to institutionalize segmented citizenship in the organization of state-society relations and segmented economies with exceptionally rigid insider-outsider divides. Moreover, while regimes justify these state-building strategies through nominally inclusive developmentalist, populist, and anti-colonial/anti-Western narratives, they have exploited economic governance as an instrument of coercive distribution. They deploy redistributive social policies to render citizens dependent on the state for their economic and social well-being, while access to channels of social and economic mobility was filtered through regime-controlled patronage networks.[33]

These parallel paths also shaped the organization of stateness, governance, and state-society relations. Across the MENA region, in both republics and monarchies, postcolonial regimes imposed top-down, hierarchical state-corporatist frameworks to regulate and manage relations between the state and an array of politically relevant interest groups, ranging from workers and peasants to journalists, lawyers, doctors, women, and students.[34] Corporatist institutions, which were most highly developed in the presidential republics of Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and Tunisia significantly expanded the capacity of regimes to manage and discipline societies—serving as mechanisms of infrastructural power in Michael Mann's terms.[35] Formally, they established channels for the mobilization

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32. Hinnebusch, *Peasant and Bureaucracy*; Hinnebusch, *Authoritarian Power and State Formation*.

33. Albertus, Fenner, and Slater, *Coercive Distribution*.

34. Ayubi, *Over-stating the Arab State*.

35. Michael Mann, *States, War, and Capitalism*. Hinnebusch argues in this volume that the infrastructural power of Arab regimes, defined in terms of the formal, state-based mechanisms through which regimes can shape political norms and practices, has declined dramatically in recent decades. In contrast, I define infrastructural power as a product of both formal,

and representation of important collective actors. In fact, however, state corporatist structures have everywhere functioned to regulate, control, and contain potential challenges "emanating from the social distress that accompanies development."[36] They provided the means to consolidate social bases and frameworks of legitimation for regimes that rose to power through anti-colonial nationalist movements, as in Tunisia and Algeria; through extralegal means such as coups d'état, as in Egypt, Syria, Libya, Iraq, and Yemen; or through colonial dispensations, as in Jordan. In addition, like other state institutions, they have served as mechanisms for allocating privileged access to the state and to collective goods.

As a result, diverse postcolonial patterns in the development of assymetric statehood across the MENA region reflected dual logics. One involved the politically motivated provision of collective goods and redistributive social policies—in the form of state-led, redistributive development strategies widely characterized as populist authoritarianism. The other rested on the use of politically determined criteria guiding where state capacity would be concentrated and how selective benefits and access to collective goods were to be allocated, including through informal clientelist mechanisms.[37] The tensions inherent in this dual strategy of regime-led state building have been well captured by Stein Sundstol Erikson, who points out that the resulting forms

> of state-society linkages driven by domestic socio-political conditions, led to a type of state-society relations that undermined both state power and the project of national development that the state sought to promote. At the same time, the idea of the state was reinforced through this process since the struggle for political survival and the politics of patronage took place within a framework in which the state idea was taken for granted and used to justify state policies.[38]

In short, selective processes of state development and the selective provision of governance became the means through which authoritarian

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state-based and informal, non-state mechanisms and argue that regimes continue to exercise significant infrastructural power.

36. Ayubi, *Over-stating the Arab State*, 177. Structuring state-society relations on the basis of corporate interests was also intended to suppress class-based forms of social mobilization that might benefit regime rivals, notably communist parties in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq.

37. On the adaptability of these frameworks, see Heydemann, "Social Pacts and the Persistence of Authoritarianism."

38. Erikson, "'State Failure' in Theory and Practice," 243.

regimes in the MENA region constructed asymmetric stateness and segmented citizenship—notwithstanding their insistent affirmations of the state's hegemony with respect to its domestic sovereignty and its commitment to inclusive citizenship. Regime elites in MENA have thus behaved precisely as rationalist accounts of limited statehood predict: they have focused their state-building efforts on "areas and functional activities that would help them to stay in power."[39] Moreover, despite regime rhetoric about the centrality of the state as an agent of social transformation and social welfare, the criteria on which ruling elites made decisions about the allocation of institutional and governance capacity were fundamentally transactional, reflecting their strategic choices about the most effective ways to exploit stateness and governance to bolster regime capacity, preserve their hold on power, maintain social stability, and sustain the loyalty of privileged social groups.[40]

By far the most common and widespread manifestation of transactional state building—in MENA as in other world regions—has been the use of patronage to provide selective benefits and privileged access to collective goods to key regime constituencies.[41] Similar patterns of clientelism emerged across the region based on the exchange of material benefits for loyalty to ruling elites. However, while every Arab regime engaged in similar clientelist and transactional strategies of state building, there are consequential differences in how regimes structured patronage that reflect the context-specific calculus of rulers. The sect, ethnicity, regional origin, and professional identity of rulers were always crucial factors in the organization of clientelism, the allocation of state capacity, and the provision of governance. In Syria, constituency clientelism disadvantaged most Sunnis. In Iraq until 2003 and in Bahrain, it favored them. In Yemen, neopatrimonialism reflected the complex tribal and regional calculus of President Ali Abdallah Saleh, who managed powerful tribes through ongoing cycles of bargaining, accommodation, and coercion. The supply of state capacity was a principal source of regime leverage for Saleh. He allocated it selectively depending on which tribes he viewed as useful allies at any given

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39. Krasner, "Theories of Development and Areas of Limited Statehood," 29.

40. In asserting the transactional nature of state development in MENA, I differ with analysts who have argued that transactional forms of state-society relations and governance are recent, post-2011 developments. See Khatib and Sinjab, "Syria's Transactional State."

41. This phenomenon is too familiar to require further elaboration. For examples from specific cases, see Van Dam, *The Struggle for Power in Syria*; Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*; Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain and the Arab Gulf*; Corstange, *The Price of a Vote*; and Ruiz de Elvira, Schwarz, and Weipert-Fenner, *Clientelism and Patronage*.

moment.[42] Tribal affinities played a prominent role in determining access to stateness and its benefits in Libya and Oman, as well.

The side payments that rulers extended to different categories of regime loyalists, clients, and constituents also varied widely. They include a laundry list of direct and indirect material benefits such as preferential access to employment and accelerated career advancement; preferential educational opportunities; impunity to engage in formally illicit activities such as smuggling or access to highly regulated foreign exchange markets; privileged access to licenses needed to import, export, or establish firms; exemption from legal obligations (e.g., military conscription or taxation); small-scale, direct financial support through mechanisms such as vote buying; or participation in predatory and criminal networks tolerated, sponsored, or controlled by regimes.[43]

The organization of clientelism within states also varied across sectors and over time. In Yemen, for example, labor migration and the remittances it generated weakened patronage ties between migrant workers and the Saleh regime during periods when oil prices in neighboring Saudi Arabia were high. Increased remittance flows moved through private channels that diminished citizens' dependence on the state and altered the balance of power between regime and society. As oil prices fell and remittances declined, the regime again gained leverage over these components of Yemeni society.[44] In Syria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia, selective processes of neoliberal economic reforms reconfigured patronage networks. Politically connected private sector actors consolidated their privileged positions within frameworks of crony capitalism, while public sector employees saw the relative value of their access to selective benefits decline.[45]

Clientelism, in other words, not only established boundaries between insiders and outsiders but also constructed hierarchies of inclusion and exclusion that are important for understanding the interactions between asymmetric stateness, transactional governance, and segmented citizenship. In Arab republics and in Jordan, for example, membership in state-corporatist organizations, including state-controlled trade unions,

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42. Alley, "Rules of the Game"; Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen*.

43. Corstange, *Price of a Vote*; Gallien, "Informal Institutions and the Regulation of Smuggling"; Gallien and Weigand, "Channelling Contraband."

44. Challand and Rogers, "The Political Economy of Local Governance in Yemen."

45. Heydemann, ed., *Networks of Privilege*; Donati, "The Economics of Authoritarian Upgrading in Syria"; Cammett et al., *A Political Economy of the Middle East*; El-Haddad and Gadallah, "The Informalization of the Egyptian Economy."

brought a measure of preferential treatment. Those who belonged to a ruling party, such as the Democratic Constitutional Rally in President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali's Tunisia, the National Liberation Front in Algeria, Egypt's National Democratic Party, Yemen's General People's Congress, or the Ba'th Party in Syria and Iraq, also received favorable treatment in the allocation of collective goods; access to employment, health care, and education; and, within limits, deferential treatment from state bureaucrats. Those well positioned within the armed forces or one of the region's vast internal security agencies fared better yet.

In other cases, including the Gulf monarchies and Libya, family and tribal identities produced similar hierarchies of privilege and inclusion. In the Libyan case, President Muammar Qaddafi's efforts to radically restructure and deinstitutionalize governance after he seized power in 1969 eventually gave way to a tribally based, transactional mode of clientelism. Reflecting the survivalist criteria that guided Qaddafi's decision-making, A. H. al-Shadeedi and Nancy Ezzedine characterize the Libyan state as a straightforward example of an authoritarian bargain or model of coercive dependence.[46] It was, they claim, "a reasonably simple patronage system: the regime's survival and support were derived from the tribes. In return, the regime provided economic and government positions for loyal tribesmen."[47]

This reliance on loyalist tribes featured prominently in the design of asymmetric statehood in other cases in which tribal considerations loomed large, including Yemen, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Oman.[48] Even where tribal identities played a less significant role, every Arab regime used similar transactional practices to strengthen ties of loyalty and dependence between rulers and select constituencies. These practices led everywhere to varieties of asymmetric statehood, which developed uneven forms of stateness and institutional profiles along several dimensions: territorial-spatial, sectoral, and social.

Asymmetric processes of state development may well be universal. The organization of limited statehood routinely reflects the different starting points that existed across territories that were integrated into states as national boundaries came to define the landscape of global modernity. It

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46. Al-Shadeedi and Ezzeddine, "Libyan Tribes in the Shadows."
47. Al-Shadeedi and Ezzeddine, "Libyan Tribes in the Shadows," 4. For two different but useful perspectives on limited statehood in Libya, see Anderson, *The State and Social Transformation in Tunisia and Libya*; and Ahmida, *Forgotten Voices*.
48. Burrows, "State-Building and Political Construction"; Weir, *A Tribal Order*; Crystal, "Tribes and Patronage Networks in Qatar"; Gengler, *Group Conflict*.

also reflects the path-dependent effects of the institutions that state builders in postcolonial countries inherited from former rulers. Yet in MENA, the irregular presence of state institutions and the uneven development of state capacity and social provision are also products of the strategic choices of regime elites. These rulers used their power to extend or withhold the development of stateness and state capacity—in functional, spatial, or social domains—as a potent bargaining chip in their interactions with allies and adversaries alike.[49]

Asymmetric Stateness and Non-State Governance

MENA's experience in this regard highlights an important but overlooked facet of state building as it occurred in the postcolonial Arab world: under certain conditions, rulers prefer limited statehood to its more expansive alternative. This point is worth emphasizing. Literatures on state formation treat the steady growth of state institutions over time as processes that move ineluctably from lower to higher levels of efficacy, capacity, and control, including their increased ability to extend their reach more deeply into society—to expand "legibility," to use the term that Lynch borrows from Scott—and the consolidation of centralized authority. Greater state capacity is routinely assumed to be in the interest of rulers. Even in literatures that sharply critique theories that assume the coherence of states and the uniformity of stateness, limited statehood is cast as a second-best outcome that occurs when constraints prevent rulers from pursuing more ambitious, encompassing state-building schemes. "Limited" in this lexicon becomes a synonym for incomplete. It is often used to advance pejorative comparisons to purportedly more complete forms of statehood.

Trajectories of state building in MENA challenge such perspectives. The possibility that state builders might exploit the development of state capacity strategically, withholding it when doing so is to their political advantage, is rarely given consideration. Also overlooked is the extent to which the development of centralized institutions—for the provision of public services, health care, or education, to cite just a few examples—goes hand in hand with the selective and asymmetric distribution of these services, in terms of both where they are most widely available and who can access them. Examples of both phenomena abound in the MENA region.

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49. Ultimately, withholding state capacity as a mode of bargaining between regimes and non-state actors may well have been self-destructive, contributing to regime and state collapse in Yemen and Libya.

These regime practices have had an outsized influence on trajectories of state development in MENA. In the Arab Middle East, asymmetric and limited forms of statehood result from the strategic choices of rulers about how most effectively to marshal and target state capacity to defend against threats from within, below, or without and to manage potential challengers, maintain the support of loyalists, exploit the benefits of sovereignty, and enhance their own legitimacy. The resulting forms of limited and asymmetric stateness are about exclusion as much as inclusion. Governance is focused as much on the withholding of collective goods as on their provision. Politics and contestation over access to governance are a matter of not only who gets what, when, and how, as Harold Lasswell famously noted, but also who does not get, why they do not get, and what they do about not getting.[50]

A close corollary of such forms of state building has been the persistence of abundant varieties of non-state governance even as stateness expands and rulers deploy state institutions to consolidate their grip over societies. In spatial terms, in areas where stateness is less extensive—especially in peripheries, both urban and rural, that are viewed by ruling elites as socially and politically marginal or in areas where the local population lacks ascriptive ties to regime elites—non-state, local modes of rulemaking, hierarchies of authority, and customary justice coexist alongside of and often supersede state-based rules, laws, and regulations.[51]

For example, locally recognized non-state authorities retain significant influence in many domains of life and are often seen as crucial brokers mediating relations between local populations and state institutions.[52] In areas where stateness is more fully developed, such as urban centers and coastal zones, non-state forms of governance are no less prominent but take on different forms. In these spaces, rulers construct neopatrimonial and clientelist hierarchies to filter and control access to nominally public institutions and services. State institutions become arenas within which non-state forms of rulemaking and hierarchies of authority are inscribed. When the two come into conflict, for example, in the enforcement of for-

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50. Lasswell, *Politics*.

51. "Periphery" is not necessarily a spatial designation. Peripheries are defined not by their physical distance from a capital city but by their economic, social, and political distance from a regime and their exclusion from flows of public revenues. The rise of ruling parties like the Ba'th in Syria, the National Liberation Front in Algeria, and the Yemeni Socialist Party in South Yemen led to a significant expansion of state intervention in rural areas, reshaping local social and economic structures while preserving neopatrimonial and clientelist modes of governance.

52. Hertog, "Defying the Resource Curse"; Khaddour, "The Assad Regime's Hold."

mal rules and regulations, it is typically non-state, clientelist hierarchies of authority that prevail.

Similarly, it is common in the MENA region to find spatial asymmetries in the allocation of stateness: regions designated as loyalist benefit from higher levels of stateness than others—better roads and utility services; more schools, hospitals, and public services; more regular supplies of electricity.[53] In some cases, these uneven patterns of state development reflect the priority that regimes attach to more densely populated urban centers over rural peripheries or to coastal over inland regions—a pattern of "resource regionalism" that is a standard component of the MENA dictator's toolkit.[54] In yet other cases, uneven state building may result from transactional ties linking regime elites and local notables of one form or another. Although the allocation of stateness is often negotiated, as Yom's chapter shows, with local actors mobilizing to retain their authority in select domains, regimes typically hold the upper hand in how state capacity is distributed. Toby Dodge's chapter illustrates how variations in stateness can also develop in the wake of conflict, such as the violence that accompanied the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. The subsequent dismantling of the Iraqi state by the United States gave new impetus to the role of tribes as "state-like entities" in the provision of local governance.[55]

No less common, MENA's rulers routinely withhold state capacity to weaken and penalize groups or regions viewed as disloyal or politically suspect. Ba'thist regimes in both Iraq and Syria adopted economically punitive policies toward areas heavily populated by Kurds. Morocco's King Hassan II was widely believed to have deprived the greater Tangier region of public spending for decades following an assassination attempt in 1972 led by air force pilots from the Kenitra air base south of the city. Urban Palestinian refugee communities in Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria have historically been subjected to the underdevelopment of state capacity and disadvantaged in the provision of collective goods. Residents of southern Yemen long complained of discrimination in state development and governance by a Saleh regime that favored the north over the south—though Saleh used state building as a bargaining chip in managing tribal coalitions in the north as well. Shiʿa citizens in Saudi Arabia's eastern provinces have suffered from a lack of state infrastructural capacity in service provision. In Libya, stateness took on distinctive forms under Qaddafi's "state of the masses," or *Jama-*

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53. De Juan and Bank, "The Ba'athist Blackout?"; Mazur, "Networks, Informal Governance, and Ethnic Violence"; Mazur, *Revolution in Syria*.

54. Mills and Alhashemi, "Resource Regionalism."

55. Strakes, "Arab and Non-Arab Tribes as State-Like Entities."

hiriyya, but the regime also provided more services and dispensed larger amounts of state revenue in areas where loyalist tribes resided, including the Qadhadhfa, Megharha, Warfalla, and Tàrhouna, while reducing public services and spending in areas controlled by tribes viewed as disloyal.[56]

Through these transactional strategies of state building, regimes in MENA constructed limited and asymmetric stateness through ad hoc, piecemeal processes of bargaining and accommodation with a wide range of local power holders. Regimes established higher levels of state capacity in domains—whether territorial, functional, or social—deemed essential for their security and stability. Some of the domains that have been privileged with respect to institutional capacity building include security sectors, institutions to oversee the exploitation of natural resources, and surveillance infrastructure, as discussed in Lynch's chapter. Others focus on the management of state-society relations, such as corporatist structures to regulate and control defined interest groups. Yet others are established in functional domains linked to the production of compliant citizens such as education or the governance of religious affairs. All are areas in which MENA states generally exhibit greater capacity. Thomas Pierret traces this process in the Assad regime in Syria, which developed the institutional capacity to promote authorized forms of Islamic practice as a way to counter oppositional Islamist movements like the Muslim Brotherhood, gradually bringing religious institutions and the training of clerics under the authority of the state.[57]

Alternately, regimes invested less in building state capacity in domains—again, both functional and spatial—deemed less threatening or less relevant to their survival and stability. They selectively delegated authority to non-state actors, at times doing so in otherwise "reserved domains," including aspects of social provision, local-level conflict resolution, and control over local access to public services. Such conditions are reflected in Yom's discussion of limited stateness in tribal regions of Jordan. Regimes even delegate limited authority to select groups of loyal non-state actors in the maintenance of internal security.[58] Regimes in Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Libya,

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56. Some notable caveats apply when speaking of tribes. Tribes are not monolithic, their loyalties are not mechanically extended to a regime simply on the basis of ascriptive identities, and they are not static. Their interactions with regimes are often quite fluid. In Jordan, processes of neoliberal reform have been linked to the erosion of transactional loyalties between East Bank tribes—long seen as a key pillar of the monarchy's social base—and the Hashemite regime. See Yom, "Tribal Politics in Contemporary Jordan"; Watkins, "Tribes and Tribalism in a Neoliberal Jordan"; and Schwedler, *Protesting Jordan*.

57. Pierret, *Religion and State in Syria*.

58. Ahram, *Proxy Warriors*; Cheng, "Private and Public Interests"; Ungor, *Paramilitaries*.

and Egypt have made use of paramilitaries or non-state loyalist militias, or both, as elements of hybrid security sectors. The emergence of Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq and of non-state armed groups in Syria (drawn from state-sponsored loyalist networks such as the Shabiha and the National Defense Forces) are among the most significant instances of this phenomenon.[59]

The forms of asymmetric stateness and modes of non-state governance described here are the product of strategies deployed by authoritarian state builders who set out to construct states and political economies able to withstand challenges, whether from within a regime or from below. Their efforts resulted in the consolidation of states built around segmented citizenship and transactional models of governance that combined the dual logics of constituency clientelism for the privileged few and authoritarian bargains for the many. Trajectories of state building in MENA thus produced states that are neither weak nor fragile but fierce and asymmetric, where stateness and governance reflected imperatives of regime survival.

In keeping with Douglass North et al., these are not developmental states that sought but have been ineffective in achieving inclusive development. Nor are they the atavistic, premodern creatures that populate Atul Kohli's work on lineages of the developmental state.[60] They are eminently modern state forms in which regime elites viewed stateness and the provision of collective goods as the means for resolving the twin problems of authoritarian power sharing and authoritarian control. The instruments they used to achieve these aims included transactional bargains over the distribution of rents to select constituencies; the dispersal of state power to informal, multilevel, non-state mechanisms of local governance; and frameworks of coercive distribution that demanded citizens concede rights and participation in exchange for personal security and access to the benefits of social provision.

For Robert Bates, this model of limited statehood represents state failure. In his view, state failure is defined by two main features: the "transformation of the state into an instrument of predation" and "a loss of monopoly over the means of coercion." This definition may hold for developmental states that, in Bates's term, "implode." Yet these two characteristics have emerged as the intended outcomes of state-building processes by authoritarian elites who subordinate their interest in development to their interest in regime survival and stability. Bates, "State Failure."

59. Mansour, "Networks of Power"; Leenders and Giustozzi, "Outsourcing State Violence"; Ungur, *Paramilitarism*.

60. Kohli, *State-Directed Development*.

Conclusion: Revisiting Trajectories of State Development
in the MENA Region

The masses of Arab protesters who swept into the streets in 2011 and again in 2019 focused their anger on the developmental failures of regimes that excluded and marginalized large segments of the populations they ruled. From Morocco to Bahrain, protesters railed against autocrats who had failed to uphold their commitments to distributive justice, economic security, and social mobility. Demanding the fall of regimes, protesters hoped to remake political and social orders and reform state institutions to advance developmentalist commitments to economic inclusion, participation, accountability, and fairness. In short, they sought what developmentalist scholars and practitioners characterize as good governance. Without in any sense diminishing the uprisings' achievements or their lasting effects on the region's politics, they largely failed to achieve their aims.

In the wake of mass protests, regimes that pursued asymmetric strategies of state building have been effective in deploying the extensive coercive capacity of states to suppress mobilization. They have used their authority over legal and regulatory institutions to enhance the state's effectiveness in areas where protests had exposed vulnerabilities, such as control over social media. In keeping with the ad hoc and often reactive approach to governance that has defined postcolonial state development in MENA, autocrats worked to shore up frameworks of asymmetric stateness by reorganizing transactional modes of governance. Rather than address the underlying grievances that drove protesters into the streets in 2011, regimes expanded their capacity to prevent a second wave of uprisings and foreclose possibilities for citizens to mobilize around demands for redistributive justice and economic security.

With the exhaustion of postcolonial systems of coercive dependence, regimes have erected new coercive and legal-regulatory mechanisms to contain urban middle classes that are no longer as tightly bound to state systems of social provision. In the process, constituency clientelism and the capacity of regimes to control and manage the boundaries of political and economic inclusion through informal, non-state forms of governance have become increasingly important. Reflecting the priority that regimes attach to survivalist over developmentalist aims, autocrats continue to exploit asymmetric stateness and their capacity to allocate or withhold stateness as crucial resources in their efforts to navigate the challenges of authoritarian power sharing and authoritarian control.

Post-uprising shifts in governance and state-society relations under-

score the failure of developmentalist accounts to explain patterns of state development in the Arab Middle East. The assumptions that shape such accounts offer a poor starting point for understanding why Arab states look the way they do. They fall short in explaining the strategic choices of the autocrats who have dominated regimes across the region since the 1950s and approached the challenges of state building with preferences and priorities that developmentalist accounts treat as secondary. They are not. In the sharply contested political environments of postcolonial states, Arab rulers prioritized the consolidation of their power and the need to ensure their capacity to address threats from within, without, and below. They adapted and expanded state institutions and managed state-society relations to advance these aims.

Prioritizing political survival does not imply that Arab rulers disregarded economic development. Without exception, the autocrats who ruled postcolonial republics styled themselves as socialists, embraced state-centered, populist strategies of economic development, and used state institutions and social provision to achieve significant improvements in social indicators. Broadly similar strategies, absent the socialist rhetoric, were followed by virtually all Arab monarchies. Postcolonial state expansion made state institutions essential in shaping the life chances of tens of millions of people. Yet these achievements moved hand in hand with, and were shaped by, parallel processes that strengthened and expanded the capacities needed to ensure regime survival.

Throughout MENA, with important variations, "dual-use" state institutional frameworks responded to the neglect of social development by colonial authorities and underpinned authoritarian bargains. They produced systems of coercive dependence and provided platforms for the development of dense clientelist networks and the proliferation of informal, non-state mechanisms of governance that were crucial in the maintenance of regime security. Even as states expanded, regimes deployed stateness—the allocation of state capacity—strategically to cultivate transactional ties of loyalty and legitimacy, on the one hand, and to marginalize and disempower social groups viewed as potential threats, on the other hand.

Over the course of more than fifty years, Arab regimes' reliance on combinations of asymmetric stateness and forms of non-state governance along with transactional strategies of social control have served them well even as they imposed significant long-term costs on societies. The uprisings of 2011 were a dramatic response to the price that Arab societies have paid for the choices of their leaders. They caution us against the presumption that existing regimes will persist indefinitely. Nonetheless, the resilience and

adaptability of both regimes and the states they have constructed cannot be reconciled with characterizations of such states as weak or fragile.

As I have shown, state capacities in MENA vary widely and are certainly less well developed in domains that scholars and practitioners have established as necessary to achieve sustainable social and economic development. Yet an emphasis on the ineffectiveness of state institutions measured by their lack of developmental capacity offers little help in understanding or explaining how state capacities have become organized or in accounting for how regimes have instrumentalized stateness in the Arab Middle East. Nor can we respond to such questions by labeling states in the Arab world as dysfunctional cases of developmentalist states in waiting. To understand trajectories of state development in the Middle East requires, instead, that we take seriously how Arab state builders themselves viewed the role and purposes of state institutions. We need to unpack their preferences and choices as products of the contexts in which they struggled to achieve and maintain their hold on power. Ultimately, this will only be possible once the study of state building in the Arab world steps out of the shadow of developmentalism, sets aside its teleological biases, and looks at Arab states as they are, not as how we might wish them to be.

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