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POLITICAL REFORM IN THE MIDDLE EAST

by Augustus Norton

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by

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A river of ink has already flowed in interesting debates over the prospects for democracy in the Middle East. While experts disagree sharply over the explanations, there is a striking consensus around a skeptical view of democracy's chances in most of the states of the region. Political culture arguments vie with political economy arguments, even as other specialists debate the ideology and the project of Islamist opposition movements or weigh the relevance of civil society. The impediments to democratic transitions deserve to seriously considered, and they shall be reviewed in the following pages. Nonetheless, there is an element of spuriousness to the academic tousles. Whatever the prospects for the emergence of more open, freer political systems in the Middle East, there is good reason to presume that the region stands on the brink of a momentous period of political recrafting.

Middle Eastern government are buffeted by change and there is no attenuation in sight. Of course, the problems that affect the Middle East are by no means unique, but in many instances the magnitude of change is much more formidable in the Middle East than in any other region of the developing world. The Middle East is entering a era of mass politics, when strategies of control through elites and notables will naturally be less successful than they have been in the past, if not counterproductive.

Even compared to the rest of the developing world, the Middle East presents a dramatic picture of rapid population growth and growing demands. Aggregate rates of natural increase, though high in comparison to the remainder of the world, are often dwarfed by the rates of population increase in cities. (These data, and those that are referred to below, are summarized in appended charts.) Middle East populations are young, and growing younger. Forty percent or more of the population of most of the countries of the region are below the age of 15. Schools, already inadequate both in numbers and quality, are not up to the task of educating this vast pool of young men and women. Unemployment and underemployment, already high, is likely to grow. At the same time, literacy has steadily increased in the region, and while female literacy rates still lag considerably behind male rates, the changes over time are quite striking. Rising female literacy rates portend declining birth rates, but the effects will not be felt for decades. In the intervening years, women will enter the workforce in greater numbers, further increasing the demands

upon government for job creation. [Fargues] (Of course, the statistics on women in the workplace are problematic in any case, since many urban working class women are already "employed" in workshops or as pieceworkers, although they are neither salaried nor "officially" employed.) [White]

The average citizen in the Middle East may not yet be cruising the information superhighway, but, even so, gone are the days when governments could aspire to monopolize the flow of information about public issues. Sitting in Cairo, Damascus, Algiers or Baghdad, radio and television signals penetrate government censorship and bring images of the world. Modern communications technologies, like computer e-mail, inherently undermine vertical structures of control, but access to them is still relatively limited. As of 1994, Internet connections were available in Bahrain, Israel, Kuwait, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia, but these horizontal networks will spread and quickly. (Presently, 2.2 million computers in 135 countries are linked by Internet. The rate of growth is 10-15% a month.) [NPQ, Fall 1994, p. 27] Many human rights activists benefit from computer communications, both to learn of developments elsewhere and to put the spotlight on incidents in their own countries. The proliferation of printing ateliers and corner shop photocopy machines insures that people have more to read than government-dominated newspapers. Peripatetic villagers and city-dwellers have traveled across borders in search of work, and have returned with fresh images that often reflect poorly on the quality of life at home. Equally important, labor migrants have earned the resources to support protest movements and collective self-help organizations. In Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon and Tunisia, to name a few interesting cases, long-established patronage systems been weakened and even supplanted as former clients seek new, and less unequal patterns of affiliation.

Across a region of some two dozen countries, there are certainly wide variations in both government performance and resources, not to mention the skills and disabilities of individual leaders. Ceteris parabus, some governments are simply led more wisely than others; this is obvious. Nonetheless, there is a widespread malaise in the Middle East. Living conditions for the lower and middle classes are not improving, and, given the rates of urbanization, the marked deterioration in public services will only accelerate. Abuses of government power--corruption and nepotism, torture and mistreatment of prisoners--are increasingly common complaints, and government ineptitude, unresponsiveness and inefficiency are taken as given. Although many citizens choose to remain politically inert, given the intolerance of most of the governments for complaints, the resultant cynicism hardly buttresses regime legitimacy. Although they only encompass a relative handful of activists, it is germane to observe that a human rights movement has emerged in the region. Just over the course of

the past two to three years, human rights workers have begun to actively collaborate across borders, and Arab activists have even met with Israeli counterparts to find common ground for their work. Just as important, human rights has entered the vernacular of villagers and townspeople. For instance, in Turkey, one now encounters municipal parks in provincial towns dedicated to human rights, and in rural Egypt, villagers have organized human rights leagues. [Murphy]

Although articulate movements for political reform, with the important exception of the Islamists, have yet to emerge in any significant sense, one senses that the appetite for reform and change may well be growing. There is already a long list of Arab governments that discerned discontent and have attempted reforms, with widely varying degrees of success, notably: Algeria, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, and Yemen.

With one, possibly two exceptions, such as King Hussein of Jordan, the present leaders are not popular figures, and few tears will be shed if they step down. In any case, the underlying problems are systemic, not a matter of personalities. If it is fair to anticipate that the pressures for reform are only likely to grow, if unattended, then the central question becomes: is reform a viable option for the present governments? In this paper, this question is answered in the affirmative. Indeed, the logic of political survival points clearly to renovation not to business as usual. For the remaining years of the Twentieth Century, and into the Twenty-first, the name of the game in Middle East politics may well be political reform. In the absence of successful reform, the incentives for radical political movements will grow. The logic is simple: regimes that will not change must either be suffered or replaced, and the tolerance for bad government is declining.

Obviously, democracy is not a necessary outcome of political reform any more than all efforts to make the political system more efficient or even more responsive will succeed. Reform does, however, imply increasing the accountability and the responsiveness of those who rule, and, therefore, will necessarily involve limiting power as well as the application of the rule of law. In other words, political liberalization is a likely accompaniment to reform.

More than three decades ago, when western academics were still grappling with political development and modernization, Karl W. Deutsch introduced the term "social mobilization" to describe the impact of wide-ranging social, economic and demographic changes upon political identity. Deutsch, like other scholars of his generation, viewed the process of modernization as a journey from "tradition to modern ways of life." It hardly needs to be said that the arguments were not merely oversimplified, but substantially

wrong. Deutsch saw social mobilization as a process that would foster encompassing national identities, as people left behind the divisiveness of "traditional" parochial life. Instead, as we have learned to our pain, change does not submerge contending identities, but often elevates them to the level of open contention. Yet, social mobilization has torn people out of power relationships that they were imbedded in for generations. Across the Middle East, vast populations have migrated for work and to enjoy the ostensible benefits of urban life. In the process, old patterns of patronage are strained and often break down completely (often only to be replaced by new patrons). In some instances, as discussed later, people create new self-help institutions, or they are recruited into existing ones. Change is a context for politicization and as men and women are politicized they become available for political action and political mobilization.

The success of the populist Islamist movements is to have tapped into the wellspring of discontent, not to have resumed the natural march of Muslim history. In the same place, at another time, the recruitment successes of the Islamist movements would have belonged to the parties of the left or of nationalism, as was the case in the 1950s and 1960s when the crowds thronged to the streets acclaiming Jamal `abd-Nasir, or waving the flag of Palestine while Palestinian nationalism was resplendent. Dreams of Arab unity, or of victory in Palestine have tarnished badly, and so much the same for the regimes that demanded sacrifice in the name of Arab honor. The Islamists emerged from the hulks of burning tanks in the Sinai, from fetid slums, from thwarted ambitions and crushed hopes. The reciprocal to the failure of the authoritarian state is Islamism. Thus, the pattern of governance in the region has contributed substantially to the comparative advantages of the Islamists.

Too much attention has been paid to the theology of the Islamist movements and not enough to their strategy or the motives of their following as opposed to their leadership. I shall have more to say about these themes below. In several cases, governments, in the not so distant past, aided the Islamists so as to undercut the strength of the political left, as in the case of Egypt under the late Anwar Sadat. Israel turned a blind eye to Islamist activities in the mid-1980s, particularly in Gaza, so as to the undermine the strength of the more secular Palestine Liberation Organization. Even where the governments have not purposefully assisted the Islamists, through limitations and restraints on associational life, the governments have aided the Islamists indirectly.

Just as sure as ducks quack, birds fly and fish swim, authoritarian governments stifle dissent. Where government has impeded, if not thwarted autonomous forms of

association, e.g., political parties, unions and professional groups, the ensuing vacuum in civil society has been a boon to Islamist organizers. The Islamist movements and their indisputable popularity challenges the ruling governments to respond. The government's strategy of response is sometimes quite problematic especially when the government acts on the presumption that the Islamists represent a unified whole. To underline the point, the response of several Middle Eastern governments to opposition voices has been doubly flawed. By stifling opposition voices, radical ideologues, whose objective is to bring down the system rather than reform it, have been legitimated. Simultaneously, the quelling of secular forms of autonomous association is enabling for the Islamists.

As important as the internal dimensions of change is the changing regional and international environment. The end of the Arab-Israeli conflict, which now looms, will likely add to domestic pressures for better government in the Arab states. In the confrontation states, Jordan and Syria primarily, pressure to reallocate money from the defense budgets will likely grow. With few exceptions, Tunisia notably, the officer corps represents a crucial base of regime support, and officers have benefited handsomely from fat defense budgets and the associated privileges and perks. Thus, there is no doubt that any attempt to cut real spending on the military will be met by firm uniformed resistance. In fact, the initiation of projects for reform that shortchange military spending might provoke military intervention to forestall the process. For that matter, even efforts to pull defense budgets into the limelight, could provoke a protective military reaction. In Egypt, as elsewhere in the region, the military budget is protected from public scrutiny or even nominal oversight by the legislature.

Most of the Arab governments have attempted to legitimate themselves, in part, through reference to the conflict with Israel. [Kepel] The conflict is now, nonetheless, receding into history. Although die-hards will remain, there is little question that the conflict is over in the place that probably matters most, viz., the minds of the political elites in the Middle East. Just as major players in the Cold war may be searching for new enemies, so the regions' governments can be expected to discover new foes, new demons. In Egypt and Tunisia the search is over. The new demons are the Islamists, popular enemies in western capitals where "terrorist", for so long synonymous with "Palestinian", has fast become conflated with "fundamentalist", "Islamist", even "Muslim". In point of fact, it has been striking to observe the smooth rhetorical transition from the Cold war to the post-Cold war world by elements keen to win or sustain favor in Washington, D.C. Apt examples include the People's Mujahidin, which aspires to replace the regime in Tehran and has been warning of the

dangers of "fundamentalism", as well as an interesting admixture of Middle Eastern government figures from Algeria, Egypt and Israel who are intent on warning of the shared dangers posed by Muslim extremists.

There is ample evidence that the Islamists come in many flavors, and there is no need to belabor the obvious here. Although it has received surprisingly little notice, the Islamists have been seriously rethinking their views and objectives in regard to issues of state and society, and political reform. [See Moussalli] Western scholars, often striking a tone that might be confused with apologia, have argued for the complementarity of Islamic concepts like shura and ijma' with democratic procedures. In an important sense, these analyses have missed the point, in that the crucial thinking these days deals with questions of tolerance or civility (madani), minority rights (huquq al-aqalia) and confidence or security (ta'min).

Thinking of the Middle East as a single region has always presented an analytical challenge. Now, as rivalries are no longer be masked the Arab-Israeli conflict, sub-regional conflicts will likely become more obvious, as well as more divisive. Without moving too far from the topic at hand, it is germane to note that the prospect of reform in a neighboring state may well prompt active efforts to impede or reverse the reform. In this connection, the role played by Saudi Arabia in the recent Yemeni crisis is instructive. Riyadh missed hardly a beat in urging the recognition of the breakaway government of Aden, and informed reports underline the deep involvement of the Kingdom in fomenting the fighting. Obviously, the Kingdom was not keen to have a pluralist exemplar sitting on its doorstep, perhaps especially in Yemen, for years the source of cheap imported labor, not leadership or ideals. It is instructive to recall that Saudi Arabian arm-twisting was much in evidence when Bahrain ended a four year parliamentary experiment in 1975. As reform projects move forward, the incentives for regional hegemons to derail the projects will grow, since the model of a participant political system or effective legal restraints on rulers will be viewed as threatening by recalcitrant autocrats. As Ghassan Salamé notes, experiments in democratization have been more likely in small states, where wider public space and less government intrusion are the sine qua non of social unity and the best protection from meddling by lurking hegemons, but these experiments have attracted a lot of negative attention from powerful neighbors. The new sources of turmoil in the region may emanate from attempts to interdict political change, and given the permeability of both state and society, there can be little doubt that some spoiling efforts will succeed.

The effects of the end of the Cold War deprives many of the states of the Middle East the automatic support of a

superpower sponsor. In Syria, for instance, there is little doubt that Gorbachev's upbraiding of Asad during the Syrian president's visit to the Kremlin in 1988 was a decisive turning point. [Norton in K&K] No longer able to bank on Soviet largesse, Asad was brought cheek to jowl with the imperatives of renovating Syria's economy and coming to terms with Israel, and hence, the United States. Nonetheless, security rents continue to flow into Egypt and Israel, and to a lesser extent Jordan. It is possible that the U.S. treasury will continue to issue these checks for years to come, but as the Arab-Israeli conflict winds down there is reason to think that the U.S. Congress will cease being quite so generous. No doubt there will be financial sweeteners in any peace package, but these sweeteners are more likely to be one-time payments rather than aid programs. In the case of Egypt, it is plain that U.S. dispensed security rents allow the government to forestall reform. Moreover, it is interesting to contemplate that it is precisely those states that have confronted financial disaster that experiments in democratization have occurred, notably Algeria and Jordan. In short, the prospect of financial collapse mightily concentrates the mind upon reform as a means of dissipating public disaffection and anger, and sharing the blame for the pain of economic restructuring, including subsidy reductions.

As for the states that do not stand on the brink of fiscal disaster, where the pace of reform will generally be more gradual, the societal pressures for change should not be minimized. The richer Arab states pay security rents rather than receive them. For years, the wealthy oil producing states of the Gulf have been paying indirect rents to the West, and especially the United States, through the purchases of a myriad of weapon systems and armaments that have helped to make the Middle East the single most important arms market in the world. The innovation came in 1990-91, when the payments became direct as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the other states of the Gulf chipped in to underwrite the deployment of allied, and especially U.S. forces to the Gulf. Saudi Arabia, alone, paid $65 billion in support of Operation Desert Storm. In October 1994, when U.S. forces, with French and British support, deployed to Kuwait as a counterpoise to Iraqi forces redeployed in the environs of the Kuwait border, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia magnanimously agreed to pick up the tab to the tune of about $1 billion. These reverse rents, however self-interested, may raise additional problems for the relevant regimes. In Saudi Arabia, for instance, the regime has been steadily criticized for its profligate spending on guns, its inability to counter Iraqi aggression despite a bulging arsenal, and its dependence upon the United States. After all, if is possible to hire the U.S. military as a rent-a-cop, why spend all those billions on tanks, planes and installations in the first place?

Simultaneously, the prices on the international oil market are flat, and in major oil producing states like Saudi Arabia there has been a lot of fiscal belt-tightening. Leading experts like Giacomo Luciani argue that governments are adapting successfully to lower rents rather than reforming the economy and loosening the grip of the state; however, given the demographic pressures in the larger rentiér economies, there is good reason to presume that the impressive array of entitlements now being provided to citizens are not sustainable. Key to the rentiér state argument is the absence of tax extractions from citizens and therefore the absence of an incentive for individuals to demand a voice in government. Effectively, a reduction in entitlements may have the same impact as an increase in taxes, so we may need to rethink the central claim of the theory. [Gause] If so, and presuming that oil prices do not increase dramatically, the rentiér regimes will not be immune to demands for change. Although the majalis al-shura (consultative councils) that now exist in all the Arab states of the Arabian peninsula and the Gulf, except Kuwait and Yemen where there are parliaments,, are a far cry from autonomous legislatures, there should be no mistaking the fact that these bodies have been created to satiate the quest for change.

There is little argument about the prevalence of authoritarian government in the Middle East, and most observers are not any more fooled by displays of pseudo-participation than the people of the region. Thus, when a Syrian President wins a plebiscite, in 1991, with 99.8% of the votes or a less popular Tunisian President wins, in 1994, with only 99.3%, or when disdained candidates are declared winners in Moroccan parliamentary elections during 1993, few voters confuse what is happening with democracy. Indeed, many Middle Eastern elections are so blatantly manipulated that many people simply conclude that it is better not to vote. Hence, in Egypt's 1990 parliamentary elections less than 10% of eligible voters actually cast ballots in many Cairo districts. Given the chance, voters have shown ingenuity in thwarting rigged elections. In Morocco's 1993 parliamentary elections, the number two vote winner was the null ballot. Voters, many of whom had been paid to vote for the pro-government candidate, simply stuffed an empty envelope into the ballot box. [Munson] While there are exceptions, Middle East governments have opted for the symbols of democracy, not the substance. Even so, the fact that autocrats choose to go through the motions is instructive; while they may deride the suitability of democracy in the Middle East, they concede the universality of the symbols of democracy.

It is important to consider the reasons for the prevalence of authoritarianism in the region. From one angle or another, explanations often turn on deep-seated cultural patterns, e.g., the durability of patrimonialism,

or philosophical, viz., the rejection, or at least the lack of an articulated case for popular sovereignty. [Butterworth, Sharabi] It would be foolish to ignore these factors, but the nature of the modern Middle Eastern state is arguably a far more important explanation. The modern state is the predominant economic force in the Middle East. The state economy, including the bureaucracy, and variety of import substitution industries, often accounts for fifty percent or more of employment. The bourgeoisie, though by no means absent, is often co-opted and pliant to state interests. Direct taxation is low to non-existent, and the state often draws a significant portion of its income from rents.

Most important arguably, the authoritarian state is suspicious of independent voices and autonomous forms of association, so civil society is skewed and often impoverished. Almost all of the Middle East governments have gone to pains to promote unity, solidarity and social concord, yet the attempts have been heavy handed and clumsy, as in the case of Egypt's Arab Socialist Union or the Shah's Rastakhiz party. Instead of achieving solidarity, the absence of free forms of association between kin, tribe, clan or sect has prompted a retreat into the familiar comfort of the ties of blood and marriage. Solidarity was goal, but social fragmentation and sectarianism has been the result. Indeed, as Richards and Waterbury note, as the cynicism and alienation of the citizen has grown, all but the fiction of solidarism has fled as well. The result is a strategy of divide and rule that privileges particularistic social formations, such as family, tribe, clan, and sect. [Richards and Waterbury, p. 330]

In effect, the authoritarian state succeeded in creating a vacuum, and it is that vacuum that is being filled by the Islamist movements. Whereas independent political parties, associations and clubs have been stifled by state controls, the mosque has eluded effective policing. It is a relatively simple manner to outlaw a party, but the Muslim state can no more shutdown a mosque than a North American or European government could lock the doors of a church. Equally, important, the state has sought to maintain control of the mosque by keeping the religious officials on the government payroll, hence exerting unmistakable pressure on the content of the Friday sermon. At least since the early 1970s however, there has been an explosion of private, unlicensed mosques that have eluded state control. In key Middle Eastern countries, like Algeria and Egypt, unlicensed mosques comprise nearly half of all mosques. [Dowell & Burgat, 88-89; Ansari]

It is easy, too easy in fact, to explain the growth of the Islamist movements as a reflection of the inherent appeal of Islam vis-à-vis secular ideologies, often glossed as alien and failed. There is some truth here, but equally

important, the Islamists have evinced a strategy of power seeking and combined this strategy with a penetrating critique of government performance. Of course, the failure of government to implement the shari'a is often cited as part of the Islamist critique, but equally central to the critique is the emphasis on corruption, malfeasance and misbehavior. The mistreatment of people at the hands of government is a constant refrain. The reason that the Islamist critique is so persuasive is that it rings true.

Scholarship on the Islamists has, however, been overly textual, too inclined to report the words of the ideologues and the spokesman, and insufficiently sociological, in terms of failing to look at the motives of those who lend their support to the Islamist movements. In fact, the rank and file supporters of the Islamist movements are remarkably mobile in terms of granting or withdrawing their allegiance. More important, allegiance to one or another Islamist organization often has much less to do with questions of piety or religiosity than the organization's demonstrated efficacy and integrity. In Lebanon, for instance, many Shi'i Muslims have shifted from the reformist Amal movement to the more radical Hizballah for mundane reasons, viz., Amal is corruption ridden and inefficient, whereas Hizballah has demonstrated a fine tuned sensitivity to its constituency needs and has sustained a reputation for clean dealing. In Turkey, the May 1994 victories of the Refah party, though interpreted in some Turkish as well as non-Turkish quarters as the harbinger of the growing salience of religion in Turkey, says more about the demonstrated ineffectiveness of Refah's rivals than about resurgent Islamism.

Some governments have exacerbated their difficulties by attempting to emulate the rhetoric of the Islamists. This is because through emulation they have validated the Islamist critique. Indeed, religious personalities enlisted to speak on behalf of the government are often discredited by their role, or end up buttressing the Islamist opposition voices. Either way, the government loses further credibility. As the present authoritarian governments weaken, there will be an increasing temptation for the rulers to resort to demagogic appeals to Islam. This sort of ideological pandering is unlikely to work, as the example of the last Shah of Iran illustrates. By mid-1978, sensing the resonance of Islamic symbolism, the Shah decreed the adoption of the Muslim lunar calendar and took other superficial steps intended to "Islamicize" his regime. We all know how the story ended. One suspects that steps to demonstrate a commitment to the rule of law, perhaps by curbing police (and secret police) abuses or stemming corruption, will be more successful than attempts to appropriate an Islamist discourse. As it is, when the government validates the Islamist da'wa, it obviously lends

momentum to efforts to coerce and persecute non-Muslim minorities (the case of the Copts in Egypt comes to mind).

Metaphors like "the Arab street" treat the average man and woman as though rational choice were alien to the Middle East. [For an example see Pollock] Unlike citizens in Europe and the United States, it is assumed that Middle Easterners are easily roused by the shrill rhetoric of demagoguery rather than the calculus of self-interest. Yet, there is ample evidence to show that the pragmatic allocation of political allegiances is common in the Middle East. Given the choice, working class people are perfectly capable of casting protest votes (as in Algeria, where many of the votes for FIS were anti-FLN votes), lending loyalty to those who provide services more competently than the government (as many of the Islamist groups have done across the Middle East), discerning local vs. national interests (as exemplified by a Refah supporter in Turkey, who noted the other parties had proven corrupt, so he was willing to give Refah as chance in leadership of his municipality; and then he hastened to add that he would not, however, vote for Refah in the national elections, since the Refah did not understand Turkey's international interests), shifting allegiance (as in Jordan, where the Islamists lost half of their parliamentary seats from one election to the next), or concluding that an election is meaningless (as when many Egyptians simply choose not to vote). [Entelis, White, Brand and al-Sayyid]

Given the chance to freely choose elected officials, there is little doubt that the incumbents would win few votes. Yet, there is an understandable tendency for the governments to grossly overestimate their popularity, often with unsettling results. In Algeria, for instance, the ruling party, the FLN, designed an election, replete with gerrymandered districts, that was calculated to magnify its votes and produce an overwhelming victory. [Norton, January 1982] Instead, in the first round of parliamentary elections, in December 1991, the FLN won 15 seats while the opposition FIS won 188 seats out of 430 total seats. The FLN design worked quite well but not for the intended beneficiary. With 48 percent of the total national vote in the first round of balloting, FIS was positioned to win overwhelming majority in parliament in the second round. For many of the Algerian voters, FIS was not the Islamist party, it was a credible opposing voice to a ruling party that had overstayed its welcome.

The Algerian example helps to illustrate the importance of carefully designed electoral mechanisms, not to deny the venting of opposition voices but to avoid overstating either the popularity of the government or its opponents. Thus, any serious discussion of political reform must pay attention to the advances of different techniques of organizing balloting. In Algeria, for instance, a

proportional system would have assured FIS the major voice in parliament, but would have precluded a situation in which FIS could easily muster the two-third vote necessary to amend the Algerian constitution. Moreover, if a proportional system had been in use, voters might well have invested their ballot in the smaller opposition parties. In the winner take all system that was used, a vote for a small party, no matter how articulate its leadership or compelling its program was no less than a wasted vote.

The January 1992 coup d'etat in Algeria not only marked the end of Algeria's dramatic experiment in political reform, but it also demarcates the end of a period of experimental reform in the Maghrib and the Mashriq. Following the FIS electoral victories, many Arab elites lost their enthusiasm for reform, and certainly for democratization. In Tunisia and in Egypt, Ben `Ali and Mubarak, respectively, suddenly found a middle class constituency urging caution, rather than demanding a more open system.

The elixir of freedom prompted the heady growth of civil society in Algeria, and provided an inspiring example of what might happen elsewhere as the weight of authoritarianism was lifted. But many of the organizations that emerged were minuscule and weak, mere fledglings. No organizations in civil society could rival the Islamists in terms of the depth and breadth support, or, for that matter, financial resources. When the army annulled the elections through its coup, a chorus of support rose from civil society, preferring the steel boot to the minaret.

Skeptics, more impressed by the frailty of civil society rather than its potential, have taken the wrong lesson from recent experiments in democratization. There is no question that civil society lacks the power to confront the existing regimes in the Middle East. In fact, the oppositional power of civil society has been generally exaggerated in other parts of the world. Nonetheless, when the state opens up public space, the blossoming of civil society, albeit inchoate, is impressive. Thus, cases as varied as Algeria and Yemen, the phenomenon of civil society illustrates that as the heavy hand of government is lifted, multifarious independent associations emerge. Given the opportunity to mature, these organizations not only lend vitality to experiments in open government but they serve as counterweight to populist movements such as the Islamists. It is too much to hope that civil society will mature over night however, and this is why the project of reform must be seen as a gradualist project.

As for FIS, the radicalizing effect of the coup was both predictable and tragic. Of course, it is important to guard against the ex post facto ergo propter hoc fallacy. The violent behavior of FIS, denied the fruits of its earned electoral victory, can hardly be extrapolated backwards to

predict how FIS might have behaved had it been allowed to ascend to the position that it won. Certainly, Algeria's dissent into civil war has illustrated in cruel terms that the logic of violence is an unlikely cure to the problems dogging Middle Eastern states. The Algerian army is a professional, well-trained body, yet it has been unable to impose its will on the country. The beginning of a dialogue between FIS and the ruling junta, necessitated by impasse, illustrates a step that could well have made Algeria's hazardous electoral victory a bit less precarious. Given the immensity of the reforms that were underway in Algeria, it remains striking that the reforms were so poorly planned. [Sahnoun]

For the Islamists, the decision to participate in elections is almost always contentious. Time and again, the decision to play splits the Islamist movement, though not into equal parts. Hard-liners portray the decision as a sell-out, questioning state-dominated elections as meaningless, and worse, a case of playing into the hands of the rulers. For their part, moderates, bringing a majority with them consistently, argue for a gradualist approach, and seize upon the legitimacy that comes from competing. Not surprisingly, the decision to exclude the Islamists from elections usually, though not always, solidifies and radicalizes the Islamist opposition, submerging hard-liner-moderate distinctions. There are exceptions, as in Tunisia, where al-Nahda has, under the leadership of Rashid Ghannoushi, been remarkably restrained despite the exclusionist position of Ben `Ali's government.

Perhaps the most surprising example of Islamist participation in elections comes from Lebanon. In the mid-1980s the Lebanese Shi'i party Hizballah was intent on revolutionary objectives and castigated the idea of compromise. In fact, Hizballah ridiculed its adversaries for cooperating with the western dominated Beirut government, and spend its energies expanding its social base amongst the Shi'a who comprise about thirty-five percent of Lebanon's population, while sustaining a vigorous resistance campaign against Israeli occupation in South Lebanon and engaging in a number of notorious attacks upon foreigners, including hostage holding. Thus, in a major programmatic statement distributed in 1985, Hizballah declared:

> "Any opposition moving within the sphere of protecting and safeguarding the constitution currently in force and not committed to making fundamental changes in the system's roots is also a superficial opposition that will not achieve the interests of the oppressed masses.
>
> "Moreover, any opposition moving within the positions where the regime wants it to move is an imaginary opposition that serves only the regime.

> "On the other hand, we are not at all interested in any projection for political reform within the framework of the rotten sectarian system, just exactly as we are not interested in the formation of any cabinet or the participation of any figure in any ministry representing a part of the oppressive regime." [p. 176]

When the al-Ta'if accord was signed in 1989, Hizballah followed the lead of Iran and rejected the accord as preserving Lebanon's confessional system. Nonetheless, when the civil war in Lebanon ended and the first parliamentary elections in twenty years were held, in 1992, the majority of Hizballah had no problem deciding to play. Of course, there was a vociferous debate and some leading figures in the party argued that the party was losing its soul, its very raison d'être, but these were minority voices. For all practical purposes, they have now left the party. Such debates are divisive internally, but constructive for the process of reform. Opposition political movements split and sub-divide, form new coalitions and new alliances. In the Lebanese case, Hizballah ran very successfully, winning eight seats, and with like-minded allies in parliament represents a bloc of twelve (of 128) seats. With the civil war in Lebanon over, Hizballah deputies regularly horse trade with other deputies to win legislative support. Of course, prosaic politics continues to evince disapproval from true believers, but the overwhelming majority of Shi'i Muslims approve of Hizballah's stance and applaud the party for its efficiency and honesty. Simultaneously, dialogues are underway joining Lebanese from all of the major sects in Lebanon, and pro-Hizballah participants have figured prominently.

As though mimicking a dull student, those who oppose including the Islamists in elections and in government keep on insisting that we do not know how the Islamists will behave, or, alternately, point to the case of Algeria to illustrate precisely how they will behave. I have already noted the fallacy of relying on the Algerian example. Moreover, we now have several important examples of Islamist participation in electoral systems, which, admittedly, they have not dominated. The examples show clearly a willingness to play by the rules, at least while constituting a minority. More important, the examples illustrate that the process of inclusion promotes pragmatism and moderation. Politics is contingent by definition, and obduracy is usually a less successful tact than compromise. Service in government institutions and inclusionary politics tend to reduce non-centrist radicalism. [See Putnam for confirming data]

Of course, we do not yet have an example of Islamists successfully ascending to power through the electoral process, and there is no denying the need for guarantees.

Those who oppose the participation of the Islamists in elections point to normative positions on women, minorities, Israel, and the West. [Miller] These are not trivial questions, but to begin with the proposition that their normative stance precludes any form of participation in the political process is self-defeating in the extreme, especially in the absence of a meaningful non-Islamist opposition. Scholars have expressed, almost in a tone of wonderment, that it is precisely in those systems that are democratizing that the Islamists seem most visible. [Anderson] How could it be otherwise, given the pattern of government suppression vis-à-vis civil society? The legacy of authoritarianism cannot be reversed overnight, but unless governments take steps, gradual ones at that, to open up pubic space and permit civil society to develop, then only the rulers and their alter egos, the Islamists, will left in stark confrontation.

Even so, change will not occur overnight. Skillful programs of reform will be incremental and gradual. The key question is whether these governments really wish to reform. The evidence is not altogether encouraging in some leading cases, such as Egypt. For instance, in March 1994, the Muslim Brethren issued a memorandum accepting, in a significant deviation from the teachings of Hasan al-Banna, multiple party competition and the values of a pluralist society. The memorandum was virtually ignored by the government. and the so-called National Dialogue launched in June 1994 was, as one Egyptian put it, more like a company meeting than a serious attempt at dialogue.

In Egypt, as in many other Middle Eastern settings, government tactics for responding to opposition or potential opposition forces range from co-optation, subversion and imitation to manipulation, domination and emasculation. When non-governmental organizations are seen to be gaining support, it is not uncommon for the government to create its own look-alike NGO. Thus, in Yemen the government created its own human rights organization to counter the Human Rights League. [As Sheila Carapico notes, the government human rights organization held its first meeting in a police station.] In Jordan, the regime has sponsored a woman's organization to undermine more independent women's NGOs. [Brand] In Egypt, the government has changed the electoral rules within professional syndicates (<u>niqabat</u>) to thwart Islamists electoral victories. In the Sudan, the ruling junta moved aggressively to put Islamists in leadership positions in the independent minded syndicates. And, I have already referred to the record of electoral manipulation that is government trademark.

Nonetheless, some scholars argue that an impasse has been reached, in that the Islamist opposition is too strong to be eradicated, yet too weak to topple the state through direct action. [Waterbury] This may describe the situation

in Egypt in late 1994. Certainly, a point of impasse and exhaustion has been reached in Algeria, but there the situation is rather unique. The civil war in Algeria has produced a very radicalized Islamist opposition which is likely to constrain moderation on the part of FIS. Successful dialogue is extremely problematic in other words. But, in other settings, constructive dialogues on political reform seem plausible as well as necessary, given the governments' declining capacity to impose its will. The point described in one leading analysis may be coming into view, viz.: "...conflicting or competing groups are interdependent, in that they can neither do without each other nor unilaterally impose their preferred solution on each other if they are to satisfy their respective divergent interests." [p. 38 in O'Donnell and Schmitter]

From the smaller states of the region, we find a handful of examples of dialogues, with varying degrees of success. These dialogues culminated in pacts which formalize agreements, and, through their visibility, serve the important purpose of providing some protection for moderates on both sides. Significantly, the Algerian reform experiment was not the product of a dialogue but a decree, and this fact may help to explain the failure of the experiment. Needless to add, governments may not only need to be nudged and pushed in the direction of dialogue by major powers, but they may also need to depend on outside powers to guarantee internal processes of reform as well as deterring outsiders' interdiction of the process.

The pressures for political reform are being felt across the Middle East. This is not to argue that ruling autocrats are contemplating a retirement villa on Lake Como, a cottage in Provence, or the leisurely pursuit of golfballs. Those who rule have no evinced interest in conceding power. Nonetheless, the facts impinge and force the contemplation of change and reform. Even in Libya, the resident eccentric, Muammar Qadhdhafi has been pushing along the path of reform. (Tunisik) Some of these efforts at controlled and constrained reform may succeed, but intuition as well as history should teach us to expect the unintended. Internal processes of change are likely to prove hard to manage, especially given the example of other societies where people breathe more freely, are less terrorized by government and have a voice in decisions that their lives. In this regard, it is useful to recall a statement Generalissimo Franco, who, contemplating his design for controlled reform, assumed he could shield Spain against "the breezes from foreign shores from blowing through our windows, corrupting the purity of our environment." [Perez-Diaz]

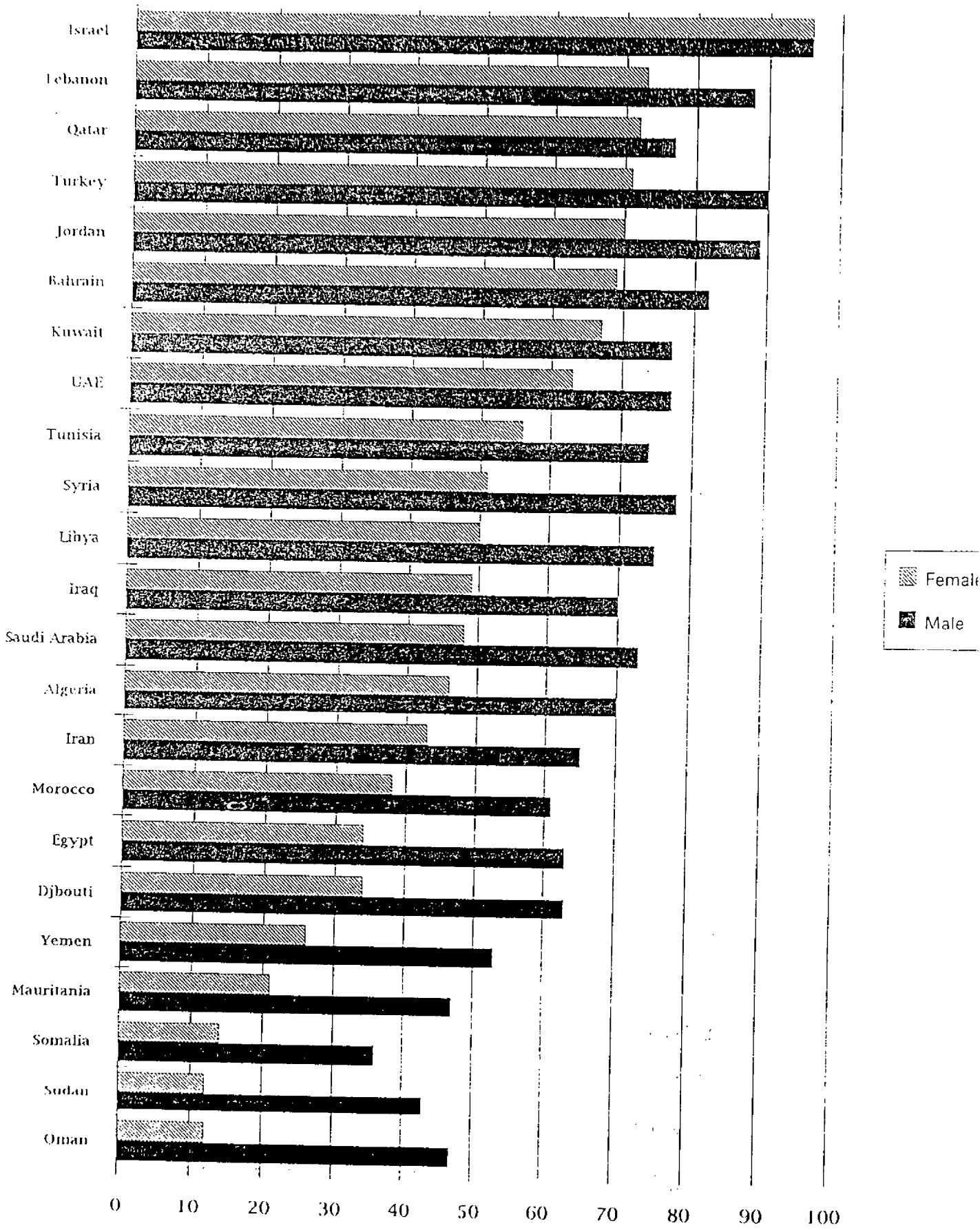
Communications Profile
Per 1,000 People

	Radios	TVs	Telephones	Newspaper Circulation
Algeria	233	74	40	51
Bahrain	531	403	282	56
Djbouti	90	56	23	NA
Egypt	324	109	28	57
Iran	247	70	41	27
Iraq	205	69	NA	34
Israel	471	266	469	261
Jordan	254	81	NA	56
Kuwait	343	285	189	221
Lebanon	840	330	333*	118
Libya	224	99	NA	15
Mauritania	144	23	NA	1
Morocco	209	74	16	13
Oman	646	766	53	41
Qatar	514	516	349	217
Saudi Arabia	318	283	158	42
Somalia	43	14	NA	1
Sudan	250	71	4	24
Syria	251	59	58	22
Tunisia	196	80	43	37
Turkey	161	175	117	72
UAE	342	110	245	157
Yemen	33	31	15	11
Developing Countries	180	55	28	50
Industrialized Countries	1130	545	590	304
World	360	148	130	130

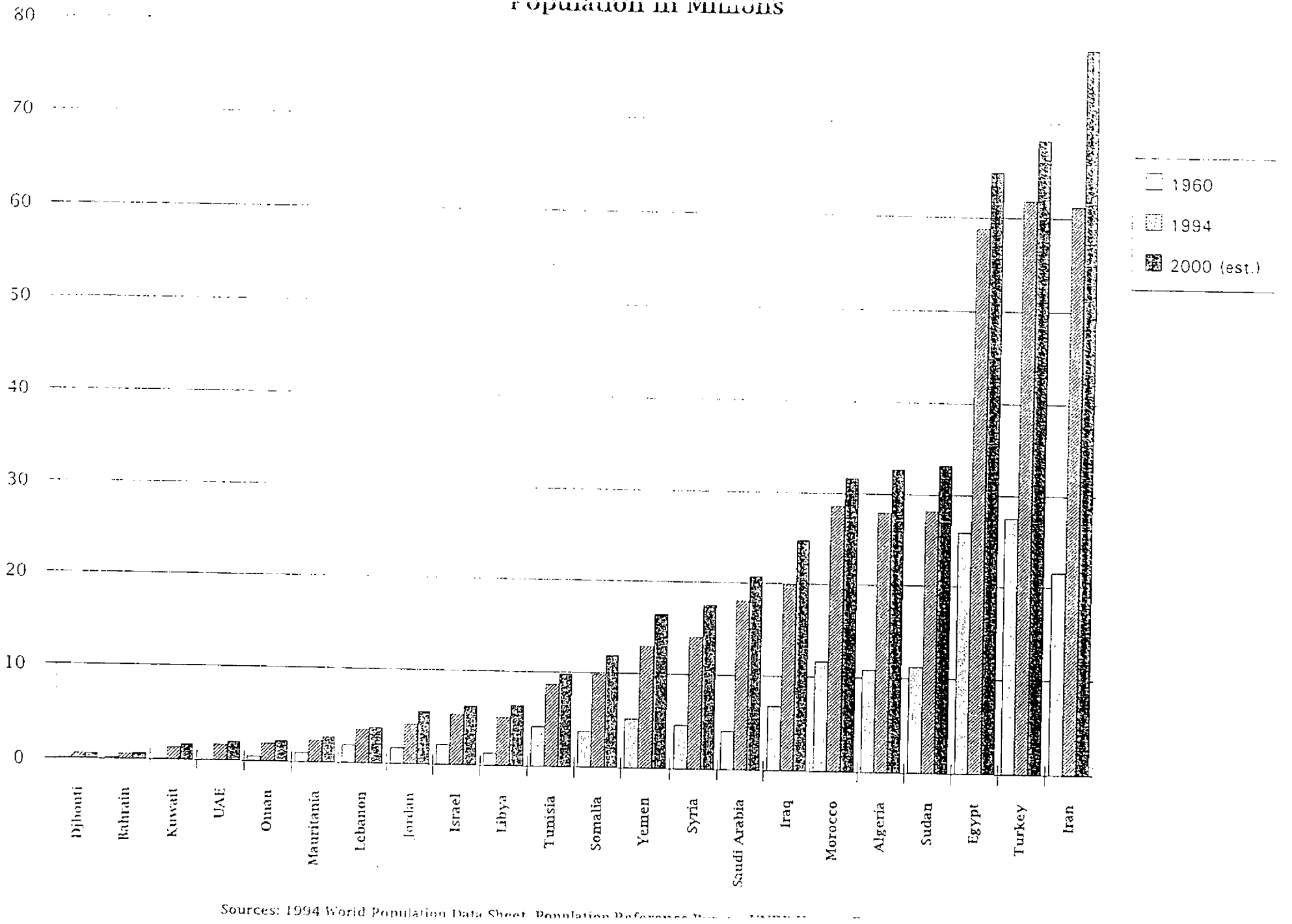
Source: UNDP *Human Development Report, 1994*

* When new system is installed

Male and Female Literacy Rates, Percentage of Total, 1990

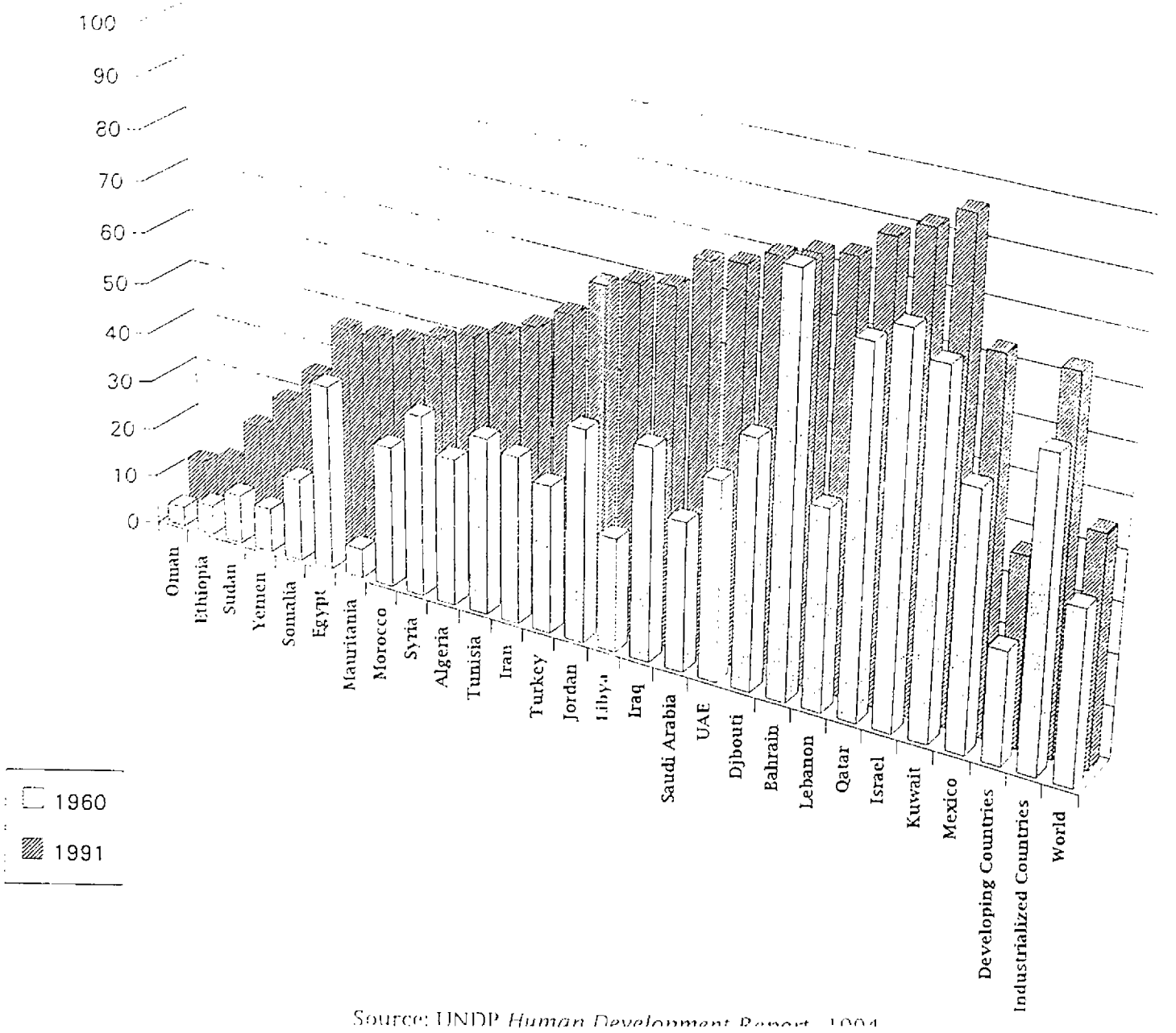


Source: UNDP *Human Development Report, 1994*



Sources: 1994 World Population Data Sheet, Population Reference

Urban Population as a Percentage of Total Population, 1994

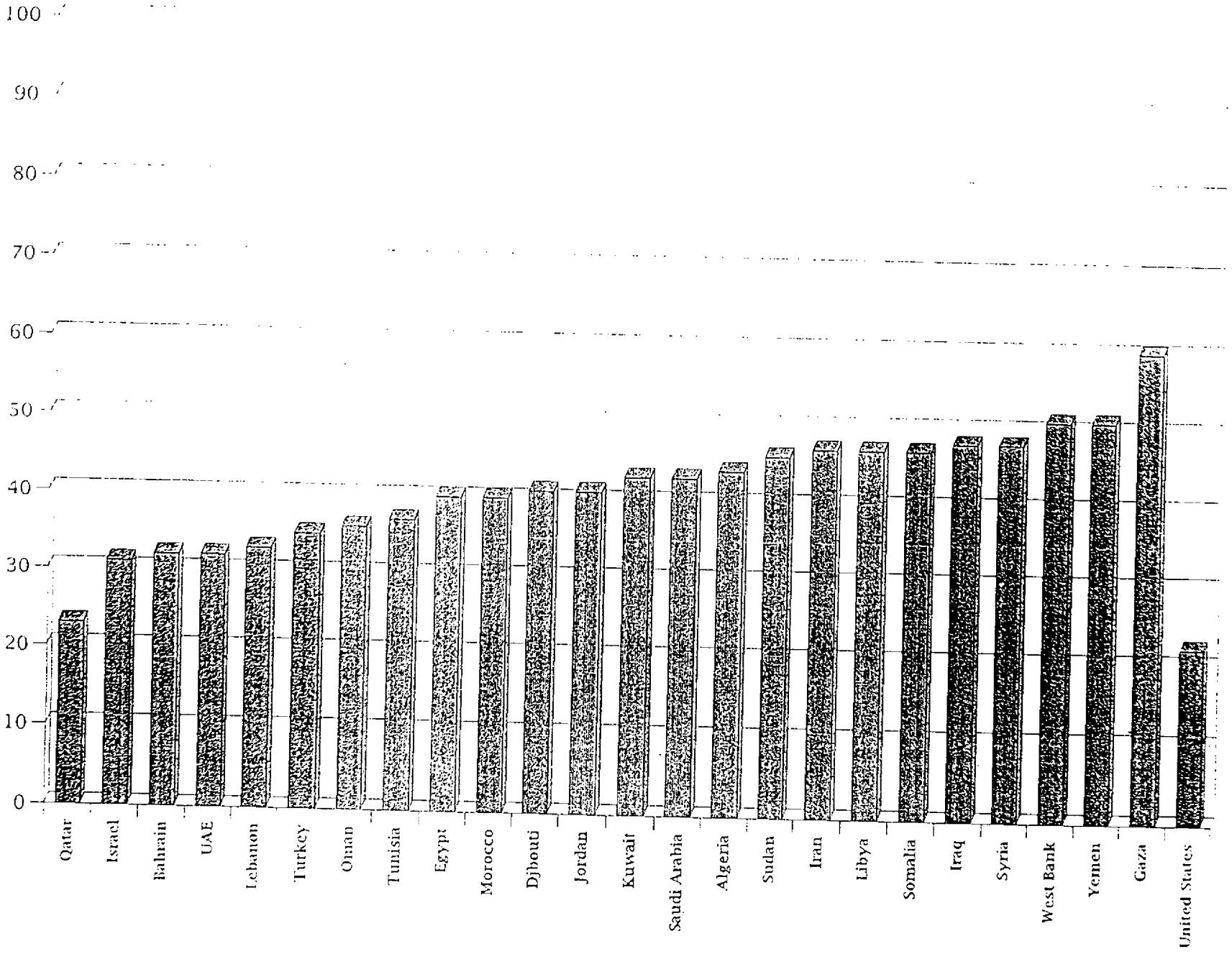


Source: UNDP *Human Development Report*, 1994

Percentage of Urban Population Annual Growth Rate, Average 1965-1991

UNDP *Human Development*

Percentage of Population Under 15 Years of Age



Source: *1994 World Population Data Sheet*