

Democratization in the Mashreq: The Role of External Factors

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Political democracy evolved along with the unique historic phenomenon of capitalism, which first occurred in Western Europe. This phenomenon is referred to in the social sciences as the process of modernization. Although initially industrialization and capitalism, not unlike other political forces, were brutally painful to certain social strata, modernization ultimately represented a fundamental break with tradition and involved a significant improvement in the quality of life of the citizens of Western societies. Thus it is valid to conclude that the expansion of the critical space¹ between society and the state, involving participatory government, accountability, tolerance, civility – essential ingredients for the development of democratic rule – were, to a large extent, by-products of capitalist development in the West.

Today the Arab Mashreq, like the rest of the south, is affected by the global wave of political liberalization. This brief essay aims at explicating the dialectical tensions and interplay between internal dynamics and external variables. One of the arguments advanced is that no clear understanding may be achieved without examining the role of capitalist distortion and the colonial legacy, though internal dynamics need to be taken into account. This essay will further analyse the debate between those scholars who advance explanations based on external or internal reasoning and proffer a synthesis between the two differing schools. The goal is to provide an overall view of the process of political liberalization and the main reasons inhibiting this process.

Capitalist penetration, in the rest of the world, so far, however, has not led to the reproduction of this unique historic process of modernity, though some scholars believe that a new wave – the Third Wave – is sweeping some parts of the developing world.² The development of events and conditions outside Western Europe took a different course. The majority of the states

that today comprise what is called the periphery, or the Third World, were formed with the help of a powerful outside factor, namely the expansion of Europe. The exigencies of the Eurocentric European model introduced a form of capitalism into these areas where direct contact took place. The result was a distorted form of capitalism, and the early assumption that development of political democracy would be a by-product of penetration did not materialize, as proved to be the case in, for example, Korea, Singapore and Latin America.

Since the Second World War, two main methodological currents have been employed to understand problems related to socio-political development in the Third World. The first current, in an attempt at explaining the effects of the process of development in these societies, reduces the debate to internal variables. Therefore, the focus is on values and attitudes of the peoples and how these became factors inhibiting the modernization of these societies. The second current takes the opposite view in that it deals with the problems facing these societies in their attempt at modernization as external to society, which is located within an international context.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent changes that have taken place in Eastern Europe, a universal interest in democracy and civil society ensued. In the specific case of Arab and Muslim societies, that debate has been divided along the same line as the developmental debate. Hence it was logical that the first current produced the theory of the Arab and Muslim 'exception'. The 'absence' of democracy, as was said to have been the case with earlier attempts at exploring the 'backwardness' of these societies, was the result of internal cultural factors.³ The externalist approach in analysing the problems of backwardness treated these societies (the Third World societies) as part of a larger international structure where external factors have had a negative impact on its socio-economic development.

Although there is extensive literature on the impact of the external factors on the social and economic structure, little has been written on the effect this interaction has had on the political development in the societies themselves. The process of economic distortion in these societies has had an impact on the process of political development as well.

Unlike the West, the historic process of development in most of the rest of the world inhibited the development of fully-fledged social classes, and social structures remained weak but complex. Social life in the periphery is more dependent upon non-class social alignments (race, religion, age, ethnicity) than it is in the Western world. Thus a similar process of distortion as occurred in the economic sphere has taken place in the political sphere.

Like the Third World itself, the Arab Mashreq is not monolithic. Political openness in the Third World, whether it took place as a result of domestic

factors, outside pressure or a combination of both, produced forms of government that varied from 'full' authoritarian regimes to 'benevolent totalitarianism' and consociational democracy. In the specific case of the Arab Mashreq, the First World War – an important external factor – was a major watershed. The Ottoman *wilayat* of Syria was divided by the colonial powers of Britain and France, and subsequently several entities emerged: Lebanon, Syria and Jordan along with what today constitutes Israel and the Palestinian territories.

As a result of this break-up, parts of the hinterland and the *badia* were isolated from major Arab cities and towns. Furthermore, the different, often competing, colonial interests, operating within the context of the new boundaries that were created as a result, gave rise to different system of government and different economic structures. The largely decentralized and fractional system of government in Lebanon differed fundamentally from the strong and centralized system of government in Jordan. In Syria, the failure of colonial rule, which was never able to root itself deeply in Syrian society, paved the way for the development of the autocratic Syrian state. In Palestine, the British objective of setting up a Jewish entity had a devastating impact on Palestinian society which was eventually uprooted and scattered over the region and the wider world.

In the post-independence era, the external factor – referred to here as the network of political, economic and social relations between the North and the South – had, in the context of the cold war, a negative impact on the development of modern systems of governance, and the process of the evolution of civil society in general. The external powers during this period were more interested in 'stability' rather than in promoting economic development and democratization.⁴ Furthermore, the Arab-Israeli conflict and the war for Palestine provided the regimes with a powerful mobilization agenda that led either to a single-party political structure or to equally autocratic systems; the critical space between state and society was often considerably reduced.

The Transition

The widely accepted notion that the process of political liberalization in the Arab countries began with the Gulf War needs to be reassessed critically. There is no evidence to support this claim, at least in relation to the Arab Mashreq. The limited economic liberalization in Syria has not been matched by political liberalization, it is true, and the Syrian state has so far successfully resisted outside pressure. However, in Jordan, political liberalization started before the Second Gulf War, and although the process gained momentum during the war, it was for different reasons than those usually advanced.

In both Lebanon and Palestine, the complexities of their domestic scenes and the network of external factors linked to them requires a different periodization in order to understand the dynamism of both societies. Palestinian society on the West Bank and Gaza has experienced an *intifada* and the thrust of its mobilizational effort was directed towards protecting and liberating itself from Israel occupation. Legislative elections were only possible as a result of a process of negotiations between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which took place under American tutelage. In Lebanon the dynamism that ended the civil war and the reintroduction of participatory government were rooted more in Syrian-Lebanese relations and their interaction with regional factors than with the Gulf War.

Among the Arab Mashreq countries, the Jordanian experiment in political liberalization and its process of transition since 1989 offers the analyst a valuable case study. The country is relatively stable. Both the state and society are going through a profound process of social change with far-reaching consequences, not only for its own population but also for neighbouring countries. It is the only state that so far has had two consecutive elections in the last eight years – the third was held at the end of the twentieth century – that were generally characterized as fair and free, and in which political Islam was the dominant political force in the first election in 1989 and a major factor in the elections of 1993.

Jordan is also implementing an economic restructuring programme involving severe austerity measures. In addition, the country, as a result of the economic restructuring, has witnessed an increase in the number of its non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Furthermore, Jordan signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1994, thus formally ending the state of belligerency with the Jewish state. The collective impact of these major factors has been felt by all strata of Jordanian society and is changing gradually the relationship between state and society. The Jordanian case serves as a critical example to shed light on the process of political liberalization in the Arab arena. Although this short essay will focus mainly on Jordan, it will refer to and use insights from other case studies in the Arab Mashreq to complement the analysis.

Civil Society

As mentioned above, for a proper understanding the process of liberalization, it is essential to analyse the relationship between external factors and domestic dynamism. The pressure to politically liberalize is the result of two factors: (1) the end of the cold war and the subsequent global wave for liberalization; and (2) the failure of statist policies as

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TABLE I
POPULAR ORGANISATIONS AND PROFESSIONAL
ASSOCIATIONS IN SYRIA

No.	Name of Organisation
1	General Federation of Workers' Syndicates
2	General Federation of Fanners
3	Federation of the Revolution's Youth
4	National Federation of Syria's Students
5	Teachers Syndicate
6	General Women's Federation
8	AI-Baath Youth Organisation
9	General Sports Federation
10	Federation of Arab Writers
11	Housing Co-operative Federation
12	Syndicate of Engineers
13	Syndicate d Physicians
14	Syndicate of Agricultural Engineers
15	Syndicate of Dentist
16	Syndicate of Pharmacists
17	Syndicate of Lawyers
18	Union of Journalists
19	Fine Arts Syndicate
20	Syndicate of Artists

Source: Arab Baath Socialist Party, *Al-Harakah al-Tashihyah al-Majidah* (Glorious Corrective Movement), Damascus, National Headquarters Printing Press, 1995, pp.183-364.

applied in some countries, such as Syria and Jordan, despite their different ideological leanings. Syria's and Jordan's economic failure and their inability to continue to provide goods and services without any consideration as to their real cost has brought both countries under unprecedented pressure to liberalize their economies more than at any other time in their history. However, in Syria 'authoritarian rule appears remarkably durable in spite of increasing socio-economic modernization'⁵ (see Table 1).

While the Syrian state today is not a military dictatorship, the military and security apparatus exercise considerable influence. By 1990 there were 35 members of the armed forces to every 1000 citizens.⁶ The roots of this development can be traced to the nationalist crisis of the 1950s, on both the political and economic levels, and to the Arab-Israeli conflict. The overwhelming desire to reverse the situation in Palestine, reunite the homeland and defeat Western interests in the region, provided the argument for establishing a strong central government capable of mobilizing resources for economic development and liberation legitimacy. And in this process, the critical space between society and state was reduced to a minimum.

This statist thrust gained momentum after the coup of 1966, and the Baath regime succeeded in controlling organizations such as the unions and professional associations. In the rural areas, the state was successful in mobilizing the peasantry who were alienated under the colonial administration and the nationalist government of the post-world war eras. The leadership of those associations were militants of the ruling party – and, therefore, 'partners' in government. They had access to power and at the same time executed the policies of the regime. Thus the associations and unions were not 'voluntary associations' of citizens promoting their interests, but frameworks for mobilization that were used by the regime as a means of implementing the power of the state.⁷

Yet legislative elections have taken place and the Syrian press and television often report on select parliamentary activities. In reality, however, everybody is aware that not only the executive power but also the legislative power lies in the hands of the president. Political parties in Syria are either 'junior partners' with no independent popular base or, as in the case of Islamists, banned, (see Table 2). The ability of the Syrian regime to mobilize in Syria is so great that during the Gulf War, this Arab nationalist regime which fought with Allied troops led by the United States in an anti-Arab nationalist cause, was able to neutralize all domestic opposition. The only opposition force that exists today in Syria is provided by the Islamists although a series of violent confrontations with the state has rendered them ineffective.

TABLE 2
POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE RULING COALITION IN SYRIA
(NATIONAL PROGRESSIVE FRONT)

No.	Name of Political Organization
1	Arab Socialist Baalh Party
2	Arab Socialist Union Party
3	Syrian Communist Party*
4	Syrian Communist Party (Yousef Faisal)
5	Socialist Unionists Party
6	Arab Socialist Movement
7	Unionist Socialist Democratic Party

*Khalid Bakdash died on 25 July 1995 and was succeeded as party leader by his wife.

Source: Arab Baath Socialist Party, *Al-Harakah al-Tashjhiyah al-Majidah* (Glorious Corrective Movement), Damascus: National Headquarters Printing Press: 1995, pp.128-44.

In neighbouring Jordan, however, events took a different direction. Historically, except for brief moments, the professional associations for most of their history had had an antagonistic relationship with the state. Unlike the situation in Syria, most leaders of these associations were also leaders of the opposition. With political parties banned and underground for the entire period between 1957 and 1967 and again between 1970 and 1989, the professional associations became arenas of competition for the political forces in the country and forums of expressions for anti-state politics. Thus the critical space between state and society in Jordan remained relatively wider than was the case in Syria, enabling 'political life' to exist within society. This difference sheds considerable light on the different political systems in the two neighbouring states of Syria and Jordan.

Furthermore, despite the presence of a relatively strong public sector, the Jordanian state was more permissive in introducing decentralizing technologies. Telexes, photocopying machines and later facsimile machines, in addition to their economic utility, facilitated the dissemination of political statements and other political literature by the underground organizations. 'Punishment' for political 'crimes' was never as severe as in Syria and other neighbouring countries. The Jordanian state before 1989 may best be described as benign authoritarianism, not as totalitarian. It is here that most of the explanation as to why the process of political liberalization took place in Jordan and not in other neighbouring Arab countries lies.

Thus, it is safe to assume that 'reform depend[ed] as much on the will of the citizens as on the willingness of the government'.⁸ As a result of the crisis and riots of 1989, 659 candidates presented themselves for the 80 seats in parliament in the 1989 elections, and in 1993 the number of candidates was 537. Both the 1989 and the 1993 campaigns were boisterous, whilst the number of political slogans was overwhelming and severely critical of the performance of past governments, offering instead promises to put an end to all corruption and make government accountable.

Thus the new parliamentary deputies had a strong mandate. Elections were free and fair, and, coupled with the representation of all political forces in the country (except for the Tahrir party) they gave parliament, as an institution, credibility. Following the elections of 1989, martial law was abolished, while a new party law and a press and publications law were enacted by parliament. The nascent democracy also passed its first test: the Gulf War. Professional associations, university students, voluntary neighbourhood initiatives and political party activists were mobilized against the Allied Forces in support of Iraq. It appeared then that the entire political atmosphere in the country was changing and the critical space was expanding. Political party material was available without restriction, and freedom to express opinions and to assemble were now guaranteed by law. But the liberalization process then began to slow down and today, eight years later there is clearly a regression.

In Lebanon and in the Palestinian territories elections have also been held and, to some degree, democratically elected legislative bodies have been put in place. It appears, however, that today the situation in all these entities has stagnated. In Jordan the stagnation is the result of the fact that civil society institutions, despite the wide coverage their activists and statements receive in the printed press, are limited in their ability to mobilize both their membership and citizens in general. Thus these institutions have not been able to reverse regressive tendencies or influence the course of social change in a meaningful way. The opposition forces, led by Islamists, have, in their campaigns, been successful at dispensing promises and criticizing unpopular policies. They have not, however, been able to provide alternative programmes in response to the ones implemented by successive governments since 1989. A major exception to this is the small business community. For the first time in the history of Jordan, industrialists and leading merchants have been voicing their opinions in an open and systematic way concerning not only issues related to economic policy such as the debate on the introduction of a sales tax but also concerning foreign policy. The chambers of industry and commerce in Amman opposed very strongly the shift in policy towards Iraq. They called for a policy of co-operation with Iraq, for their interests clearly lay in maintaining a strong and friendly relations with Iraq.

The first powerful signal from above that the process of liberalization would be a long one came in June of 1993 when, by royal decree, King Hussein introduced an amendment to the election law that effectively reduced the number of Islamic deputies in the 1993 parliament. It also prevented other opposition figures from being re-elected. This move was highly unpopular and was totally rejected by the majority of the political elite in the country.⁹ Four years of political activity to reform the law by the opposition have, however, been fruitless. The second blow came on the eve of the signing of the peace treaty between Jordan and Israel. The Jordanian state in its effort to secure the ratification of the treaty by the Jordanian parliament, resorted to 'pre-democratic' means of mobilization and control. Opposition views were banned from the only (state owned) television and radio station. Demonstrations and public assembly were, for the most part, either banned or strongly discouraged.

These measures were even extended to the mosques, where collective prayers in open public spaces were banned. On the day of ratification, a police cordon was installed in the areas around Parliament, which had the effect of intimidating MP's and prevented immediate contact between those who gathered outside Parliament to protest the treaty and the legislators. Furthermore, the government moved to curb and manage the process of political liberalization by amending the press and publications law. The objective was not to restrict the political party press but rather the established daily newspapers and the weekly newspapers that have flourished and increased in numbers. The first attempt to introduce changes in the press and publications law under the government of Sharif Zeid ben Shaker during the second half of 1995 was postponed. However, in May 1997, and while Parliament was in recess, a temporary law signed by the king was issued. The amendments included articles which would have restricted the freedom of the press. The response was immediate; in protest, the entire board, except for the president, of the Jordan Press Association resigned, and in a further escalation of protest over the law, the council of the Federation of Professional Associations in the country threatened to resign. They gave the government six days to rescind the amendments. This measure, however, was criticized by an important segment of public opinion so that the threatened resignations were withdrawn. The leadership, nevertheless, opted for resignation rather than use other legal measures to pressure the government.¹⁰

These reactions provide additional evidence that the institutions of civil society in Jordan, despite their role in the country's political and social life, were incapable of mobilizing popular support to counter the government's attempt at controlling and managing the process of political liberalization. The key question is, therefore, why have modern political frameworks of

mobilization and participation not developed? Jordan's contemporary history is full of mass demonstrations and association efforts in support of Arab causes. Public opinion in the country was the single most imported factor in preventing the country from joining the Baghdad Pact in the 1950s. The organized 'street' stood very firmly alongside President Nasser in his struggles, from the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company and the war with Israel, Britain and France, to its support for the Algerian struggle for independence and all other Arab nationalist causes of the period, including the latest example; the Second Gulf War in which the 'street' was solidly on the side of Iraq.

The reason why the political domestic scene in Jordan was different in the 1950s and 1960s, can simply be explained by the existence of sweeping pan-Arab ideologies that found a receptive audience amongst Jordanians. This factor, which was also external in nature, played a critical role in 'convincing' the monarchy not to liberalize lest its political stability and survival be adversely affected. Furthermore, an analysis of the interaction of such external factors with the inner dynamism of the Jordanian political experiment is of use, not only for the detached analyst but also for pro-democracy activists. Political analysts, 'enlightened' tribal activists and commentators in general predicted that the elections of 1989, which began the process of liberalization, would be the last elections in which tribal affiliation would play a significant role in determining voting patterns. To the disappointment of these actors, the 1993 elections turned out to be more tribal and parochial than those held four years earlier.

The explanation for the tribalization of politics and the, re-emergence of pre-modern forms of mobilization is not wholly rooted in local conditions. It is maintained here that the complexity of the social structure, which is the result of the distorted process of development, is the single most important factor inhibiting the development of social classes. The process of political openness did not lead, as was expected, to the development of strong political parties neither old nor new. Instead, a new hybrid system of participatory frameworks developed (see Table 3).

In today's Jordan, one of the most important factors determining voting patterns is kinship.¹¹ However, as a result of the erosion of the power-base of established sheikhdoms which traditionally provided popular leadership, the emergence of new challenges to this existing tribal leadership brought about an interesting development. In some localities in the north, where informal selection processes were unsuccessful in determining the tribal candidate, 'primaries' were conducted to determine who would represent the 'collectivity' in the parliamentary elections. In one case, tribal candidates paid fees and ballot boxes were distributed in the villages of the tribe. A tribal committee oversaw the entire process and declared, as a result of the primary,

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TABLE 3
PROPORTIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF AFFILIATION TO AFFILIATION

Political Party Affiliation at any time	Poll of 1997	Poll of 1996	Poll of 1995
Yes	1.0	1.3	2.2
No	97.8	98.1	97.5
Refused to Answer	1.0	0.6	0.4
Unknown	0.1	—	—
Total=100%	973	1200	2000

Source: Public Opinion Poll on Democracy in Jordan (1997), Centre for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan, May 1997.

who was to be the 'official' tribal candidate. Women were excluded from participating in this 'family' affair.¹²

The process of selecting the tribal candidates, however, was not always harmonious. In certain localities consensus was not possible, and several candidates presented themselves. A different method was employed in other parts of the country. In Karak, for example, tribal congresses were convened to 'elect' who would become 'their' candidate in the general elections. In fact, this process of regression and the continued ascendancy of 'collective' affiliation is not unique to Jordan. A similar process takes place in the Palestinian territory on a different level. In Lebanon it is doubtful that the Lebanese system ever separated itself from the collectivity. The Lebanese system is still very much entrenched in the sectarian-tribal and communal social structure. Similarly, observers have noted a deterioration and regression in political practice in the Palestinian territories.¹³ In Syria it remains to be seen what course political parties will take if a process of political liberalization takes place there. Thus one needs to examine carefully the relevance of formal institutions imported from the West, such as political parties, as frameworks for participation in the context of societies analysed here.

The expansion of the critical space between society and the state, participatory government, accountability, tolerance, civility – all essential ingredients for the development of democratic rule – cannot develop without a strong civil society. For a strong civil society to develop an adequate framework for mobilization and participation must also develop. This also questions the role of members-of-parliament who collectively assume legislative power but who do not represent the objective interests of

the people who elected them. Furthermore, it is necessary to discuss the issue of 'accepted' political values. In the West, a new system of values accompanied the process of capitalist evolution and this was to become the foundation of morality in society there. Most of these values cannot be transplanted into other regions of the world as they stand, although this should not be construed as an argument to support values and practices that promote oppression and strengthen authoritarianism in the name of authenticity.

In the Palestinian territories the same process of regression is taking place. The professional associations, trade unions, student unions, and women's organizations originally flourished inside and outside Palestine as a result of strong PLO involvement.¹⁴ These were not voluntary associations designed simply to promote and protect membership interests, but their establishment was a strong statement about political identity. In addition, the strong and organized PLO presence within these organizations gave them the characteristics of similar organizations in Syria and other one-party states. With the creation of the Palestinian National Authority, these associations became an arm of Yasir Arafat's system of rule. The widely-reported strike in 1997 by teachers on the West Bank was a case in point. Eleven thousand teachers went on strike demanding higher wages, whilst their 'union' was opposed to their action!¹⁵

The Islamists

The size of the Islamist victory in 1989 in Jordan surprised political observers, including the Royal Palace. The Muslim Brotherhood won 20 seats out of 22 candidates on the Muslim Brotherhood list, and the multi-voting system allowed them to capture 12 other seats for Islamists or candidates with Islamist leanings. Their support was also instrumental in electing several minority (Christian) candidates (see Table 4). The victory not only confirmed what the Muslim Brotherhood had been claiming about the size of its popular support, but now gave it legitimacy as a leading factor in political life and allowed it to attempt to fulfil its Islamist agenda through legislation.

The phenomenon of Islamists contesting elections in Jordan and joining the cabinet was described initially as the 'politics of inclusion'. The relationship between the Jordanian state and the Islamists was at the time unique amongst the states of the Middle East and Islamist tactics in Jordan were based on 'reforming' the system from within. While in Syria, for example, the relationship is one of violent confrontation, in Jordan the Islamists represented a major political player in their ability of being able to oppose or support the government as well. In Syria, however, the Islamists

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TABLE 4
ELEVENTH HOUSE OF DEPUTIES (1989)

Islamist	Conservative and Centre	Nationalist and Leftist
32 seats (20 Muslim Brotherhood) (12 independent Islamists)	33 seats	15 seats

Source: Hussein Abu Rumman, 'First Reading in Jordan's 1989 Parliamentary Elections', in *New Jordan Magazine*, No.15-16, 1990, pp.25-42.

reject the vary nature and existence of the Bathi'st regime, using extralegal means to contest the legitimacy of the Syrian government. This distinction sheds light on the issue of 'legitimacy' which confronts the two political systems in Syria and Jordan. On the whole, the Jordanian government is seen to be legitimate, while the opposite is true in the case of Syria.

Behind the apparent similarities between the Brotherhood movements in Syria, Jordan and Palestine lie important differences, particularly between the Syrian Brotherhood and its Jordanian counterpart. The most important difference arises from the type of relationship each movement has with the state. In Syria, the movement opposed the 'socialist' policy of the Arab nationalists whether under the local Baath or the Nasserite model. The confrontation between the Brotherhood and Arab nationalism, which began in Egypt in the 1940s and 1950s, later spread to the rest of the Arab World, including Syria. During this early period in the confrontation, the Jordanian state provided the movement with a safe haven in the country and the Brotherhood was, as a result, a powerful domestic ally of the Hashemites.

While members of the Muslim Brotherhood were being purged and jailed in Syria, in Jordan they fought alongside the monarchy in all its battles against the forces of Arab nationalism, Palestinian nationalism and communism. Thus they had no history of opposition to the regime in Jordan, and the policy of inclusion in Jordan did not in fact start until 1989 because it was simply unnecessary. Members of the Brotherhood held leading positions in the Jordanian bureaucracy before the process of liberalization began. The situation was very different in Palestine, where the Brotherhood split and its activist wing, Hamas, has had a relationship with the Palestinian National Authority which was not harmonious and which, furthermore was further complicated by an external factor - Israel. Israel, in any case, is not interested in promoting democratization in the Palestinian territories but rather in promoting 'stability' to protect its interests and it was for this reason that it tolerated the original activities of

the Brotherhood and even the Hamas split, as it saw it as a way of weakening the PLO.¹⁶

Yet despite the close relationship between the Hashemites and the Muslim Brotherhood, the regime has, in more recent times, followed a policy of being opposed to what it regards as major political organizations. In 1993, by Royal decree, the election law in Jordan was changed in order to reduce the ability of the Brotherhood to mobilize as effectively as it had done in 1989. The consequence was that this move reduced the number of seats the organization and its allies gained in the 1993 elections (see Table 5). Under the old system, the number of seats allocated varied from one district to the other. In some districts the number allocated was nine while in others, it was five or even three. Voters could vote for any number of candidates. The new system allowed voters to cast ballots for only one candidate. The result was that Islamist representation inside Parliament was now reduced to a level similar to the movement's degree of support in the country as a whole. The new election law also reduced the chances of victory for independent candidates who did not have a wide tribal base of support. Although the change was implemented according to the Jordanian constitution, it was undemocratic in its intentions and its consequences.

None the less, the overall consequence has been that the policy of inclusion in Jordan has, so far, been successful. The move by the king to change the election law put the Islamists on the defensive and, unlike the 1989 Parliament, in its 1993 successor, the Islamist agenda was almost absent. In 1989, the Brotherhood members-of-parliament and their allies – Islamists and others – had pushed for legislation to ban the manufacture and sale of alcohol in the country. They had also demanded the segregation of the sexes in schools beyond the fourth grade and had also pushed for strict legislation to restrict interaction of the sexes in public places, on the premise that such rules were consistent with Sharia law, which, they claimed, also required segregation at recreational facilities.¹⁷

TABLE 5
TWELFTH HOUSE OF DEPUTIES (1993)

Islamist	Conservative and Centre	Nationalist and Leftist
22 seats (16 Muslim Brotherhood)	47 seats	11 seats

Source: Taleb Award *et al.*, 'Jordan's 1993 Elections: Analytical Numerical Study', 2nd edition *Civic Society and Political Life in Jordan* (Amman: New Jordan Studies Centre, Sep 1994), pp.31–4.

The Role of External Factors

Since an historical analysis of the impact of external factors has been given here, starting with the beginning of the process of state formation in the Mashreq, the fragmentation of Syria by colonial powers has to be the point of departure for the discussion. The colonial intervention, and the subsequent process of development combined with the interaction between other regional conflicts, such as the Arab–Israeli conflict and international factors, such as the cold war, have had a decisive impact on the relationship between rulers and ruled in the Arab Mashreq. The evidence suggests that external factors, will continue to have the same impact as in the past.

Western powers, particularly the United States, are engaged in promoting their perceived national interests rather than in advancing democratization. A case in point is the American relationship with Jordan. Between 1989 and 1993, when Jordan was going through one of the most democratic phases in its history, it was also being punished by the United States because of its policy towards Iraq. Another aspect of this external factor is the effect of the economic restructuring programme on Jordan. The World Bank has called for an expanded role for NGOs in the country in the process of development something which will become inevitable as a result of the dismantling of the public sector. Yet this is a policy of doubtful utility to Jordan, for it is based on the unequal relations that exist between the North and the South. In reality, both economically and politically, the countries of the South should follow an independent route. However, this will not be permitted and hence the conditions that have been reproduced in the past will continue to exist and the process of socio-economic, and political distortion will accelerate.

Economic aid or any other kind of co-operation should be provided to address needs that are rooted in local conditions and are linked to a specific process of reform, in order to avoid the perpetuation of distortions that have been the result of other links established between North and South in the past. Of course, it is important in this context that the kind of economic aid characteristic of the era that followed the Second World War should be avoided for such aid was, for the most part, self-serving and designed to promote 'stability' rather than reform. It was a decisive factor in strengthening the coercive apparatus of the states to which it was supplied and had a negative impact on the process of the evolution of civil society in the South as a result. In fact, the most important aspect of foreign aid in the past was the way in which it helped the consolidation of the coercive powers of the rentier state over civil society. Rents, especially foreign aid, enabled Third World regimes to acquire and maintain a margin of autonomy in relation to society, so that the latter was weakened and marginalized in the process.¹⁸

Contemporary patterns of co-operation and aid in support of democratization could have a similar distorting impact if they do not take into account the specific historical pattern of state formation and its subsequent development in the South. Local academics, intellectual politicians and activists should therefore have a larger role in drawing plans for action and determining the methods to implement reform. Indeed, a condition for avoiding the reproduction of the modernization debate of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, and imposing it on the debate on the evolution of civil society in the South is that the first steps in such a debate should take place through a South-South dialogue. Independent actors in the South are better equipped to analyse the existing social, political and economic structures that exist there and to devise plans of action in order to expand the critical space between societies and the state in their own countries. As a first stage in what will prove to be a long process of cooperation, they also need to be exposed to experiences of others in the region. This will enable them to incorporate ideas suitable to their environment as a result of an expanding epistemological debate on issues related to participation, mobilization, accountability, and citizenship. This will ultimately yield better results by conditioning the collective efforts of these independent actors in reforming their societies. Yet it is also imperative that independent actors from the South become partners with their counterparts and agencies in the North in designing programmes and strategies for action to promote democratization in the South.

NOTES

1. What I mean by critical space is the extent and degree of autonomy that civil society tends to have *vis-à-vis* the state.
2. See Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Norman, OK and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991.
3. For a good overview on this debate see: Kedourie, *Democracy and Arab Political Culture*, Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1992.
4. There is extensive literature on this issue, for a discussion on the specific case of an Arab country (Egypt) see: Moheb, *Civil Society and Democratization in Egypt 1981-1994*, Dar al-Katub, Cairo, 1994.
5. Hinnebusch, State and Civil Society in Syria, *Middle East Journal*, 47/2, Spring M3, pp.243-4.
6. Perthes, 'State Building, National Security and War Preparation in Syria, or *Si vis stabilitatem*', para bellum, unpublished paper, p.3.
7. Hinnebusch, op. cit. No.248-250.
8. Schwedler, *Toward Civil Society in the Middle East? A Primer*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1995.
9. For the details of the reaction to the move to change the election law §M the Statements of leading politicians in the local press.
10. *Al-Ra'i* (Arabic), daily, Amman, 19 May 1997, following intense debate the members of board of the Jordanian Press Association rescinded their resignations. However, Hussein Mjali, President of The Bar Association, resigned.
11. The Centre for Strategic Studies (CSS) has been conducting polls on issues related to

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- democracy. This has been one of the major findings of the surveys conducted by the CSS on 'Democracy' from 1993 till 1997. The CSS has been conducting polls since 1993 on issues related to people's attitude towards civil institutions in general; political parties, voluntary associations, press, etc. Also measuring people's participation in primordial activities.
12. Interview with Professor Azzam himself a candidate in one of the premier in the fall of 1993.
 13. See Lecture by Professor Jirbawi, Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation, Amman, Jordan, 5 June 1997.
 14. On the situation of the process of liberalization in the Palestinian territories see: Abu Amr, *Al-Mujtama' al-Madani wal-Tahawwul al-Dimoqrati fi Filistin*, Cairo: Ibn Khaldoun Centre for Development Studies, 1995, also on the debate over democratization. in Palestine see: Budeiri and others, *Al-Dimoqratiyah al-Filistiniyah*: Awraq Naqdijyah, *A Critical Perspective on Palestinian Democracy*, Muwatin: The Palestinian Institute for the Study of Democracy, April 1995.
 15. Panorama, Palestinian Information Centre, Vol.6, year 1, 1997, p.29.
 16. The two leading Islamist organizations in the Palestinian territories, Hamas and Jihad, officially boycotted the 1996 elections. However, six independent Islamist in the Palestinian legislative council see: Shikaki, *Al-Intikhābāt al-Filistiniyah al-Ülah: al-Bi'ah al-Siyāsiyah, al-Sulūk al-Intikhābi, wal-Natā'ej*, Nablus: Center for Palestine Research and Studies, 1997.
 17. For an extensive analysis of the debate over the Islamists' agenda in the 1989 parliament see minutes of the sessions, 19 Feb. 1992, 27 Jan. M3 and 10 March 1993.
 18. For more detailed analysis of the Jordanian case see: Brand, *Jordan's International Relations: The Political Economy of Alliance Making*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.

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