The Multiple Meanings of Elections in Non-Democratic Regimes: Breakdown, Response and Outcome in the Arab Uprisings

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The difference couldn't seem starker. Egypt's parliamentary election in November 2010 was a dour affair. Widespread repression marked the months leading up to the election; few voters came out on polling day, as military trucks lined-up near voting stations; and the Egyptian opposition heavily contested the results. The election may have been aimed, in part, to prepare the ground for Gamal Mubarak to succeed his father, but many would argue this election– like others before it and elsewhere in the Arab world – was meaningless. Only one year later, following dramatic uprisings across Egypt and Mubarak's downfall, elections were held once again. Arguably, the air was equally tense, but this time filled with energy. Campaigning was boisterous; voters streamed to the polls –most for the first time ever, and results, although contested, were unprecedented and largely seen as legitimate. The elections left open many questions about Egypt's future, but one thing that seemed certain: *these* elections mattered.

This dichotomous portrayal of elections before and after the Arab uprisings – viewed, respectively, as irrelevant and significant – is widespread, but hardly accurate. As scholars of elections under authoritarian regimes have spent much time and ink explaining, elections play an important role in the maintenance and breakdown of authoritarian regimes, and this was as true in the Arab world as anywhere else.[2] Elections did not "cause" uprisings or wholly determine regimes' ability to withstand the pressures of 2011, but they did affect the maintenance and breakdown of authoritarian regimes, the regimes' responses to region-wide crises that erupted in January 2011, and ultimately, will affect the outcomes of these crises as well.

Importantly, elections do not have a single influence (or set of influences); rather, the roles they play, and their influence on regime change, varies across time and space. Their role depends on a myriad of domestic and international factors, but primary among these is how elections fit within the logic and power-structure of the regime. Elections contribute most to instability, and are least useful in shoring incumbents that come under crises, in regimes where they are integrally tied to the regime's legitimacy (primarily one-

[2] For a more detailed review of the arguments that follow, and challenges remaining in ascertaining the role of elections, see Jennifer Gandhi and Ellen Lust-Okar, Elections under authoritarianism, *Annual Review of Political Science*, 12:403-422, 2009.

party regimes); while they are least likely to contribute to instability when the regime's legitimacy is insulated from electoral politics (primarily monarchies).

Recognizing the multiple roles elections play in the breakdown, process and ultimate outcomes of the instability following January 2011 yields important lessons not just for understanding politics in the Arab world, but for understanding electoral politics, authoritarianism, and transitions more generally. First, this chapter points to the multiple meanings elections can take, both before, during and following regime ruptures. Debates over the roles elections play often talk across each other, failing to recognize that different types of elections (e.g., executive or legislative) play different roles, and they do so in different contexts. Second, it underscores the importance of recognizing how the role that elections play is determined, in large part, by the logic of the political regime. The analysis here highlights the variation in the roles of elections held in monarchies and one-party states, but what is at stake is not whether a king or president is at the helm, but rather the relationship between elections and the power-structure and legitimacy of the regime. Scholars of elections, authoritarianism and transitions would do well to look more closely at these differences in other regimes as well. Third, and related, this chapter sheds light on debates over the relationship between regime types and both breakdown of authoritarianism and consolidation of democracy. It suggests that an important, overlooked approach to understanding the empirical differences elucidated in previous studies is to examine how the logic of different regimes affects the roles of elections – and their ability to contribute to stability.

This chapter explores the multiple roles of elections and their impact on political stability in four sections. The first discusses how elections helped stabilize authoritarian regimes before 2011. The second explores why this role diminished over time, and why one-party regimes experienced greater instability than others in the Arab world. The third section examines the role of elections in regimes that were shaken by the political crisis of 2011, considering the roles they play where incumbents are still trying to hold onto power as well as how the elections vary in post-rupture regimes. The fourth section considers the relationship between electoral politics and outcomes of the Arab uprisings. The chapter concludes with lessons learned and insights for the future.

Elections under Authoritarianism: Mechanisms of Regime Maintenance

It goes almost without saying that elections under authoritarian regimes have little influence on the selection of ruling elites or policy-making. Presidential elections have often been rubber-stamping referenda or minimally contested multi-candidate contests,[3] with little expectation that they will bring to power new parties and personalities. So too, Arab citizens see local and national legislatures as having little influence over the most important policies.[4]

Nevertheless, just as in other regions, elections have been used to shore up authoritarian regimes in the Arab world.[5] They have provided to a venue to co-opt opposition, [6] to deter defection from the ruling coalition,[7] and efficiently distribute

[3] Multi-candidate presidential elections are rare in the Arab world, but have been held in Egypt and Algeria.
[4] Jennifer Gandhi and Adam Przeworski have argued that elected institutions (e.g., parliaments) can provide an arena for elites to contest policies. See Jennifer Gandhi and Adam Przeworski, Cooperation, cooptation, and rebellion under dictatorship. *Economics and Politics.* 18(1):1—26, 2006 and Jennifer Gandhi, *Political institutions under dictatorship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008). There is little evidence of this in most of the Arab world, and few citizens see the parliament in this light.
[5] Empirically, authoritarian regimes with elections are more durable than their non-electoral counterparts. See Barbara Geddes. *Authoritarian breakdown: empirical test of a game theoretic argument.* Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Atlanta, GA, 1999; Contra this argument, however, see Jason Brownlee, Portents of pluralism: How hybrid regimes affect democratic transitions," *American Journal of Political Science*, 53(3): 515-532, July 2009; and Axel Hadenius and Jan Teorell, Pathways from authoritarianism, *Journal of Democracy* (18)1: 143-156, 2007.
[6] See Carles Boix, Milan Svolik,.*The foundation of limited authoritarian government: institutions and power-sharing in dictatorships*. Presented at Dictatorships: Their Governance and Social Consequences Conference, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ. Jennifer Gandhi, *Political institutions under dictatorship*. (New York: Cambridge University Press 2008); Jennifer Gandhi and Adam Przeworski, Cooperation, cooptation, and rebellion under dictatorship. *Economics and Politics.* 18(1):1—26, 2006; Joseph Wright, Do authoritarian institutions constrain? How legislatures affect economic growth and investment. *American Journal of Political Science.* 52(2):322—43, 2008; Beatrice Magaloni, *Voting for autocracy: Hegemonic party survival and its demise in Mexico* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Ellen Lust-Okar, *Structuring conflict in the Arab world: Incumbents, opponents, and institutions* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005); Emily Beaulieu. *Protesting the contest: election boycotts around the world 1990--2002.* PhD thesis. Department of Political Science, University of California. San Diego (2006); Jennifer Gandhi and Ora John Reuter, *Opposition coordination in legislative elections under authoritarianism*. Presented at Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston, MA, 2008.
[7] Barbara Geddes, *Why parties and elections in authoritarian regimes?* Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, DC (2005), Alberto Simpser, *Making votes not count: strategic incentives for electoral corruption*. PhD thesis. Department of Political Science, Stanford Univ (2005), Beatrice Magaloni, *Voting for autocracy: Hegemonic party survival and its demise in Mexico*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), Beatrice Magaloni, "Credible power-sharing and the longevity of authoritarian rule." *Comparative Political Studies* 41:715-41, 2008; and Edmund Malesky and Paul Schuler. Why do single-party regimes hold elections? An analysis of candidate-level data in Vietnam's 2007 National Assembly contest. Presented at the 2008 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston, MA.

patronage and access to state resources.[8] The extent to which elections served these roles depended in part on regime type (e.g., one-party vs. monarchical regimes) and past electoral history.

Elections provide a venue for elite contestation, helping to co-opt and divide opposition. In the face of heightened opposition and widespread unrest, ruling elites often re-opened legislatures or expanded them, often with promises of democracy to come.[9] Hassan II played this card in Morocco, restoring parliament in 1976 following two attempted coups and heightened dissatisfaction[10]; Sadat broadened the playing field in 1977,[11] responding to discontent over economic liberalization and Egypt's overtures toward peace with Israel; Mubarak expanded to multiparty elections in 1984, following Sadat's assassination; Algeria's Chadli Benjadid called for the first multiparty elections in 1988, after bread riots shook the country; Jordan's King Hussein followed suit in 1989; and even Hafez al-Assad expanded the number of independent seats in the Syrian legislature in 1991, attempting to appease business elites chafing under economic reforms.[12] The list goes on.

Notably absent are most of the Gulf monarchies. There, extraordinarily high levels of state resources and, with the exception of Saudi Arabia, small populations outnumbered by expatriates have until generally stifled demands for reform. Elections are not entirely absent, but they are dispensable. Elections were held in Kuwait since independence in 1961, when the monarchy inherited an elected National Assembly from the British, and

[8] Ellen Lust-Okar, Elections under authoritarianism: Preliminary lessons from Jordan, *Democratization* 13(3), 455-470, May 2006. Lisa Blaydes, *Elections and Distributive Politics in Mubarak's Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[9] Even in monarchies, legitimized through hereditary rule and not political parties, elections were not entirely new; colonial powers had left behind elected institutions in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco and elsewhere. Yet, by the 1970s, most elections in the region were either suspended (e.g., Jordan, Morocco), or had become restricted to ruling parties (e.g., Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Syria).

[10] Military coups were attempted in Morocco in July 1971 and August 1972.

[11] Sadat signed Egypt's first post-independence political parties law (Law No. 40/1977) in June 1977. It provided a significant break from the single-party regime instituted by Nasser by stating that "Egyptians have the right to create political parties and every Egyptian has the right to belong to any political party." See Human Rights Watch, *Monopolizing Power: Egypt's Political Parties Law*, 4 January 2007, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/45a4e0a92.html [accessed 17 April 2012]

[12] Volker Perthes, Syria: Difficult Inheritance in Perthes (Ed), *Arab Elites: Negotiating the Politics of Change* (Boulder Lynne Rienner Press, 2004), 87-115.

in Bahrain since 1973.[13] In both cases, however, the elections were suspended for long periods in response to political tensions. (See Table 1.) Indeed, far from integral to the regime, elections in the Gulf have been themselves a tool – extended in the face of medium pressures, but withdrawn if pressures exerted through them are too great. The Gulf is thus the exception that proves the rule: elections provided rulers a means to hold onto power in the face of escalating opposition – at least in the short-run, but where such pressures were muted or elected institutions proved unruly, regimes have been happy to do without them.

National and local[14] legislative elections also provide opportunities for contestation over access to patronage. Legislatures primarily are a space in which limited demands can be voiced, and through which elites and their constituents can gain access to state resources. From the perspective of voters, elections are for "service parliamentarians" who can help ease transactions with the state with limited bureaucratic capacity and rule of law.[15] From that of candidates, they are an opportunity to vie for privilege, status and an ability to aid their constituents in a regime where weak rule of law, lack of transparency severely restricted paths to power.[16]

Indeed, elections provide the regime with a tool to bring some elites closer to the regime, sideline others, and hold out hope for many more that their turn in the outer-rooms of power will come. In contrast to the widespread conventional wisdom of elections as pre-determined contests in which only the hand-picked are chosen, there are often large numbers of entrants into legislative electoral races – even in one-party regimes. Certainly the regime intervenes in some races – assuring the success of favorite

[13] The National Assembly elected in 1973 was dissolved in 1975, and the elections suspended. The next Bahraini elections were not held again until 2002.
[14] Unfortunately, to date, far too little work has been done on the local elections in the Arab world. It is an area of likely fruitful theoretical and empirical study.
[15] Lisa Blaydes, *Elections and Distributive Politics in Mubarak's Egypt*; Ellen Lust-Okar "Competitive clientelism: Elections in the MENA," in Staffan Lindberg (Ed.), *Democratization by elections?* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2009), Ellen Lust-Okar, Elections under authoritarianism: Preliminary lessons from Jordan, *Democratization* 13(3), 455-470, May 2006; and Samer Shehata. "Inside an Egyptian parliamentary Campaign." pp 95-120 in *Political participation in the Middle East.* Eds. Ellen Lust-Okar and Saloua Magrawi. (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2008)
[16] Beatrice Magaloni, *Voting for autocracy: Hegemonic party survival and its demise in Mexico* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Kenneth Greene; *Why dominant parties lose: Mexico's democratization in comparative perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Blaydes, *Elections and Distributive Politics.*

'sons' and preventing potentially strong opponents from winning. But, in general races are competitive and highly contested. With high numbers of candidates for each seat, winners often gain their seats through pluralities, large numbers of votes are wasted and up for grabs in subsequent elections, and the turnover rate in legislatures is strikingly high – with less than 25% incumbency rates across the Arab world.[17] As a result, elections provide hope to elites and would-be elites that they can win tomorrow, if not today.

Elections can also help legitimize the regime and signal its strength to would-be opposition. In all authoritarian regimes, they do so in part by providing state-sanctioned venues for 'legitimate' competition, limiting opposition access to this arena and demonstrating the state's ability to yield acceptable outcomes. To maintain legitimacy, incumbents seek high turnout, although the level of 'acceptable' turnout varies across states and the level of elections (e.g., executive, national legislative and local). When turnout remains stable and elections proceed relatively smoothly, regimes send strong signals to would-be opposition that they remain in control.[18]

Elections take on additional meaning in one-party states. There, legitimacy is based in large part on popular support for the leading party, while in monarchies, legitimacy centers on personalized, hereditary rule. Thus, to maintain legitimacy, rulers in one-party regimes need to limit representation of non-ruling parties in the legislature, and they have a difficult time disbanding legislature in the face of political crises. Monarchies, however, benefit from diverse legislatures, since no single party then emerges as a challenger and the king can claim to have a critical role in mediating among competing factions in society. Moreover, in the face of political crises, monarchies (even less wealthy ones outside the Gulf) can – and have—easily disbanded parliaments, sometimes for long periods at a time.

Table 1 Overview of Regimes and Elections in the MENA, as of December 2010

[17] Ellen Lust, "Competitive Clientelism: Elections in the MENA," in Staffan Lindberg (Eds.), Democratization by Elections? (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2009). The same was true in other regions as well (cf, on Kenya, by Joel Barkan).

[18] Not surprisingly, oppositions can attempt to undermine legitimacy and challenge the regime's control by boycotting elections and challenging turnout figures. See Gail Jeanne Buttorff, "Legitimacy and the politics of opposition in the Middle East and North Africa." doctoral dissertation, University of Iowa, 2011.

	Type of Regime/Elections	Elected Head of State	Legislature Suspended	Age of Leader
Algeria	Competitive	Yes	1992 - 1997	73
Bahrain	Monarchy	No	1975-2002	60
Egypt	One party	Yes (Referenda until 2005)	None	82
Iraq	Competitive	Yes	None under current regime	60
Jordan	Monarchy-Elections	No	1967-1989, 2001-2003 elections postponed	48
Kuwait	Monarchy - Elections	No	1976-1981; 1986-1990; 1990-1992; dissolved in 1999, 2006, 2010	81
Lebanon	Competitive	Yes	Legislature remained seated, but elections not held during the 1975-1990 civil war	62
Libya	No Elections	No	--	68
Morocco	Monarchy - Elections	No	1965-1970; 1972-1977; 1990-1993 elections postponed	47
Oman	Monarchy	No	--	62
Palestine	Competitive	No	--	Haniyeh 47 Abbas 75
Qatar	Monarchy	No	--	58
Saudi Arabia	Monarchy	No	--	87
Syria	One party	Referenda	None	45
Tunisia*	One party	Yes	None	74
UAE	Monarchy	No	--	62
Yemen	One party	Yes	TBD	68

Thus, in one-party states, high support in presidential elections demonstrated by (nearly) inconceivably high turnout rates and votes of support and overwhelming majorities for ruling parties are important for signaling the regime's strength. (See Table

2.) As Barbara Geddes has pointed out, presidents in dominant party states used relatively uncontested elections and referenda – with astoundingly high (reported) turnout rates and levels of support—to show military and other potential opposition the fruitlessness of attempting to unseat them.[19] The election results may have raised eyebrows and became the butt of countless jokes, but they also nevertheless demonstrated that the regime could get away with the spectacle. That too, Lisa Wedeen reminds us, reinforces their power.[20]

Table 2. Recent MENA Elections, Prior to January 2011

	Last Three Parliamentary Elections	Number of Seats held by Largest Party/Total Seats (%)	Percentage Turnout	Turnout of Last Presidential election (date)	% Votes for President
Algeria				74.6 (2009); **	
	1997	156/380# (41%)	65.6**		
	2002	199/389 (51%)	46.2**		
	2007	136/389 seats (35%)	35.6**		
Bahrain				--	
	2002	NA	53**		
	2006	17/40 (42.5%)	73.6**		
	2010	18/40 (45)	67**		
Egypt				22.9 (2005)*	
	2000	353/454 (78%)	23 (est)		
	2005	311/454 (68.5%)	28.2**		
	2010	420/518 (81%)	27.5**		
Iraq					
	2005 (Jan)	140/275* Unified Iraq Coalition (51%)	58.3*		
	2005 (Dec)	128/275* Unified Iraq Coalition (46.5%)	79.6*		
	2010	91/325** Iraqiya (28%)	64**		
Jordan				--	
	2003	88/110 Independents	57.8**		

[19] Barbara Geddes has argued more generally that this is a signaling mechanism. My interpretation would differ from hers only slightly: While she sees this as a mechanism that elections can play at all levels—local and national, legislative and executive, I see it as a unique role of executive elections.

[20] Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

		(80%) 116/110 Islamic Action Front (14.5%)			
	2007	98/110 Independents (89%); 6/110 (5.4%) Islamic Action Front	54**		
	2010		53**		
Kuwait				--	
	2006	No parties	91.9*/66.3**		
	2008	No parties	59.4**		
	2009	No parties	59**		
Lebanon					
	2000	86/128 Independents (67%)	45**		
	2005	69/128 March 14 alliance (54%)	46.5**		
	2009	71/128 March 14 Alliance (55%)	54**		
Libya	*last election held in 1965	---	---	---	
Morocco				--	
	1997	PJD 57/325 (17.5%)	58.3**		
	2002	PJD 50/325 (15.3%)	51.6**		
	2007	Istiqlal 52/325 (16%)	37**		
Oman				--	
	2000	No parties	NA		
	2003	No parties	NA		
	2007	No parties	62.7**		
Palestinian Authority				73.4 (2005)* /45.6**	
	1996	55/88 Fatah (62.5%)	75.4**		
	2006	74/132 Change and Reform Alliance (56%) (Hamas and Islamic Resistance Movement)	77.7*		
Qatar	--	--	--	--	
Saudi					

Arabia					
Syria				95.86 (2007)est	
	1998	Ba'ath 135/250 (54%)	82.2**		
	2003	Ba'ath 135/250 (54%) Coalition NPF 167/250* (67%)	63.5**		
	2007	Ba'ath 134/250 (54%) Coalition; NPF 172/250* (69%)	56**		
Tunisia				89.4 (2009)**	
	1999	148/182 (81%)	91.5**		
	2004	152/189 (80%)	86.4**		
	2009	Constitutional Democratic Rally 161/214* (75%)	89.4**		
UAE	---	---	---	---	
Yemen				65.2 (2006)**	
	1993	122/301 (40.5%)	80.7**		
	1997	187/301 (62%)	60.7**		
	2003	238/301 (79%)	75**		

Sources: * IFES Election Guide; ** Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance: http://www.idea.int/vt/; # Nohlen, Dieter, Micheal Krennerich, and Bernhard Thibaut Eds, *Elections in Africa, A Data Handbook*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Change and Limitations: Why Elections Lose their Power to Stabilize

Elections do not inevitably contribute to regime stability. Indeed, as many scholars have highlighted, elections can become moments of real contestation, with the regime's survival at stake, when the incumbent's inability to stand for re-election generate splits in the ruling elite.[21] Even when opposition elections do not take on such heightened meaning or parties lose, stolen elections (or credible claims of them) can spark moral outrage, foster opposition coordination, and mount new, and sometimes definitive,

[21] Alexander Baturo. *Presidential succession and democratic transitions.* Working Paper 209, Institute for International Integration Studies 2007.

challenges to regimes,[22] ushering in new possibilities for democracy. Nowhere were such effects more evident than in the color revolutions of Eastern Europe.

The Arab world has not witnessed the emergence of color revolutions[23] around electoral moments, but in the past two decades, three main factors came together that deteriorated the stabilizing role of elections.[24] First, economic crises and reforms limiting state control over the economy limited the state's ability to distribute patronage through elected institutions; second, the passage of time led to increased frustration, as promises of democratization became stale and the Arab world was left behind global democratic trends; and third, the secularist-Islamist divide, which had once served to stifle secularists' demands for immediate reform, narrowed through cooperation both inside and outside the electoral sphere. Across the Arab world the heightened discontent and limitations in the electoral sphere undermined regime stability. The problem was exacerbated in one-party regimes, where attempts to consolidate personalistic power and shore up the regime in the face of declining resources undermined electoral institutions that were linked to the very core of the regime's legitimacy.

As in other regions,[25] declining state resources and neo-liberal reforms weakened the links between patronage and parliament. Constituents continued to expect services, seeking representatives' help in obtaining jobs, education, and assistance. However, their representatives were increasingly unable to meet their demands. This heightened

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[22]Valerie Bunce and Sharon Wolchik. Favorable conditions and electoral revolutions. *Journal of Democracy* 17(4):5—18, 2006; Mark *Beissinger*. Structure and Example in Modular Political Phenomena: The Diffusion of Bulldozer/Rose/Orange/Tulip Revolutions; Perspectives on Politics 5(2):259-276, 2007; Mark Thompson and Philip Kuntz. Stolen elections: the case of the Serbian October. *Journal of Democracy* 15(4):159—72, 2004; Judith Tucker, Enough! Electoral fraud, collective action problems, and post-communist colored revolutions. *Perspectives on Politics.* 5(3):535—51, 2007.

[23] To date, the closest experience to a color revolution in the Middle East, although not the Arab world, is found in Iran, which witnessed uprisings after the 2009 elections.

[24] Perhaps lulled by decades of apparently stable authoritarianism and focusing too heavily on the participation within formal institutions, few, if any, Middle East specialists focused on elections in the region pointed to counterproductive effects before the uprisings – or at least saw them as a serious threat to regimes. Drawing from scholarship in other regions, I myself had written about how limited resources, growing private sectors, and bureaucratic reforms could undermine the effectiveness of these institutions (See Ellen Lust-Okar "Competitive clientelism: Elections in the MENA," in Staffan Lindberg (Ed.), *Democratization by elections?* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2009), but I did not argue that elections had lost their usefulness or regimes were unstable.

[25] See Beatrice Magaloni, *Voting for autocracy: Hegemonic party survival and its demise in Mexico* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), Kenneth Greene; *Why dominant parties lose: Mexico's democratization in comparative perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

frustration with representatives and skepticism toward the electoral process contributed to unrest[26] and resulted in declining turnout.[27] (See Table 2.) Regimes recognized this as a problem and at times tried to breathe new life into elections, but cynicism toward the process continued to grow.

The passage of time contributed to this problem as well. After promises of 'gradual democratization' following the once widely-heralded opening of multiparty elections, Arabs experienced decades of disappointment.[28] Rather than a gradual blossoming of democracy, many countries witnessed notable deliberalization. The vast majority of citizens became disinterested in elections, scoffing participants and processes alike. Some continued to go to the polls in the hopes that they could elect someone they could count on to help them access state resources; others did so to garner gifts and cash payments; and most choose to stay home. Nearly all had come to the conclusion that elections would not deliver democracy.[29]

This was particularly grating for opposition elites, who found promises unmet and their access to power and resources restricted. They turned to boycotts and protests to pressure the regime for change. (See Table 3.) They also formed cross-party, and even cross-ideological, alliances in attempts to press their demands. These alliances often dissolved; demands went unmet; and the public often dismissed party leaders as ineffective, at best, and regime lackeys, at worst. Nevertheless, far from effectively co-

[26] For a careful case study of this relationship in Jordan, see Mustafa Hamarneh, "Ma'an: An Open Ended Crisis," University of Jordan, Center for Strategic Studies, September 2003, and Charles Schmitz, "Yemen's spring: Whose agenda?" in *Revolution and Political Transformation in the Middle East, Volume 1* (Washington, DC: Middle East Institute, August 2011).

[27] Participation has secularly declined over the past decade and a half: 65.49 percent in 1997, 46.06 percent in 2002, and 35.65 percent in 2007 in Algeria.

[28] Not all elections were tied to promises of democracy, of course; Syria and Tunisia had long held elections, never promising extensive reforms. In Algeria, Jordan, Yemen, and elsewhere, however, the reintroduction of elections or expansion had been heralded as democratization. Yet, decades later – and despite watching much of Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America democratize, not only were such promises stale, but there was marked political de-liberalization.

[29] For example, in the 2006 Arab Barometer Survey, only slightly more than 45% of Algerian respondents had voted in elections, nearly half of respondents believed the last presidential elections were not free and fair, and similarly, nearly half of them had no or little trust in elections. Similarly, more than 50% of Kuwaitis believed the 2006 elections had major problems or were not free and fair, and more than 50% of respondents had little or no trust in parliament. Faith in elections appears higher among Jordanians, Lebanese, and Palestinians, where 56%, nearly 62% and 73%, respectively, reported voting in the last elections. See country reports and data available at www. http://www.arabbarometer.org/

opting opposition elites, elections were prompting opposition to develop skills and cross-ideological alliances that could embolden broader political challenge.[30]

Table 3. Boycotts in the Arab World, 1985-2006.

Country	Date	Election Type	Description
Algeria	November 16, 1995	Presidential	Three main opposition candidates refused to participate but the boycott did not appear to be supported by a majority of the electorate.
Algeria	May 30, 2002	Legislative	Boycott in the Berber-dominated Kabylie region by five opposition parties, including The Socialist Forces Front(FFS) and the Rally for Culture and Democracy(RCD).
Egypt	November 29, 1990	Legislative	Three historically dominant opposition parties (The NWP, SLP and LSP) all boycotted November legislative elections in Egypt.
Jordan	November 04, 1997	Legislative	The Muslim Brotherhood Organization, The Islamic Labor Front and eight other left-wing and national parties boycotted.
Kuwait	June 10, 1990	Legislative	Thirty two opposition leaders, who had been members of the dissolved 1986 parliament, led a boycott of the elections on grounds of tampering with electoral rolls, voter intimidation and media censorship.
Lebanon	August 23, 1992	Legislative	Maronite political parties boycotted the 1992 parliamentary elections with the stated objection that continued Syrian occupation of the country made fair elections impossible.
Lebanon	August 18, 1996	Legislative	Maronite leaders threatened boycott, but few parties and candidates actually boycotted.
Lebanon	August 27, 2000	Legislative	Three small, right-wing, Christian opposition parties boycott, opposing Syrian occupation, but Maronite Christian parties urge participation.
Morocco	June 25, 1993	Legislative	Main opposition parties, USFP and Istiqlal, present shared candidates; Party of the Democratic Socialist Avant-garde (PADS) boycotts.
Tunisia	November 02, 1986	Legislative	All opposition parties boycotted the elections to protest unfair electoral practices. Specifically, the opposition parties (which had only begun to gain official recognition as of 1981) objected to the government's rejection of a number of their candidate lists.
Yemen	April 27, 1997	Legislative	The Yemeni Socialist Party, the country's largest opposition party in parliament, and several other small opposition parties boycotted.

[30] For more on the potential role of elections in building opposition skills and institutions that help push for expansion of civil and political liberties and democratic consolidation, see Staffan Lindberg, Democracy and Elections in Africa, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006; Staffan Lindberg, "The power of elections revisited, in Staffan Lindberg, Ed., *Democratization by elections: A new mode of transition? (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009)*; Todd Eisenstadt, *Courting democracy in Mexico: Party strategies and electoral institutions*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004; Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments in Africa,: Regime transitions in comparative perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997; Jason Brownlee, "Portents of pluralism: How hybrid regimes affect democratic transitions:" *American Journal of Political Science*, 53(3): 515-32, 2009. On the importance of cross-ideological alliances, see Philip Roessler and Marc Howard, Post-Cold-War political regimes: When do elections matter? in Democratization by elections: A new mode of transition, Staffan Lindberg, ed (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

Indeed, in the Arab world, the stabilizing role of elections was further undermined by the gradual inclusion of Islamist forces, which weakened barriers that had previously divided secularist and Islamist forces. Secularist demands for democratization in the Arab world had long been muted by the fear of Islamist forces. [31] In the early 1990s, secularist opposition forces feared that Islamists would come to power through elections, only to undermine democracy (what US Ambassador Edward Djerejian famously called "one-person, one-vote, one-time"[32]) or that the democratization process would collapse into civil war, as it had in Algeria. Their fears were exacerbated by the fact that Islamists and secularists had almost no experience cooperating with each other – a fact fostered in many states by electoral rules that banned Islamist forces (e.g., Egypt, Morocco).

By the mid-2000s, the situation had changed. In countries like Morocco and Egypt, regimes had responded to growing Islamist support in the population to allow Islamists a greater role in parliament. In Morocco, the Islamist-oriented Democratic and Constitutional Popular Movement Party (MPDC), which was later to become the Party of Justice and Development (PJD), was allowed to run as a legal party for the first time in the 1997 elections, when the king reversed his long-standing position that Morocco did not need an Islamist party. In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood remained illegal, but it was allowed to win nearly 20% of parliamentary seats in the 2005 elections.[33] Such participation did not serve to allay secularists' fears entirely, but it did lead to opportunities for joint secularist-Islamist efforts. In the face of increasingly repressive regimes, this helped shift many secularists from their initial stance that "the devil you

[31] Lisa Blaydes and James Lo, One man, one vote, one time? A model of democratization in the Middle East, *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, November, 1-37, 2011; Ellen Lust "Missing the Third Wave: Islam, Institutions and Democracy in the Middle East," Studies in Comparative International Development 46, 2 (June 2011): 163-190.

[32] Edward P. Djerejian, "United States Policy toward Islam and the Arc of Crisis," Baker Institute Study, No. 1, 1995 available at http://bakerinstitute.org/publications/study_1_arc_of_crisis.pdf (accessed April 17, 2012).

[33] As they had before, Muslim Brotherhood candidates ran as independents. In part as a response to international pressure and regional insecurity in the wake of the 2003 war in Iraq, the regime allowed these candidates more room to maneuver and more success at the polls in 2005.

know (the regime) is better than the devil you don't" to one where mutual collaboration and trust was conceivable.[34]

In one-party regimes, the role of elections was further undermined by the contradiction between the impulse to consolidate a personalistic regime and the need to maintain participatory institutions that would legitimize and strengthen the regime. This impulse was evident across the Arab world, particularly as ruling elites sought to maintain their allies' support in the face of diminishing resources. Yet, in monarchies, there is no tension between shoring up personal power and strengthening a regime based on hereditary (i.e., personalized) legitimacy. On the contrary, in one-party states, where legitimacy is closely tied to electoral institutions, personalization of power undermined the very institutions on which the regime relied.

Consolidating personalistic power required presidents in one-party states to weaken the very ruling parties that were once developed to help settle elite conflict or mobilize support against the opposition.[35] Indeed, by 2005, Egypt's ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) had lost the ability to control its slate of candidates in parliamentary elections,[36] and when unrest escalated in January 2011, it played no clear organizational role in defending the regime against protesters. The same was largely true in Tunisia, where the ruling Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD) had become so weakened that it was dissolved in 2011, even before opposition fully removed former regime loyalists from power. In Syria and Yemen, too, ruling parties became largely impotent, as evidenced by the fact that while they play a role in in rubber-stamping reforms in the wake of political crises, the primary defense for the regime was not found in the ruling party but among key elites in the regime's inner circle. The contradiction between personalized power and strong political institutions, combined with the need to restrict the electoral playing field, left dominant party states with a narrow political support base.

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[34] Ellen Lust, "Missing the Third Wave: Islam, Institutions and Democracy in the Middle East,"*Studies in Comparative International Development* 46(2):163-190, June 2011.
[35] Jason Brownlee, *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).
[36] In fact, in 2005 more NDP-related candidates ran as independents and won than did NDP candidates running on the ruling party's ticket, and in 2010, the still-weak NDP could only eliminate defections by nominating multiple candidates per seat.

The problem was particularly acute in regimes where aged rulers faced succession crises. In part, this is because age raised the specter of succession, making palpable a vision of the regime without its leader. Internal disputes also arose over potential contenders, creating moments in which critical elite defections were likely.[37] Finally, regimes refitted the electoral arena to bide time to shepherd succession processes and, in many cases, to tilt the balance of power toward their progeny. They rewrote constitutions,[38] manipulated electoral rules, stepped-up electoral repression and constrained opposition representation in legislatures in an effort to maintain elite cohesion and smooth transition processes. However, such efforts were often counter-productive; constraining the playing field led to declining participation, limited the reach of patronage distribution, prompted disaffection of political elites and at times the formation of broad boycott coalitions, and undermined legitimacy.[39] It is thus not surprising that one-party regimes with elderly presidents– Ben Ali in Tunisia, Mubarak in Egypt, Saleh in Yemen, Gadhafi in Libya—were among the first to come under attack in 2011.

Under these conditions, as Egypt demonstrates, parliamentary elections not only failed to contribute to the regime's stability, but arguably contributed to its downfall. Anticipating the 2011 presidential elections, for which it was widely rumored Gamal Mubarak would be his father's favored contender, 82-year old Hosni Mubarak sought to ensure that legislative elections returned a docile parliament. The ruling circle was taking no chances that the Muslim Brotherhood would win a substantial number of seats, as it had in the 2005 elections. It thus harshly repressed the Brotherhood, manipulated first round elections to effectively shut out the opposition, and then ridiculed the opposition as

[37] Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe Schmitter and Lawrence Whitehead, *Transitions from authoritarian rule: Tentative conclusions about uncertain democracies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1986); Philippe Schmitter, "Twenty five years, fifteen findings," *Journal of Democracy*, 21 (1) January 2010: 17-28.
[38] For example, in Tunisia, 73-year old Ben Ali was determined to hang onto power and control succession, changed the constitution (increasing the age of president from 70 years to 75 years old) to allow himself to run in elections. In Egypt, too, Mubarak implemented competitive presidential elections in 2005. This was a landmark decision – as previous presidential polls were referenda –but one in which the rules were clearly set to favor his son, Gamal.
[39] On the role of boycotts in undermining autocracies, see Emily Beaulieu. *Protesting the contest: election boycotts around the world 1990--2002*. PhD thesis.

it united first to boycott second round elections and then to form a shadow parliament.[40] This ultimately contributed to Mubarak's downfall in four ways: 1) manipulating the elections heightened antipathy toward the regime; 2) eliminating of the Muslim Brotherhood from parliament made it more willing to join the opposition forces that mobilized in January; 3) repressing the opposition prompted coordination that served as a dress rehearsal for the uprising; and 4) responding flippantly to their efforts only escalated opposition to the regime.[41]

So, too, in Yemen, 69-year old Ali Abdallah Saleh's determination to manipulate elections contributed to his downfall. Reportedly determined to buy time to groom his son Ahmed for power, he reneged on a 2006 promise that he would not seek reelection, pushed for constitutional revision to remove the two-term limit for the presidency, and side-lined and denigrated the opposition Joint Meeting Parties (JMP).[42] Yemeni forces were locked in a political crisis over upcoming elections. Elections had been postponed since February 2009 and no progress made on electoral reforms promised in the February Agreement of that year. In December 2010, the General People's Congress (GPC) unilaterally announced elections would be held in April 2011; the JMP called for a boycott; and the GPC ridiculed their efforts.[43] Elections were not held, but as in Egypt, the conflict over elections heightened opposition to the regime, failed to co-opt opposition forces, and strengthened opposition alliances across the ideological spectrum.

In short, economic crises and reforms increased frustration over stalled democratization and the diminished divide between Islamist and secularist forces weakened the ability of limited elections to stabilize regime, but the extent to which they

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[40] Tarek Masoud, "The upheavals in Egypt and Tunisia: The road to (and from) Liberation Square. Journal of Democracy, 22(3): 20-34, (July 2011); Stephen Zunes, "Fraudulent Egyptian election," Foreign Policy in Focus – December 7, 2010; Jason Brownlee and Joshua Stacher, "Change of leader, continuity of system: Nascent liberalization in post-Mubarak Egypt," Comparative Politics-Democratization Newsletter, May 2011.

[41] This paragraph draws directly from Ellen Lust, "Why now? Micro-transitions and the Arab uprisings," Comparative Politics-Democratization Newsletter (Fall 2011).

[42] The JMP was an alliance of five opposition parties that formed across regional and ideological divides, including Islah, Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP), Hizb Al-Haq (a semi-religious party), the Unionist party, and the Popular Forces Union party. They had been literally at war with each other in 1994 but joined forces out of their frustration with President Saleh and the GPC's increased hold on power.

[43] In December 2010, a Yemeni official noted that the opposition was weak and unable to incite protest, and the government therefore "would not be influenced by opposition demands." Reuters, Opposition threatens Yemen polls boycott, December 13, 2010.

did so depended, in part, on the nature of the regime. The analysis here adds support to those who argue that regime type affects the possibility of breakdown, but it does so differently than the prevailing literature would suggest. The Achilles heel in one-party states (and hybrid regimes) is not only elite incentives and institutional structures, but the inability of elites to shore up personal power and maintain electoral institutions that strengthen their regime.[44] In monarchies where elections either were not held (because resources cushioned the regime from demands) or, if held, were more competitive, opposition demands appear to have been weaker and mobilization was limited. In monarchies holding more significant elections, demands for reform were stronger, with public often taking to the streets to call for the reform. (The one exception is in Bahrain, where the minority Sunni rule over a majority Shi'a population led opposition to take to the streets in greater numbers.) In one-party regimes that held elections, where the stabilizing effects of elections had diminished most significantly, incumbents came under earlier and harsher attacks. This relationship is shown in Table 4.[45]

Table 4. Relationship between Electoral Politics and the Processes in 2011 Arab Uprisings (as of April 2012)

	Little Mobilization	Partial Mobilization	Mass Mobilization	Violent Unrest
No/Heavily Restricted Elections	Qatar Saudi Arabia UAE		Oman	Libya
Elections – One-Party			Egypt Tunisia Syria Yemen	Syria
Elections – Monarchy		Jordan Kuwait	Bahrain	

[44] The debate over the relationship between regime types, elections and breakdown is fully unresolved. Geddes (1999) argues that single-party regimes last longer than military or personalistic regimes, and Jason Brownlee (2009) finds similar results, while Gates et al argue hybrid regimes are the most unstable. Brownlee's findings are consistent with my argument here; he finds that monarchies are less likely to breakdown than single-party and hybrid regimes, even when controlling for per capita GDP and Middle East (but not oil). Scott Gates, Havard Hegre, Mark Jones, and Havard Strand, "Institutional inconsistency and political instability: Polity duration, 1800-2000," *American Journal of Political Science* 50(4), 893-908.

[45] Libya appears to be an outlier, since competitive elections have not been held and the regime is not officially a one-party state. Yet, the logic of Gadhafi's exceptional regime – with no parties, a revolutionary movement and cell structures - most closely approximated a revolutionary, one-party state.

		Morocco		
Elections -- Competitive	Algeria Lebanon Iraq Palestine			

Elections after 2011: Business-as-Usual or Radical Transformation?

To what extent did the 2011 Arab uprisings fundamentally alter electoral politics across the region? Certainly, the uprisings have reconfigured relations between citizen-subjects and their states; even where regimes have remained intact, their citizens demand more, and do so more forcefully, than ever before. Elections are an important arena through which these struggles are carried out, and a tool for authoritarian regimes can use in various ways to try to maintain its hold on to power. (See Table 5.) They do not solely determine the outcome of the political crisis the Arab world has experienced, but they do play important roles. The role that they play depends on a number of factors, but most notably the regime type and extent of crisis the regime has experienced.

Table 5. Elections since January 2011.

	Last Election held before January 2011	**Elections Scheduled since January 2011**	**Elections held since January 2011?**
Algeria	Parliamentary: May 17, 2007 Presidential: April 9, 2009	Parliamentary: May 10, 2012	----
Bahrain	Parliamentary: October 23, 2010	Parliamentary: September 24, 2011 (by-election)	Yes
Egypt	Shura Council (1st and 2nd rounds): June 1 and 8, 2010 Parliament (1st and 2nd rounds): November 28 and December 5, 2010	Constitutional Referendum: March 19, 2011 Parliamentary: Phase 1 (1st round): November 28- 29, 2011; Phase 2 (1st Round): December 14-15, 2011 and Phase 3 (1st round) January 3-4, 2012 Shura Council: January 29, 2012 and February 14, 2012 Presidential Elections (1st Round): May 23, 2012 and (2nd Round): June 16, 2012	Yes
Iraq	Parliamentary: March 7, 2010	----	No
Jordan	Parliamentary: November 9, 2010		No

Kuwait	Parliamentary: May 16, 2009	Parliamentary: February 2, 2012	Yes
Lebanon	Parliamentary: (Subnational phases 1-4): May 2, 9, 23, and 30, 2010		No
Libya		Legislative: June 20, 2012	
Morocco	Parliamentary: September 7, 2007	Constitutional Referendum: July 1, 2011 Parliamentary: November 25, 2011	Yes
Oman	Legislative: October 27, 2007	Legislative: October 15, 2011	Yes
Palestine	Parliamentary: July 17, 2010 (canceled)	Parliamentary (tentative) 2012	
Qatar	Legislative: April 2007 (postponed)	Parliamentary: June 2013 (tentative)	No
Saudi Arabia		Sub-National Legislative: September 29, 2011	Yes
Syria	Parliamentary: April 22, 2007 Referendum: May 27, 2007	Sub-National Legislative: December 22, 2011 Constitutional Referendum: February 26, 2012 Parliamentary: May 7, 2012	Yes
Tunisia	Parliamentary: October 25, 2009 Presidential: October 25, 2009	Parliamentary: October 23, 2011	Yes
UAE	Parliamentary (1st, 2nd, and 3rd Stages): December 16, 18 and 20, 2006	Legislative: September 24, 2011	Yes
Yemen	Presidential: September 20, 2006 Legislative: April 27, 2003	Legislative: April 27, 2011 (postponed) Presidential: February 21, 2012	Yes

Source: IFES Election Guide, available at http://www.electionguide.org (accessed April 22, 2012.)

In many cases, authoritarian regimes holding onto power continue to use elections to pump new energy into the political sphere and to control the pace of reform. This has been particularly true in monarchies, especially in the Gulf, where oppositions have been

weaker, electoral reforms are less threatening to the regime, and, in many cases, weak or non-existent electoral institutions mean that even limited electoral reforms can be heralded as a significant step forward. Thus, for instance, Saudi Arabia's decision to hold the second-ever municipal elections (after a two-year delay) in September 2011, while announcing that it would allow women to participate in 2015, was billed as an important reform. So, too, in September 2011, the UAE implemented historic elections when it expanded the electorate from 6,000 to 129,000 voters and called voters to the polls for the second-ever polling to elect the 40-member, half-appointed Federal National Council (with extremely limited legislative powers); and Oman drew voters to the polls in October 2011to vote for the 84-member Consultative Assembly after announcing –but not defining-- "significant powers" that would be granted to the assembly. In Kuwait – where the emir dissolved parliament in December and called snap elections for February 2012, the parliament has more power and the electoral sphere is more vibrant. Yet, here, the second elections in three years allowed opposition forces to enter parliament, but they were held without any significant institutional reforms.

Outside the Gulf, monarchs also promised electoral reform as a way to pre-empt escalating opposition. In Morocco, Mohammed VI responded to demonstrations spearheaded by the February 20th movement by instituting constitutional reforms, calling voters to endorse them in the July 1, 2011 referendum and then to return to the polls for parliamentary elections on November 25th of that year. The elections brought to power, for the first time, a coalition government including the Islamist PJD, and the constitutional reforms theoretically enhance the power of the parliament. Similarly, King Abdallah II of Jordan responded to increased unrest and demands for political reforms that included eliminating the long-unpopular one-person, one-vote electoral law, expanding parliamentary powers, and electing the prime minister by establishing a commission to devise a slate of reforms. The promise of reforms convinced many Jordanians to wait and see, and the steady stream of new electoral commissions, political party laws, and other changes captured Jordanians' attention, as many turned to debating and evaluating rumored and proposed reforms. It also drew the Muslim Brotherhood, which had boycotted the 2010 elections, back into direct discussions with the

government. The promises and even implementation of reforms did not entirely appease opposition, as both Moroccans and Jordanians remained skeptical about the significance of reforms both proposed and manifest. Yet, it did alleviate some immediate tensions and strengthened ties between the regime and some opposition forces.

The use of elections to rejuvenate the political sphere has not been limited to monarchies. In Algeria, Bouteflika announced in April 2011 that electoral reforms would be implemented before the next parliamentary elections, scheduled in May 2012. The move was less bold than in Morocco, and it was also less destabilizing to the regime than it would have been in one-party regimes, since electoral reforms stemming from the conflict in the 1990s had already undermined the ruling party and the guardianship role of the military helps insulate the top echelons of power from electoral politics. Nevertheless, it was an attempt to strengthen the regime in the face of regional pressures. In unprecedented moves, Bouteflika announced the elections to the public directly, through a short televised speech exhorting the youth, especially, to come to the polls; the regime allowed international observers to witness the process; the government created a National Elections Observation Commission (CNSEL), including representatives of all major parties, to oversee the elections; the Ministry of the Interior quickly registered new parties; and the regime expanded the National Assembly from 389 to 462 seats.[46] The elections were not without the familiar problems, as the CNSEL and Ministry of the Interior struggled over a number of issues. But, they did demonstrate that the regime continued to see elections as a tool to appease opposition and mobilize support.

Elections are used not only to promise reform, but also to downplay the extent of the crisis, portray a sense of 'normalcy', and demonstrate a regime's resolve against the opposition. In June 2011, as airstrikes pounded Tripoli to fight what the regime referred to as "rats" and "terrorists" supported abroad, Saif-al-Islam announced that his father would stand for first-ever presidential elections, promising to step aside if defeated. This seemingly-odd announcement in a country without elected institutions was intended to bolster the conviction that the majority of Libyans stood with the regime. Similarly,

[46] For a detailed analysis of the Algerian parliamentary elections see Robert Parks, "Arab uprisings and the Algerian elections: Ghosts from the past?" *Jadaliyya*, April 10, 2012, available at: http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/4979/arab-uprisings-and-the-algerian-elections_ghosts-f [accessed on 4/22/2012].

Bahrain's decision to hold by-elections on September 24, 2011, for vacancies left when 18 parliamentary members of the al-Wefaq opposition walked out was an effort to draw lines in the sand. Held as thousands of protesters marched toward Pearl Roundabout to demonstrate their opposition, the elections underscored the regime's determination that they would continue with 'politics as normal' and to 'punish' those who chose to defect.

Bashar al-Assad's decision to hold elections as violence escalated in Syria is also better understood as an attempt to signal control than as a step in the reform process. Local elections were held on December 12, 2011, following reforms intended to increase the power of local councils. Reportedly, 43,000 candidates competed for 12,000 local council seats, despite an opposition boycott and as fierce fighting continued across the country (reportedly killing 20 on polling day alone). Similarly, in March 2011, as Kofi Anan met with the Syrian regime to establish a cease-fire, the international community stepped up pressure on the regime, and fighting escalated throughout the country, al-Assad announced parliamentary elections would be held on May 7, 2012, as the next step in a reform process that included the promulgation of a new constitution in February that year. The international community and Syrian opposition quickly objected, but the regime resolutely continued its plans. The Syrian regime, alone, was to control the political process.

It may seem farcical for regimes under siege to call for elections, but they may also benefit from doing so. It reinforces the notion that the regime remains firmly in control and that the political conflict can be resolved through 'reform as normal.' The strategy may not always succeed; low-turnout rates can undermine confidence in the regime, and, as Bahrain demonstrated, the elections themselves may provide a focal point around which protests are mobilized. Nevertheless, elections can also an important message to fence-sitters. It tells those who would support the opposition only if they believe it will win, or those who believe there is no other path to reform, that the regime is in control and intent on 'peaceful' reform. If fence-sitters believe this is the case, they will continue to sit it out.

Finally, elections can be used as a concession, presenting a proposed exit strategy, to protesters. This was the case in Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen, although they did not

appease publics embittered by broken promises of past reforms and (in Egypt and Yemen) emboldened by the images of Ben Ali's abrupt departure from Tunisia. Ben Ali's January 13th declaration that he would not run for re-election, coming amid orders to the police to stop firing live ammunition at protesters and followed the next day by the dissolution of parliament and calls for new elections within six months, did nothing to end the protests. By evening on January 14th, Ben Ali had fled the country, leaving his Prime Minister Mohammed Ghannouchi and the military in charge. Protesters in Tahrir Square also rejected Mubarak's February 1st promise not to run for re-election in the presidential polls scheduled for September that year. Arguably, the announcement may have divided the Egyptian public – as least initial discussions suggested some were willing to accept what could have been a peaceful, electoral transfer of power, but the night of the camels – when regime-backed thugs running roughshod over protesters in Tahrir Square were televised across the world—turned the tide against the regime. In Yemen, President Saleh's attempt to follow-suit with a February 2nd announcement that he would postpone the much-criticized April parliamentary elections and not run for the next presidential elections, followed by a May 21st promise for early presidential and parliamentary elections, was also roundly rejected. Such promises only raised the ire of the opposition, which wanted long-standing leaders to step down, and potentially signaled the regime's weakness. Certainly, they did not slow their demise.

In short, and as summarized in Table 6, incumbents have used elections in various ways to respond to the crises that emerged in 2011. In some cases, electoral reforms were part of a broader package of political reforms, intended to alleviate opposition by signaling the possibilities of further change, co-opting some opposition elites, and providing a mechanism to distribute patronage more broadly. This strategy was particularly prominent in regimes where minor reforms could be heralded as significant change, and where the upper echelons of power were relatively insulated from electoral politics (e.g., in monarchies and, given the military's guardianship role, Algeria). Incumbents also used elections to demonstrate resolve. This was the case in Bahrain, Libya and Syria, where minority regimes expected reforms would undo the regime. Finally, incumbents offered elections as an exit strategy in Egypt and Yemen. This

occurred in one-party regimes, which came under the greatest pressure and where calling new elections could have prevented the regime's institutional structure from unraveling, giving the dominant party a chance to remain in control, and some would argue, may have even proven a ploy that eventually allowed the leader to bide time and regain power.

Table 6. Elections in response to the 2011 Arab Uprisings (as of April 2012).

	Elections as Promised Exit	Elections as Reform	Elections as Signaling Strength	Little or No Change in Elections
No/Restricted Elections		Oman UAE Qatar Saudi Arabia	Libya	
Elections – One-Party	Egypt Tunisia Yemen		Syria	
Elections – Monarchy		Morocco Jordan *Kuwait*[47]	Bahrain	
Elections Competitive		Algeria		Lebanon Iraq Palestine

The Future of the Arab World and Role of Elections

At the time of this writing – only 16 months after Ben Ali left office, it is difficult to know what the ultimate outcomes of the crises shaking the region will be. Whether or not regimes change, and the possible replacements that emerge, are determined by the depth of the crises they face, their ability to respond to crises, and oppositions' abilities to push back. The processes at hand are stochastic, highly uncertain, and contentious, and they are influenced by myriad factors at home (e.g., regime type, social cleavages, economic conditions, etc.) and abroad (e.g., geostrategic concerns, regional instability—esp. in neighboring countries, international coalitions, etc.) Elections are one part of a

[47] Kuwait could be coded as either little change or reform. The emir routinely responds to crises by dissolving parliament and calling for new elections, just as he did in December 2011. There were no major institutional changes before the new election, but the new parliament did include more opposition voices than previous ones had.

multi-faceted strategy that incumbents and oppositions use to press their case, but they nevertheless play an important role in the depth of the crisis each regime faces, the regime's ability to appease the opposition, and the final outcome. The role elections play – and the final outcome achieved—depends in part on how they fit within the power structure of regimes.

In some countries, elections may contribute to stabilizing authoritarian regimes, much as they did in the past. Limited electoral openings may appease opposition voices, and the crisis may pass with little real change. This is most likely in small oil monarchies with large expatriate populations, where elections are not a key to regime legitimacy or the distribution of power, and in which allegiance (or at least acquiescence) is maintained through other means. This outcome is more likely still if the fall of regimes elsewhere leads to massive instability or civil war, and if international forces – perhaps spurred by the rise of anti-Western forces through elections elsewhere—step up efforts to limit change in geo-strategically important areas.

In other cases, the elections may be a key venue of gradual regime change. This outcome may seem unlikely, given that more than two-decades of promised reform in most of the region helped create a cynical, impatient public. As witnessed in Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen, many are satisfied with nothing less than their leader's removal. Yet, the option should not be entirely dismissed. As Arabs across the region observe the violence and instability in regimes where rapid change has occurred, they may increasingly prefer a less-dramatic path. Emboldened by the changes across the region but not intent on an immediate, all-or-nothing outcome, they may push institutional openings toward more fundamental openings. Such possibilities appear greater in monarchies like Jordan, Kuwait and Morocco, although this outcome appears less likely in Jordan, where tensions between the minority but privileged Jordanians of East Bank background and those of Palestinian origin are likely to prevent greater power-sharing. Nevertheless, in these cases, the institutional structure of the regime allows a process that would shepherd a constitutional monarchy and continue to allow some privilege, at least, to the ruling family. The outcome is also possible in Algeria, where the negotiations following the civil war have already eliminated a ruling party's hold on power and the

guardianship role of the military can help assure privileges for those at the apex of power, and in Yemen, where thus-far limited but significant changes following Saleh's departure have provided the basis for further reform. In these cases, regime change would not emerge overnight, but rather through a medium-term push-and-pull process that gradually opens the playing field to new actors, fosters new contestation, and reshapes political institutions.

Finally, elections can become a key arena for the struggle over the country's future. This is particularly true when old leaders fall and ancient regimes are swept away. Such elections pose enormous challenges and opportunities.[48] Playing fields are opened more widely than ever before, debates focus on political platforms, ideologies, and the country's future, and voter participation is high.[49] Indeed, as we saw in Egypt and Tunisia, voters rushed to the polls—often for the first time ever—and previously unthinkable results were realized.

Yet, even elections that follow regime ruptures can take on varied meanings and lead to different ultimate outcomes. The significance of elections depends in part on how completely the old regime was removed and on the strength of electoral institutions under authoritarianism. In both Tunisia and Egypt, for instance, electoral institutions were well-established. However, in Tunisia the *ancien regime* was largely swept aside before new elections to the Constituent Assembly were held, and the elections were the focus of contestation over the country's future, while in Egypt the removal of the old regime is much less complete, and much of the struggle over the country's future takes place through extra-electoral politics (e.g., demonstrations, protests).

Where electoral institutions were less developed, post-rupture elections are important but not the center of contestation over the country's future. Thus, both Libya (which saw the former regime removed) and Yemen (where elements of the former regime remain) saw dissolution into conflict, as political forces used extra-electoral means to fight their battles. In Libya's lead-up to the June 2012 parliamentary elections, intensifying armed conflict threatened to make elections untenable, and in Yemen, al-

[48] For more on these challenges, see Ellen Lust, Electoral Programming and Trade-offs in Transitions: Lessons from Egypt and Tunisia, Brookings Institution working paper, forthcoming.
[49] At the point of this writing, Yemen remains a notable exception. There, the election of Abd Rabbuh Mansur al-Hadi, the sole contender for the presidency, can hardly be called competitive.

Hadi's attempts to remove figures close to Saleh were resisted not only on the basis of pro- and anti-reform figures, but also by mobilizing tribes in resistance. This is somewhat consistent with the large literature that finds countries that had a longer experience with elections and higher contestation under an authoritarian regime, are more likely to consolidate democracies after transition.[50] Yet, as Yemen suggests, the key factor may not be the electoral history and contestation alone, but also the relative strength of state institutions vs. extra-state politics more broadly.

Table 7. Relationship between Electoral Politics and Outcomes, as of April 2012.

	Fall of Leader	Repression	Institutional Reforms	No Change/Limited Reforms
No/Restricted Elections	Libya	(Libya)		Oman UAE Qatar Saudi Arabia
Elections – One Party	Egypt* Tunisia Yemen*	Syria	Syria	(Egypt) (Tunisia) (Yemen)
Elections – Monarchy		Bahrain	Morocco Jordan	Kuwait
Elections Competitive			Algeria	Lebanon Iraq Palestine

* Before removed from power, presidents promised not to stand in upcoming elections.

In sum, elections play different roles in outcomes – from helping to maintain authoritarian regimes (likely in small Gulf States), to providing an arena of reform (e.g., Algeria, Morocco and Jordan), and to a key contest in the post-rupture transitions. The extent to which elections play a key role in the struggle over the state after leaders fall depends on the extent of the break and how developed the electoral institutions were

[50] Michael Bratton and Nicholas van de Walle, *Democratic experiments in Africa: Regime transitions in comparative perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Staffan Lindberg, Democracy and Elections in Africa, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006); Staffan Lindberg, *Democratization by Elections?* 2009; Jason Brownlee, Portents of pluralism: How hybrid regimes affect democratic transitions," *American Journal of Political Science*, 53(3): 515-532, July 2009; and Axel Hadenius and Jan Teorell, Pathways from authoritarianism, *Journal of Democracy* (18)1: 143-156, 2007.

under authoritarian regimes. That is, electoral politics – and their place within the broader political structure – influences not only the possibility of transition, but will also likely affect the nature of the regimes to follow as well.

Conclusion

In the Arab world, as elsewhere, elections have influenced the consolidation, breakdown, and transition processes of authoritarian regimes. In contrast to the conventional wisdom- that elections were 'meaningless' before the Arab uprisings and significant following them, we find that elections played important, but different, roles prior to the political crises that emerged with the Arab uprisings, in the regimes' responses to these crises, and, likely in the outcomes that follow. And, in contrast to the dominant scholarship, which seeks to understand 'the role' of elections and elected institutions under authoritarian regimes, as well as in processes of regime breakdown and democratization, this chapter points out the multiple roles that elections play before, during and following regime ruptures. In doing so, it sheds new light on both electoral politics and on the relationship between regime types, stability and democratization. The argument is not that electoral politics is the only factor affecting these processes, but rather that it is an important one – and that the broader political context (including regime type) has important influence on the roles elections play.

Indeed, the roles elections played prior to 2011, and their ability to help stabilize regimes, depended in part on regime type. Elections were a venue to co-opt opposition and defer defection from the ruling coalition, a mechanism for distributing patronage, and a signal of regime strength. The latter role was particularly important in one-party regimes, where majority control in legislatures, high turnout and support rates for incumbents in presidential elections signal to would-be opponents that the regime remains firmly in place.

Yet, in the last two decades, social, political and economic changes undermined the stabilizing role of elections. Economic crises and reforms limited the state's ability to distribute patronage, the continued delay on promises of democratization increased popular cynicism and discontent, and a decline (though certainly not elimination) of secularist-Islamist antagonisms fostered cooperation across opposition groups. Moreover,

the impulse to consolidate personalistic regimes undermined electoral institutions, particularly in one-party states, where establishing personalistic rule conflicted with the internal political contestation needed to strengthen ruling parties and elected institutions. Across the Arab world, popular discontent escalated, opposition forces became stronger (often under the radar), and regimes more fragile. Changes in elections did not cause the Arab uprisings, but they did contribute to regimes' inability to withstand political crises, and they did so most notably in the one-party regimes.

Incumbents have also used elections as a tool in responding to the regional political crises following January 2011. The roles elections play –as part of a broader package of responses – depends in part on the nature of the political regime. First, some regimes (and especially monarchies) have called elections, and at times revised electoral laws, in order to appease the public, co-opt opposition and signal that broader political reforms are forthcoming. Others – and here the one-party regimes of Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen stand out – have used elections as a proposed exit strategy, hoping that by calling elections and promising not to run in them, they can stifle the opposition, cushion the shock of change, and minimize the losses for regime elites. Finally, and perhaps most notably, in regimes under siege, leaders have called new elections 'as usual' – arguing that the returns would demonstrate the wide-spread, unshaken support of the 'silent majority.' It is in this way that we can best understand why Gadhafi called for elections in Libya, even as bombs fell on Tripoli, and Assad continued with plans to hold elections in Syria, even as the military fought opposition forces across the country.

Finally, elections will play an important role in establishing outcomes of the political crises that swept the region as well. Elections are not the sole factor influencing the outcome, and processes of breakdown and transition are inherently stochastic and indeterminate. Yet, the logic of elections in different political circumstances suggests that we are likely to find elections will help to maintain authoritarian regimes in small, wealthy Gulf States, foster small (perhaps nearly imperceptible and reversible) reform in Algeria, Morocco and Jordan, where a third-party guardianship role eases reforms, and be an arena of contestation in post-rupture transitions of Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen. In these cases, the extent to which elections play a key role in the struggle over the state

after leaders fall –and the possibility that they help usher in democracy –depends on how greatly the transitional regime has broken with the former elites, and on how developed multi-party elections were in the past. That is, electoral politics – and their place within the broader political structure – influences not only the possibility of transition, but will likely affect which regimes emerge in the future.