Beyond Orthodox Approaches

Assessing Opportunities for Democracy Support
in the Middle East and North Africa

Netherlands Institute for
Multiparty Democracy

people
unlimited
$Hivos$

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This publication is not a reflection of any specific national or political interest.Views expressed in this publication do not necessarily represent the views of NIMD, Hivos or their Boards.

Content

Preface

The Middle East and North Africa is known to be one of the least democratic regions in the world. The authoritarian regimes in the region have demonstrated their adaptability to changing political circumstances, and aspirations for a democratic transition have so far failed to materialise. Yet the lack of democracy in the region should not be mistaken for a rejection by its citizens for such reform. Various opinion polls show that the majority of the population in the region are in favour of democratic government and want their voice to be counted. Furthermore, requests for support from political and civil organisations in the region – for increasing public and political democracy in their societies – underscore this desire.

How to engage in democracy support in the Middle East and North Africa region? This question led to the collaboration between NIMD and Hivos. Our organisations have jointly initiated a fellowship – that was taken up by dr Isam al Khafaji – a research trajectory and arranged a meeting of experts. The present policy paper is the intermediary result of these activities.

This publication aims to explore what role – if any – external organisations, such as ours, can play to further democratisation in the region. The authors of this brief have examined and reflected upon the pro-grammatic opportunities and potential obstacles for engaging in and with the region. By increasing our knowledge of the political landscapes of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and by focusing on potential windows of opportunities or the closings thereof – where increased authori-tarianism prohib-its possibilities for assistance – we hope to improve our understanding of the dynamics in the region and what could potentially constitute vital building blocks for a programme in the region.

We are fully aware that the political systems in the region provide challenges for democracy support. Research on possible methodologies that focus on levelling the playing field in uncongenial au-thoritarian settings are therefore essential. NIMD works predominantly in young democracies and fragile states that require different programmatic approaches than when working in the political setting of the Middle East and North Africa. Hivos, in contrast, does work in authoritarian and semi-authoritarian settings and is searching for ways to circumvent programmatic constraints, in addition to deepening its knowledge of the political systems in the region.

Hivos and NIMD want to maximise their complementarities of expertise by pooling resources: experience and research into democracy support. We would subsequently like to assess the possibilities for joint programmatic approaches. We feel that it is imperative to learn from one another. We believe that civil and political society can be regarded as two sides of a tunnel, interlinked – and especially in the MENA region – frequently merged in one single organisation. Understanding both types of societies as well as the relationship between them is essential for fostering democratisation processes in the region.

With this publication we have tried to build upon and add to existing knowledge about democracy support in the MENA region. We hope that this will serve as an inspirational base for developing new programme policies in the field of democracy support. One of the points of departure for this publication was the knowledge aggregation ensuing from a meeting of experts held several months ago. We thank the participants of this meeting for their valuable input and suggestions which, we hope, are reflected in this paper.

We thank the authors of this publication as well as the editorial board and we look forward to the materialisation of the suggestions proposed towards a more democratic Middle Eastern and North African region.

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NIMD

The Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) is a democracy support organisation of political parties in the Netherlands for political parties in young democracies. NIMD is currently working with more than 150 political parties from 17 programme countries in Africa, Latin America, Asia and Eastern Europe, NIMD supports:

• Joint initiatives by parties to improve the democratic system in their country
• The institutional development of political parties
• Efforts to improve relations between political parties, civil society and the media

Hivos

Hivos is a non-governmental Dutch organisation guided by humanist values. Together with local civil society organisations in developing countries Hivos strives for a world in which citizens – men and women – have equal access to resources and opportunities for development and can participate actively and equally in decision-making processes that determine their lives and society.
Hivos' core activities are: financing and capacity building, knowledge for development, advocacy and development education. Hivos supports over 800 partners in 30 countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Part of the Hivos programme is implemented from regional offices in Zimbabwe, India, Costa Rica and Indonesia.

Introduction

Democracy support in the MENA Region: Criticism and Beyond

Profound criticism surfaces when looking at the role of democracy support in the Middle Eastern and North Africa (MENA) to date. Much of this criticism is directed towards European and US democracy support efforts in the region. The role that international Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and external actors play in the MENA receives far less attention. Both will be scrutinised here in order to extract the relevant lessons learnt for external organisations wishing to engage with the region.

US and European Democracy support
A significant part of the criticism on democracy support is directed at Europe's half-hearted policy towards the region, and, in particular, on the absence of a coherent strategy for the region. The EU-based Euro Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) programme has a mixed record at best. The EMP programme predominantly targets economic partnerships with MENA states but it has failed to synchronise this with its other objectives, such as political reform (see box). Despite its good intentions, the agreements are not implemented in a consistent way. Egypt serves as an example in this context. It receives a great deal of European support in spite of its semi-authoritarian regime, as do other regimes in the MENA region where economic, security or migration issues are considered to be more pressing from Europe's point of view. Political reform is part and parcel of Europe's partnering with MENA states, yet it remains under exposed in the agreements reached. In general, little push for reforms is given by the EU. Europe's uncritical response to the Tunisian President Bin Ali's 96 per cent election victory in October 2004, serves as a telling illustration in this regard.

Euro Mediterranean Partnership and European Union Neighbourhood Policy
In 1995 the Euro Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), also known as the Barcelona Process, was established. It covers three categories:
• political and security partnership,
• economic and financial partnership, and
• partnership in social, human and cultural affairs.

In 2007, a new instrument was introduced, complementary to the EMP: the European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). It is designed to target sustainable development and approximate EU policies and standards – supporting the agreed priorities in the ENPI (country) action plans.

One of the reasons for the lack of results in the European programmes can be linked to the absence of conditionality. The EU is criticised for not attaching conditions to the economic, political and social association agreements that it has drafted with many states in the MENA region. The European Neighbourhood policy was set up in an attempt to solve the lack of results generated by the EMP programme. The ENPI aims to be a more flexible, policy–driven instrument than the EMP programme. The ENPI action plans, however, are rather vague in regard to the kind of reforms to be rewarded and with what kind of aid.

Conditionality

Conditionality refers to conditions attached to financial assistance. For example, donors who support projects in the field of politics or governance conditions for the disbursement of funds. There has been much debate about the lack of conditionality in the MENA region, in particular in relation to the European Mediterranean Partnership. Despite the perpetuation of authoritarianism in the region, the EU has continued to donate large sums of money to the regimes. The same applies to the US to a great extent, although it should be noted that a greater push for reform and increased conditionality briefly materialised under the Bush administration vis-à-vis Egypt. Conditionality, as a concept, has a questionable reputation because it could be used in a uni-directional, top-down manner. Nevertheless, if used wisely and attached to agreed reform issues, it can be a powerful instrument for fostering political reform. Conditionality goes well beyond the scope of the control of NIMD or Hivos. Nevertheless, generating results in states that receive continued support – despite a perpetuation of authoritarianism – might be more difficult and less realistic than in states where this is not the case, or, conversely, where the principle of conditionality is put into practice, which positively impacts on the leverage and opportunity for change.

Similar comments apply to US programmes and policies. Many agree that the 'installing democracy' policy of the Bush administration had a negative impact on perceptions of democracy in the Middle East and North Africa. Furthermore, one of the most outstanding points of critique on Bush's Greater Middle East Initiative (GMEI) relates to the lack of partnership with actors from the MENA region. GMEI was a finished, top-down framework instead of a commitment to working together and negotiating with Middle Eastern leaders in setting an agenda. It did not specifically identify actions targeting non-democratic Middle East states and it ignored the Arab-Israeli conflict. This policy has been silently removed from the political agenda, yet a new concrete strategy towards democracy support in the region appears to be ongoing under the Obama administration. With regard to the MEPI standing programme, this initiative predominantly deals with economic, education and gender issues, although political reform is its first objective (see text box).

US Democracy Promotion

In 2002 the State Department launched the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI). MEPI focuses on
• political governance and participation,
• economic liberalisation and opportunity,
• educational equality and access,
• empowering women.
It provides direct funding to partners such as non-governmental organisations(NGOs), businesses and universities. In 2004 the Greater Middle East Initiative (GMEI) was launched during a G8 meeting. It was meant to serve as a tripartite (US, Europe, Middle East) discussion on economic and political reform. Even before its official kick-off serious doubts were cast regarding the potential of the GMEI to contribute to real democratisation due to its supposedly top-down nature.

As a result of US and European assistance efforts and their demands, incumbent regimes have adopted a discourse of democracy. Yet tangible results in the field of democratisation and human rights have not been generated. Whether international demo-

cracy support in the Middle East and North Africa has played a substantial role in assisting democratisation and political reform in the region, is still unclear. Regimes have proven their resilience in the past decades in what Steven Heydemann of the US Institute of Peace labels an upgrading of authoritarianism. As Heydemann successfully argues in his article 'Upgrading Authoritarianism in the Arab World' and as will be discussed in the next chapter, regimes in the region have adapted to international demands and democracy support projects and reorganised their strategies of governance accordingly. The adaptation of regimes has an impact on democracy support and affects democratisation programmes. To circumvent undesirable effects on the impact of democracy support projects, Heydemann underscores the need to increase conditionality. This could lead to new, beneficial openings for democracy support programmes.

Connecting to Grass Roots Actors
Democracy support efforts thus far have not included grass roots organisations – organisations and groups that have solid support within civil society in the region. Carnegie Endowment expert, Marina Ottaway, stresses that many international organisations, and policies stemming from actors such as the European Union, have opted for a so-called 'elitist approach'. External actors have targeted non-embedded elitist NGOs and organisations instead of reaching out to grass roots actors, such as Islamist social and political movements. This is underscored by various other experts such as FRIDE associate Richard Youngs, who advocates including grass roots organisations in European policies and guidelines. Democracy support not only neglects grass roots organisations, political parties are also often left unsupported and this is related to the lack of focus on political society of many democracy support organisations. This may be connected with technocratic and economic interests that actors such as the EU and the US have with many MENA states, which can have a reverse effect on democracy support.

Because of this elitist approach, as many experts such as Ottaway argue, democracy support in the region has contributed to semi-authoritarianism instead of enhancing democracy in a variety of

cases. A worst case scenario in this context is Egypt, where decades of democracy support, including institutional reform, economic support, awareness programmes and civil society support have not brought the country much closer to democratisation. Independent international NGOs or organisations that support local NGOs, activists, parties and the like, are all affected by the broader context sketched above. If authoritarian regimes maintain international (financial and economic) support, this might negatively affect the potential for democratic openings in a country.

Political and Civil Society

Many different interpretations are given for civil and political society. We will use the following two interpretations.

Political society: political society is a separate sphere of actors and institutions mediating, articulating and institutionalising the relations between the state and civil society. Political parties are the key institutions of political society. But when their function of mediation and articulation is performed or complemented by other organisations in civil society these could also (temporarily) be included in political society. From this notion the conclusion follows that political society is an intermediary sphere between the state and civil society (after Kees Biekart, 1999).

Civil society: civil society is the sphere outside state, corporate sector and family where people organise themselves to pursue their individual, group or common (public) interests. Civil society is not restricted to (professional) non-governmental organisations, but mainly relates to community-based and membership organisations, as well as religious and traditional associations. Individual and informal initiatives may also be part of it. Civil society is also the public arena for social and political struggle, critical reflection and debate on contesting values, interests and ideas. As such civil society provides a counterweight to the state and to market forces, guaranteeing checks and balances within a democratic system. Civil society is not inherently democratic and tolerant however, as it also reflects existing social inequalities.

There is only a limited freedom of movement for external organisations as well as for organisations that are supported by external actors. The lack of freedom for external organisations to operate also points to a different issue: democracy support in the majority of states in this region frequently fails to focus on democratisation as such; it aims, rather, to improve democratic conditions and preconditions that need to be met to further democratisation.
In this field several external organisations have already moved beyond the criticised approaches of the past and have started to develop and investigate new programmatic areas. Several democracy support organisations are looking at the conditions that are needed for democracy. Such conditions are manifold and allow for a wide range of potential activities. There are technical and structural conditions that currently obstruct democratisation such as uncongenial laws for political parties and civil society organisations. Restrictive laws and regulations hamper parties and organisations from freely associating and developing agendas. Innovative projects in this particular field are laudable, but it should be noted that projects aimed at reforming such laws and regulations can, and often are, thwarted by the incumbents.

Investigating new angles
The good news is that there are more programmatic angles that can be investigated which have thus far only been marginally explored. Democracy support in the MENA region has largely neglected political society and much can be achieved in this area. At a political level, for example, more could be invested in levelling the balance between the often antagonistic secular and Islamist political parties. Investing in multi-party cooperation, especially between opposition parties, can in some cases be fruitful. In this way, one can connect to both grass roots (often Islamic) organisations as well as assisting the parties in trying to make alliances for reform and elaborating on the content of reform. The same applies to civil society. More connections to and between grass roots organisations could be facilitated since antagonism between civil society organisations can form an obstacle on the road to reform. Investing in cross-civil-society cooperation is an approach that should be explored. Logically, bringing civil and political society closer together and

investing in alliances for reform are consequential possibilities. A key issue here is that programmes of such a sensitive nature could never be adopted by governments, the EU or US for that matter, but they can be explored by smaller, independent organisations such as NIMD and Hivos. External organisations should be aware of the difficulties of operating in MENA states and, in particular, of the negative effects that international agreements and technocratic policies can have on their projects, though they can play a meaningful role in democracy support in the region if they find ways to circumvent these loopholes.

The Political Landscape of the MENA Region at a Glance
The differences between countries in the MENA region are considerable when taking the composition of the population and their subsequent social, political and cultural traditions and policies into account. This diversity underscores the heterogeneous nature of Middle Eastern and North African states. There are, however, common denominators that characterise a majority of the MENA states: a lack of political and social freedoms, and the absence of prolonged efforts for genuine democratisation. These common denominators and some general characteristics need to be considered when exploring the possible avenues of activity open to external organisations in the MENA region. This general overview provides a broader context and background to the case studies in the following chapter where country-specific circumstances are taken into consideration.

Different Shades of Authoritarianism
There is a high degree of consensus that, apart from Israel and to a lesser extent Turkey, none of the states in the MENA region can be considered democratic. Varying levels of oppression characterise the region. No country in the region – including those states that have liberalised economically – has allowed the centre of power to compete openly. Nevertheless, the differences between the regimes in the region are considerable and need to be reflected upon. For the sake of convenience – albeit inadequately – a distinction

will be made here between 'authoritarian', 'semi-authoritarian' and 'fragile states'.

Authoritarian States
Authoritarian states are mostly ruled by one (sometimes self-appointed) leader assisted by a small hierarchy. Currently, Syria, Libya and Saudi Arabia are notable examples of authoritarian states. Political parties are often forbidden, such as in Libya, or not legalised, as in Saudi Arabia. Authoritarian regimes have a firm monopoly on power and can use coercion and oppression to an almost unlimited extent and make rash decisions. Libya's leader Ghaddafi is exemplary of such leadership; after criticising his self-constructed cabinet, Ghaddafi dismissed it altogether in 2008. However, due to internal (or anticipated) crises of legitimacy, it is germane to note that some authoritarian states are in a process of liberalisation.

Political reform processes in some authoritarian states do not *per se* lead to a transition towards democracy. Yet this may imply that aggregate citizen interest will be taken into more account by these regimes. Examples thereof are Bahrain, where a liberalisation process was initiated by the regime, and Kuwait, where liberalisation occurred as a reaction to internal pressure after the second Gulf War of 1990 – 1991. These states, as well as Oman and Qatar, have embarked on a political reform process that has resulted in partially-elected advisory councils and, in the case of Kuwait, the landmark achievement of female voting. However, despite the political reforms political parties have not been legalised, civil society remains curtailed and the judiciary is not independent. The inability of the Kuwaiti Muslim Brothers to open a bank account can serve as an example in this context. One could conclude that the political liberalisation process seems promising, but that genuine progress remains difficult to assess, particularly in terms of its sustainability.

Categorising Iran's political system is difficult. Large sections of its constitution are based on the French system and it has various democratic institutions, such as elections and a parliament. Yet ultimate power lies with the 'Guardianship of the Jurist' *(velayat-e-faqih)* which gives the Shiite clergy the last political word. This system, which enables the political clergy to override parliament, gives the Iranian system its distinct theocratic and authoritarian character. As is argued in the case study on Iran in this publication, the increasing power of military and paramilitary groups needs to be added to this picture. One could nevertheless say that, during the most recent Iranian elections, there has been a genuine contestation of power. But political competition has been limited to those who earned (or inherited) their credits during the Iranian revolution in 1979. Secular political parties or movements are forbidden. Within the existing authoritarian boundaries and a distinct Shiite Islamist (post) revolutionary discourse, some form of competition does take place in this authoritarian state.

Semi-Authoritarian States
The difference between authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes is not fictitious. Relative freedom of press and association is tolerated in semi-authoritarian states, and political and civil society enjoys relative freedoms. These states have democratic characteristics such as regular elections and they allow some room for opposition parties and (independent) civil society. At the same time, political parties and civil society face serious limitations and restrictions and cannot operate freely. Thomas Carothers of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace has classified a number of Middle Eastern countries, such as Morocco and Egypt as 'dominant power' countries. The Moroccan and Egyptian states allow for some real political space and political contestation by opposition groups and most of the basic institutional forms of democracy are present. But in both cases, elaborated upon further in this publication, one political grouping dominates the system. The one dominating power seems to offer little prospect of a change of power in the foreseeable future. Semi-authoritarian regimes leave room for opposition, but not enough to allow the opposition to become a serious threat. Political contestation is managed by the regime and any room for manoeuvring, and limitations thereof, are set by the incumbents. Semi-authoritarian states often perform poorly when it comes to social and economic deliverables and are, with some exceptions such as Egypt, institutionally weak.

Limitations for political and civil society in these states can be found in clear red lines. For example, political party or civil society registration is often restricted, targeting religious parties in Egypt or reformist movements in Iran. Jordanian parties face a constraining array of complex bureaucratic limitations that make it virtually impossible for Islamic parties to register. Egyptian parties based on religious affiliations are simply prohibited. Moreover, electoral laws are often designed to favour the incumbent regime and electoral committees are rarely independent. Other limitations are less obvious.

An effective strategy in this regard is co-optation, an intricate method to neutralise adversaries (see text box). This has contributed to the rise of sophisticated regimes throughout the Middle East that appear democratic but have distinct authoritarian features. Arbitrariness is another strategy employed by regimes. Sudden clamp downs on oppositional groups usually have an evident reason, but in some cases plain arbitrary arrests occur. As a result of the various strategies pursued by semi-authoritarian states, parliaments and oppositional forces in semi-authoritarian states are weak. Parliaments frequently have little power and the real power and decision-making often rests with the monarchy (Jordan and Morocco), with the military (Algeria) or with the presidents (Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen).

Co-optation

Co-optation refers to the tactic of neutralising or winning over a (minority) group or organisation by assimilating them into the regime or state structures. The elements of plural society are then encapsulated by the regime without being forced to give up their independent identities. Once co-opted, the individual, party or civil group enjoys privileges and has access to imported networks and power structures, thereby entering the country's arena of the (ruling) elite. As a result, political parties, individuals, businessmen and civil society officially remain independent but de facto become, to a varying extent, dependent on and beneficiaries of the regime. Co-optation also relates to the appropriation of thoughts and rhetoric in order to neutralise competing groups. The increasingly Islamic-tinted speeches of Mubarak are an example of an appropriation of Islamic rhetoric in an attempt to regain legitimacy and halt the popularity of groups such as the Muslim Brothers.

Nonetheless, the level of independence (or lack of co-optation) of political and civil society does vary from state to state. For instance, as opposed to Egypt, political and civil society is more independent and free in Morocco. Compared to both countries, Tunisia, which fits the semi-authoritarian profile, is as authoritarian as Syria when it comes to freedom of speech.

Despite the limitations of political parties and civil society, they are not to be viewed as irrelevant. As long as they are not too oppositional towards the incumbent regime, parties and civil society can play a role in shaping politics. In short, one can conclude that semi-authoritarian regimes, although setting boundaries for political parties and political and civil outsiders, are more dynamic in terms of political pluralism than authoritarian states.

Fragile States
Lebanon, Iraq and the Palestinian Territories have held valid elections and have witnessed a contestation for power through elections. However, these three states are fragile: they suffer either from instability, institutional incompleteness, weak social, political and institutional infrastructures, or a combination of these factors. In consequence these states display a great propensity for conflict.

External political powers play a significant role in the situation of these fragile states, such as Syria, Iran and Israel in Lebanon; Turkey and Iraq in Northern Iraq; the US in Iraq, and Israel in the Palestinian territories. Though conflict prone and unstable, some fragile states also show a great potential for democratisation as they do not suffer from despotic regimes, unclear red lines or limited possibilities for internal and external organisations to manoeuvre. These states generally offer external organisations far more scope to assist genuine democratisation, such as in Iraq, where promising signs after the provincial elections present new opportunities to external organisations. One exception in this regard is in the Palestinian territories, where two competing factions, Hamas and Fatah, worsen the position of external organisations to assist democratisation, since there are two Palestinian authorities: a Fatah dominated West Bank and a Hamas dominated Gaza.

Sectarianism and ethnic divides in fragile states are also important when looking at other parts of the MENA region. In virtually all countries in the region the different religious denominations and ethnicities, as well as minorities and majorities, are generally either not well represented politically and economically, or overrepresented. In some countries minorities muffle majorities or other minorities (the Alevi-based power centre in Syria serves as an example in this context), in other countries majorities downplay the rights of minorities (the disadvantaged position of Berbers in Algeria is an illustration). In this respect, a common ground on national identity and on what the nation state should entail and represent does not appear to be well rooted. Fragile states are perhaps the first countries in the MENA region that are (forcibly) dealing with the lack of balance between the ethnic and religious groups, which can potentially lead to institutionalised forms of representation.

Rentier States
The political economy of the MENA region is not conducive to democratisation. Due to large natural resources such as petroleum and oil, many states in the region have freed themselves from taxing citizens and living off the rent generated by exploiting and selling these resources. In the MENA region,

such sources of revenue include oil exports, foreign aid to governments and revenues derived from being located in a strategic region (for example, fees paid to Egypt for passage through the Suez Canal). Rentier states are able to finance several institutions with the acquired rent that is otherwise paid for by tax payers – who then have a say in holding their governments accountable for these state institutions. Through rentierism, the autonomy of state institutions towards the political leaders has diminished. In those cases where institutions preserved their autonomy, parallel institutions were created. Rentierist governments have liberated themselves from a level of accountability towards their citizens and this inherently impacts negatively on democratisation. Rentierism has regional spill-over effects. For instance, major oil exporters issue grants to non oil producers, such as Syria and Egypt, in exchange for political services. The financial clout of the state enhances strategies to create jobs for many people in the civil, military and paramilitary services.

No Taxation No Representation
A rentier state classifies those states which derive all or a substantial portion of their national revenues from the rent of indigenous resources to external clients. Rentierism stands for the relative liberation of the state from the need to extract its revenues from the domestic economy in exchange for giving concessions to private actors, from whom it usually derives its revenues in the form of taxes. The state is in this case the largest purchaser of products and services of their respective private sectors.

Political Parties, Movements and Civil Society: In Search of the Democrats
Political Parties
Secular parties are often considered to be pro-democratic, whereas Islamist parties are seen as anti-democratic by many 'western' observers of the MENA region. This depiction of MENA's political landscape is not always correct. There are several secular parties that have, overtly or covertly, undemocratic agendas, and there are several Islamist or Islamic parties and movements that adhere to democratic principles. It would be more relevant to differentiate

between democrats and non-democrats than to distinguish between secular and non-secular parties. However, taking the differences that do exist between secular and non-secular parties into account – and taking the continuous debate about political Islam and its isolation from democracy support efforts into consideration – both will be dealt with briefly and separately below.

Secular Political Parties
Secular parties have weakened in the course of decades of authoritarian rule. On the one hand this is connected with oppression from the respective regimes. The lack of political space, uncongenial laws and regulations negatively affect freedom of association and the political leverage of parties in the region. On the other hand, this can also be attributed to the co-optation of secular parties by the incumbent regimes. Because parties have been co-opted by the regimes, opportunities are not seized to press for improvements in governance and accountability. As a result of co-optation, many voters associate various secular parties with the regime, and do not believe in their capacity to reform politics. Furthermore, most secular political parties do not represent the views of the general population in the region they are elitist groups without significant constituencies. Again, Ottaway's notion of non-embedded elites is a fitting way to describe most of the secular parties in the MENA region.

Islamist Political Parties and Movements
Islamists have in most of the countries within the region considerable grass roots structures and command a considerable following in diverse social strata of society. Political Islamism (see text box) is often more than a political polity. In many countries it has extensive social networks and well-structured social organisations. In some cases Islamists have established separate social and political wings, but in other countries there is no distinction between the two. The social work that is often at the core of the movements may be one of the reasons why Islamism has grown so significantly in the region. Another element of success is the uncorrupted and moral image of Islamists. Whereas secularism has often been corrupted by undemocratic leaders, and is sometimes perceived as an imported idea from the West, Islamists have maintained a domestic

image with an outspoken agenda. Moreover, the organisational structures of the Islamists are solid, efficient and well developed. Undoubtedly, some Islamist groups are ambiguous as regards clarifying their position on civil liberties. When it comes down to the implementation of the *sharia*, ignoring women's rights and minority rights, Islamist groups often remain inexplicit, but can be expected to be in support of such measures. There is a world of difference in the perspectives of the various Islamist groups, also within Islamist movements themselves, on these civil liberties that needs to be taken into account. At the same time, Islamists are often the (only) ones who are clamouring for political reform and who have, to varying extents, developed agendas for political reform and democratisation. Therefore, in terms of grass roots potential for democratisation, the Islamists should be regarded as important players in potential political reform processes.

> **Political Islam**
> A good working definition for Islamism is offered by the International Crisis Group, which distinguishes between
> • political Islamism, movements that generally accept the nation state and operate within its constitutional framework and articulate a reformist rather than revolutionary agenda;
> • missionary Islamism, Islamic missions of conversion (Al-Da'wa); and
> • Jihadism, Islamic armed struggle, which exists in three main variants, internal, irredentist (fighting to redeem land ruled by non-Muslims) and global. These categories all relate to Sunni Islamism. Shiite Islamism will be elaborated upon in the third case study on Iran in the following chapter.

Political Parties and Movements towards Political Reform
The term 'moderate Islamism' is commonly used by observers and experts on political Islam and the MENA region. Yet in the international community such consensus is not yet found. This is one of the major reasons why Islamists have not been incorporated in democracy support programmes so far. Simultaneously, there is a trend to dismiss political parties as relevant actors in the political reform

process in the MENA region. Political parties can indeed be a very weak link in the MENA region. But to write off Islamists, waning secular parties, or both as potential agents of reform *a priori*, is unwise.

Currently, a power vacuum between Islamists and secular authoritarian regimes exists, one that is not conducive to any form of political diversity. Not only is a political centre missing, a pluralist group of political parties that represents society in all its diversity, both in terms of religion, ethnicity and political convictions, is absent. The lack of balance in the political field could be a potential danger to the stability of some states in the long run. The need to level the playing field in an inclusive manner, incorporating both secular and non-secular groups and parties is of vital importance. Enhancing a political balance in the region necessitates strengthening political parties and thus broadening the political spectrum.

Civil Society
The role and character of civil society differ greatly from state to state in the region. In several countries a considerable part of civil society is state controlled. NGOs are often government-organised NGOs (GONGOs), such as some human rights leagues, councils, boards and committees. Despite their often semi-dependent status, GONGOs also serve a public function as they allow critical reflections on the policy of the regime and its subsequent willingness to accept criticism. Other NGOs have been co-opted by the incumbent regime to neutralise their activities. As a result of state interference, civil society has become emasculated and obscured in a large part of the MENA region (with the notable exceptions of Iran, Lebanon, Morocco and recently Iraq which do have – relatively – independent civil society sectors). As NGOs are often co-opted or directed by the incumbent regime, and do not represent local or national grass roots, significant parts of civil society need not be considered as catalysts for pro-democratic reform. These groups tend to have the same fundamental weaknesses as (secular) political parties, which is why NGOs in the MENA region are often negatively regarded.

NGOs that do receive Western funding are often mistrusted and perceived as allies of the regime. At the same time, various regimes try to prohibit foreign funding for civil society or set considerable limitations for international cooperation with civil society, making international assistance very difficult. Fortunately, there are also independent civil society organisations in the MENA region. Islamist based charity organisations (of which some are also co-opted yet many remain relatively independent) usually operate autonomously and have vast grass roots networks in society. They are tolerated due to their popularity and because they often fill major state-institutional performance gaps in delivering public services, such as education and health care. In Iran, Lebanon. Iraq and Morocco independent activists and organisations can and do play a pivotal role in political reform processes. The regimes in Iran and Morocco have challenged these groups. Besides independent civil society, government-organised or co-opted civil society exists, however, the division between these two is not always easily distinguishable.

A more recent phenomenon is the emergence of a virtual civil society. Large media networks such as Al Arabiyya and Al Jazeera have leapt into the civil void, as well as many web sites, newspapers, web logs and political sites. Most political debates in the region take place in these virtual media, although some of the large broadcasting agencies do face red lines for political discussions that cannot be crossed. Debates in these virtual media possibly have a more profound impact on political reform than any other part of civil society.

Cases

To assess the political systems of the MENA region in depth and to gain a deeper understanding of its consequences for democracy support work as well as the prospects for democratisation, three cases will be elaborated upon. In the preparation of this publication, many countries were researched and discussed. We decided to focus on these three case because they represent three different forms of authoritarian regimes. In the cases their context specific elements and particularities of the respective political systems are highlighted subliminally offering possible similarities and recommendations to external organisations when working in the region as a whole.

The first case will delve deeper into the political landscape of Morocco and provide an assessment of democracy support and lessons learned. The second case will scrutinise the particularities of the political system of Egypt and its effects on democracy support. Thirdly and lastly, a case on Iran will provide an insight in the internal political dynamics of its political system and consequentially the limited possibilities for external actors to engage in democracy support activities.

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Morocco

A centrally-steered semi-authoritarian state?

Sylvia Bergh

Morocco's political landscape in a nutshell
Among the MENA states, Morocco has been a key target of Western democracy promotion efforts in recent years. It is often perceived as one of the most liberal and progressive countries in the region, and hence as an important test case for demo-cracy. King Mohamed VI succeeded his father, King Hassan II, in 1999, following the latter's death after 38 years on the throne. There is no doubt that this signalled the start of a more liberal era with signifi-cant reforms. However, the dominant perception of Morocco as a country on the path to democracy overlooks the fact that it is still effectively an abso-lute monarchy in which the king is head of state with vast powers over the executive, the judiciary, and the legislature, as well as the commander-in-chief of the armed forces and religious leader (Com-mander of the Faithful). The king and the ruling elite surrounding him *(makhzen)* also control large parts of the economy. As Kausch (2008:1) puts it, and as this case study will argue, "while clearly ahead of other countries in the region in terms of human rights and liberalisation, Morocco is still a centrally-steered façade semi-autocracy, not the 'model' of Arab democratisation it likes to be portrayed as."

There are several elements, some historical, some more current in the light of 'upgrading of authori-tarianism', that make up the Moroccan political landscape. Morocco's first constitution of 1962 established a partially-elected parliament and a multi-party system. Towards the end of his reign, King Hassan II oversaw constitutional reforms that led to the creation of a House of Representatives (325 members directly elected by universal suffrage every five years under a proportional electoral system, including 30 female members elected at a national level under a 10% quota) and an Upper

House (with 270 members indirectly elected from trade unions and other interest groups). The Upper House enjoys the same powers in the law-making process as the Lower House, and can therefore be considered a source of duplication of efforts. Even though the Upper House has the possibility to censure the government with a two-thirds vote, and the Lower House is able to dissolve the government through a vote of no-confidence, the monarchy has most power. The constitution clearly subordinates the legislature to the authority of the monarchy, giving the king a veto and the right to amend legis-lation, dissolve parliament and set election dates.

There are other constitutional provisions that further undercut parliament's authority. Articles 50 and 51, for example, substantially reduce the power of the parliament in the budgetary process by prevent-ing the legislature from altering the draft budget submitted by the government in any way that would increase overall government expenditures or decrease state revenues. In fact, parliament can only legislate in certain clearly-defined areas listed under Article 46 of the constitution, such as civic and criminal law, individual and collective rights expressly stated in the constitution, local electoral systems and commercial regulations. Overall, par-liament still lacks the ability to set its own agenda, and strong policy in response to public interests has to emanate from where power resides – in the palace.

The king makes key ministerial appointments, such as the prime minister, and the ministers of the interior, foreign affairs, defence, and Islamic affairs. He also has the right to appoint members of the administration, including the general secretaries of all the ministries. However, in 2007 the king kept his

pledge to select the Prime Minister from the party that received most votes in the legislative elections.

Adding to the weakness of parliament is the fact that the party system is fragmented and largely dysfunctional. This situation is linked to the history of political parties in Morocco: while the *Istiqlal* or Independence Party and Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP) are the oldest opposition parties, King Hassan II pushed for the formation of the heavily Berber, rural-based Popular Movement (MP) as well as the creation of various other pro-palace parties. Hence from the outset, most parties did not originate from ideological movements but were artificially created to serve regime stability. In 1998, opposition parties, *Istiqlal*, USFP and the Party for Progress and Socialism formed a bloc, or *kutla* and were allowed to participate in the governing coalition. This manoeuvre by the king led to the co-optation (see text introductory box chapter) of the traditional opposition to 'government parties' thereby placing the blame for government paralysis also on the shoulders of the regime's former critics. The highly person-centred party system explains the lack of intra-party cooperation, even when ideologically close, and the large number of internal scissions. The result of such divisions, which were encouraged by the *makhzen*, was the proliferation of political parties (30 in the 2009 municipal elections). The electoral law reform in 2002 contributed to the fragmentation of power in parliament. It created a two-tiered proportional representation system, making it increasingly difficult for parties to win more than one seat per district. The result is a parliament in which it is nearly impossible for any one party to win a majority of seats, which, in turn, leads to a weak and divided legislature. Recent amendments in 2007 focused on redividing the districts, giving

more weight to rural constituencies – a move aimed at diminishing the power of the moderate Islamist Party, the Justice and Development Party (PJD) whose largest constituencies are urban.

A shaky ruling coalition held together by the *kutla* and the pro-palace National Rally of Independents (NRI) has ruled since the 2007 elections, with the PJD and MP deciding not to take part. In January 2008, Fouad Ali El Himma, former Deputy Interior Minister and close friend of the king, founded the Movement for all Democrats (MTD), and subsequently a political party based on the MTD, the Party of Authenticity and Modernity (PAM). It does not have a clear ideology, but it has two explicit policy goals: to fulfill the king's desire to bring about a consolidation of the party landscape, and to stand up to the PJD, which the monarchy still considers a threat to its stability. In the process, two-cross party alliances have been formed, one aligned with El Himma and one of the PJD and USFP against him.

The consolidation of the party landscape was achieved to a degree in the run-up to the June 2009 municipal elections, when many smaller parties dissolved to fuse with PAM. Representatives from these and the other allied parties are primarily rural notables and urban elites who gained parliamentary seats due to their patronage networks. They have little or no contact with their constituents and change party affiliation during the legislative periods. Given El Himma's access to the king, they most probably see the PAM's attraction in helping to position themselves closer to the gravitational centre of power. It seems that so far the PAM has reinforced embedded elite structures rather than brought about any renewal or change. The PAM's proximity to the king probably also explains its

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landslide victory in the municipal elections. It gained most of the municipal council seats: 21.7% of the total 27,795 seats, followed by the *Istiqlal* (19.1%), USFP (11.6%), and MP (8%). The PJD won 5.5% of the seats. Eight of the 30 parties represented in the poll won 90% of the seats. However, the real winners of the election were women: Out of 20,458 candidates, 3,406 won a seat (compared to 127 female councillors elected in 2003); half of them are under the age of 35 and more than 70% have a university degree. This achievement is largely due to a coalition of women's rights NGOs that campaigned for a women's quota.

Nevertheless, women's advancement in politics is overshadowed by the large-scale voter apathy apparent in recent elections. Although domestic and international observers concurred that the 2007 legislative elections were the most transparent and fair in the history of Morocco, and 78% of eligible Moroccans registered to vote, turnout was only 37% and 19% of ballots cast were blank or invalid (i.e. the actual turnout was most likely around 24%). This should be seen as a clear message that the current political system is detached from the populace and in need of structural reform. Indeed, NDI focus groups revealed that the choice to abstain from voting was a deliberate act of non-participation based on political motivations. In other words, maintaining a distance from formal politics has become an alternative form of politics in itself. Protest and blank ballots were also the result of voter confusion due to the large number of political parties with similar campaign platforms (NDI 2008). Much of the focus in these elections was on individual competition between high-profile personalities as opposed to national platforms, and there were widespread allegations of vote-buying. Similarly,

in the municipal elections in June 2009, the official turnout was 52.4%, which was slightly lower than in the 2003 elections (54%). However, 11% of all votes cast were invalid, so the actual turnout was closer to 40%. There were also large regional variations, from 29% in metropolitan Casablanca to up to 70% in the Western Sahara provinces. Although the elections were generally seen as free and fair, the media reported many instances of vote buying and other forms of electoral fraud.

Having reviewed the main elements of the political landscape in Morocco, we now turn briefly to the recent reforms that bolster the view of Morocco as a liberal country. These reforms include the establishment of the Equity and Reconciliation Commission (IER). This organ investigates repression during the reign of Hassan II, a new law on political parties, and the revamping of the *Moudawana*, family law, strengthening the position of Moroccan women in matters of guardianship, marriage, divorce and so on. While these reforms have introduced positive changes, they are also limited. For example, the IER does not cover human rights abuses committed since the start of the reign of the present king, and many of its recommendations are not yet implemented, or face resistance in their implementation, such as the new *Moudawana*.

In terms of media freedom, at the beginning of his reign, King Mohamed VI eased control over the written press, leading to lively newspaper reporting in the region. However, the print media are increasingly subject to harassment and court procedures, implying closures and even imprisonment, mainly for overstepping the 'red lines' on what is allowed to be reported upon, particularly in relation to the king. Most recently, the editions of two critical news

magazines were destroyed at the printer's because they contained the results of a survey that asked questions about the King's performance during his first 10 years on the throne. In any case, readership in Morocco is low, with only 300,000 daily readers, but there are now 20,000 bloggers.

At a local level, important decentralisation reforms are underway and the National Human Development Initiative (INDH), launched by the king in May 2005, has the potential to empower local communities.

In short, while there are some signs of positive change, these should be seen as mainly social and economic reforms that do not amount to political liberalisation or democratisation. Moreover, they could be motivated more by the king's desire to ensure US and EU support of the Moroccan position on the Western Sahara dispute than a real reformist agenda. For true democratisation to take place, deep structural changes are needed that would shift power from the king to the elected parliament but these require constitutional reform, something that is very difficult if not impossible for external actors to bring about. As one interviewee put it, "only the king can limit his own powers". The ability and inclination of the opposition to demand systemic reform is weakened by the lack of political space: political leaders operate in an extensive patronage system and need to accept the prerogatives of the monarchy in order to maintain their positions and influence. There is a lack of government accountability that derives from the parallel existence of formal democratic procedures and informal *de-facto* rules of the game. This is why Morocco should be seen as a centrally-steered semi-autocracy, or an example of semi-authoritari-

anism (Ottaway 2003:3), rather than a country that is set to embark on democratic transition. This is not to deny the signs of growing civil disobedience and extremism bred out of frustration (two-thirds of Morocco's population is under the age of 25 and unemployment among graduates in particular is high), which might make further reform more urgent in the not too distant future. Yet, such reform is likely to be more economic than political in nature.

Actors
Relevant actors for embedded democratic reforms
As is clear from the previous section, the space available for embedded democratic reforms in Morocco is limited. Nevertheless, it may be helpful to focus briefly on the question of whether there are embedded elites with whom democracy support organisations are or could be working together. The potential candidates include secular political parties, Islamist groups, and civil society organisations.

Secular Parties
Morocco's secular parties are among the oldest and most established in the region. However, they suffer from a lack of internal democracy and vision. As the record high rate of absenteeism in the 2007 elections indicates, the public at large has lost confidence in the parties because it largely sees them as corrupt and self-serving. While the king routinely invokes the widespread deficiencies of parties and the inability of the political elites to govern as reasons for the lack of progress, many critics argue that until parliament is given more meaningful powers and political actors have a more active hand in policymaking, parties will be unable to fulfill their role. According to one interviewee, it would

Only the king can limit his own powers.

be an illusion to think that democracy supporters in Morocco can work with political parties in the Western sense. Instead of representing citizens, they are brotherhoods supporting expansive patron-client networks. In addition to their partially fulfilled 'Western' functions of oversight, legislation and representation, members of parliament (MPs) in Morocco are deployed for foreign policy purposes, such as joining diplomatic missions to European and African countries in order to influence the hosting government's position on the Western Sahara issue in favour of the Moroccan position. Given this assessment of secular political parties, most, if not all of them, can be regarded as embedded elites. The PAM may be an exception, although its engagement for democratic change is not yet apparent.

Islamist Groups
There are two main Islamist groups. The Justice and Development Party (PJD) is a registered political party and recognises the king as Commander of the Faithful. It entered parliament in 1997 as the political arm of the Movement for Unity and Reform (MUR) and became a formal political party in 1998. The PJD won 9 out of 325 seats in the 1997 elections, and following the 2002 elections, it had 42 MPs. Contrary to polls and analysts' predictions of a landslide victory, the PJD only gained a total of 47 seats in the 2007 elections. It was forced to moderate its Islamist tone following the 2003 Casablanca bombings, purging hard-liners from leadership posts. PJD adopted a pragmatist position establishing itself as the dominant opposition party in parliament fighting corruption and demanding government accountability, while avoiding direct confrontation with the palace. In the end, it also formally accepted the reform of the family law, and ideological assertions in this light like the call for the application of the

shari'a law, have been gradually reduced to low-key objectives. However, despite its efforts, the PJD has remained an inconsequential force in terms of shaping government policy. It can credit no major pieces of legislation to its name and has continued to struggle to find common ground with other opposition groups in parliament. It also struggled to maintain a balance between pragmatism and ideological commitment. This lack of programmatic clarity and vision may explain its underperformance in the 2007 elections.

The PJD, however, is known for internal transparency, the promotion of women, superior attendance record at parliamentary sessions, submitting the largest number of questions to government and effective grassroots outreach. The party has a broad network; its supporters are mainly young and urban, with strong pockets of support in city slums and among unemployed university graduates. It draws votes based on the party's message and not the candidates' family names. In this sense, the party starkly contrasts with its secular counterparts, which are largely governed by an ageing leadership with autocratic ruling structures and limited popular support. Several democracy promotion organisations active in Morocco include PJD members in their activities and events, but typically only the moderates and reform-minded members, rather than hard-line conservatives. Cooperation takes place on a personal basis, and not with the party itself, given the sensitivities on both sides. The EU does not work with the PJD and religious NGOs, as opposed to the US through their more inclusive approach.

The largest Islamist movement remains *Al Adl w'al Ihsan* (Justice and Charity Movement), led by

Many NGOs suffer from similar weaknesses as the political parties: personalised leadership, weak internal transparency, and weak grassroots mobilisation and representation.

prominent Islamic thinker Sheikh Yassine. It is de facto outlawed, and repression has steadily intensified with members under constant surveillance and meetings routinely broken up. The group focuses on grassroots preaching and social change. It works outside the political system, opposes political participation, and considers the monarchy illegitimate. It condemns the separation of religion and politics, and advocates the creation of an 'Islamic democracy'. It is not afraid to challenge the *makhzen* and the monarchy, and is considered the true opposition in Morocco, far more influential than the PJD. The Friedrich Ebert Foundation has included the PJD and the Justice and Charity Movement as partners in its scenario-building project, *Maroc Scénarios 2025*. The MUR, the movement from which the PJD emerged, often voices support for *Al Adl* when the government cracks down on it, but the PJD is typically more careful in its response to such confrontations in order to avoid provoking tensions with the regime. Furthermore, *Al Adl's* leaders have systematically criticised the PJD for its participation in parliamentary politics and accuse its leadership for being submissive to the monarchy.

Civil Society
As for the state of civil society in Morocco, the government has liberalised the legal framework to some extent. However, the government has employed a strategy of co-optation by cooperating with, and incorporating, national NGO elites into government service. Many NGOs suffer from the same weaknesses as the political parties: personalised leadership, weak internal transparency, and weak grassroots mobilisation and representation. Strong competition and in-fighting prevents lasting networks from taking root. Most importantly, many NGO leaders are civil servants or politicians, hence

there is no clear distinction between members of civil and political society who could hold each other accountable. However, some of the human rights NGOs have established a reputation for professionalism and independence, such as *Transparency Maroc*, *Centre des Droits des Gens*, the *Organisation Marocaine des Droits de l´Homme* (OMDH) and the *Association Marocaine des Droits de l´Homme* (AMDH). Many democracy support organisations work with them.

Democratisation
Local perceptions of democracy
In the World Values Survey, 81% of Moroccans said that democracy was a 'very good' way to govern Morocco, with over 77% believing that democracy is better than any other system. These are much higher percentages than in Egypt, Jordan and Algeria. However, in a 2002 poll by Maroc 2020, 45% of respondents expressed a positive degree of confidence in the cabinet (with its royal appointments) versus 35% in the parliament and 27% in political parties. In a national poll conducted by 2007 Daba, Moroccans ranked 'strengthening democratic practice' last out of twenty priorities for the incoming government. Only 2% of respondents identified it as one of their top five concerns. As the low election turnout in 2007 also made clear, the Moroccans do not see political parties as influential actors in the development of the country. The power to propose and implement changes is attributed to the king and those closest to him. The media reinforces this perception by covering royal activities in great detail, while static political parties rarely hold activities and do not elicit much interest. This also explains the appeal of the PAM:

A weak sense of citizenship: the nature of the political system in which the population is commonly treated as 'subjects' rather than active citizens means that the majority of Moroccans do not see themselves as having civic rights and duties.

it mainly emphasises economic reforms, which are perceived as detached from political reforms. Given the patronage networks of members of parliament, it is not surprising that most constituents tend to believe that their role is to act as intermediaries between the population and the bureaucracy, and to intercede with the latter for services, favours and the resolution of personal grievances.

The underlying reason for this state of affairs is arguably a weak sense of citizenship: the nature of the political system in which the population is commonly treated as 'subjects' rather than active citizens means that the majority of Moroccans do not see themselves as having civic rights and duties. The low adult literacy rate in Morocco (56%) exacerbates the situation.

Different entry points to democracy support
The field of democracy support in Morocco is a rather crowded one: there are more than 15 foundations, national or UN agencies and international NGOs present in the country engaged in various activities and projects. The most complicated framework for action is at a European level. The EU's promotion of democracy and good governance is part of a dense institutional framework, including the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (also termed the Barcelona Process), the mainly bilateral association agreement, European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), launched in 2004 and implemented through action plans, the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI), and the European Instrument on Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR). There is no space here for a detailed assessment, but one can say that most of the activities focus on democracy, the rule of law, good governance. Supporting administrative and

public sector organisations in the advancement of an ameliorated balance of powers in the political system is not addressed in these programmes, nor in for example French of Spanish bilateral efforts. This is related to the EU's concerns with migration, regional security, free trade and fisheries.

This section briefly summarises the main lessons learnt with regard to democracy support by the main actors, grouped around the four most relevant entry points that is, elections, strengthening political parties, building parliamentary capacity and support to civil society. Democracy support organisations are referred to as DSOs.

Elections
Several DSOs, often in partnership with local organisations, have been engaged in voter education prior to national and local elections in order to increase citizens' political awareness and encourage their participation in the elections. However, the low turnouts suggest that such initiatives do not go far enough because they do not address the deep-seated motivations for abstention discussed above. Many DSOs also work in the field of training election candidates, especially women, most recently in the run-up to the 2009 local elections. The Friedrich Ebert Foundation is currently working on an impact assessment of its training activities. As for election polling, an American DSO carried out a series of opinion polls in 2006 which showed the PJD winning a majority of votes in the 2007 elections. Yet against the background of US policy towards Iraq and Lebanon/Israel, the polls were seen as unsolicited meddling by the US in Morocco's internal political affairs. Thus, it can be deduced that policy coherence is of the utmost importance to the credibility of democracy promotion. For the 2007 elections,

the Consultative Council on Human Rights (CCDH) invited an American DSO to carry out the first international election observation mission to Morocco. The European Instrument on Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) supported the first domestic NGO electoral observation commission with the training of 3000 facilitators in electoral monitoring and reporting, in addition to institutional support. Similarly, a German DSO has supported the setting up of a network of researchers to study the legislative and local elections, based around the Centre Marocain des Sciences Sociales, which it would like to become an established research centre for political parties and elections in Morocco. While such measures lead to an improvement in the quality of elections, this should be seen as a necessary, but insufficient, pre-condition for democracy in Morocco.

Political Party Strengthening
The second major entry point in democracy support is political party strengthening. This entails reinforcing the internal organisation of political parties promoting more effective membership, internal management, communication, and outreach to supporters. Other areas of work include strengthening the links between central and local structures, and between local councillors, constituents, civil society organisations, and party organisation. However, as explained earlier, the relationship between constituents and their representatives is not based on shared ideas for public policy, but on patron client relations. Similarly, there is generally a high degree of mistrust and/or rivalry between NGOs and political parties, or overlap in terms of leadership, all of which make this area of democracy support problematic.

Several DSOs provide training opportunities for young people and women belonging to parties from across the political spectrum and various parts of the country. This was also done most recently in the run-up to the local elections. However, interviewees said the youth training sessions do not bring about any real change or positive trends, because youngsters are still regarded with suspicion by more senior party members and not considered mature enough to be promoted to more senior positions. At the local level and for women, the outlook is more positive thanks to quotas and policies enshrined in the new election and political party laws, though the long-term impact has yet to be seen. Training sessions and debates with politicians often include members of different parties. Bringing activists and politicians together from various and sometimes opposing parties may have created a sense of shared cause among young people and women regardless of their political affiliation. However, other evidence emphasises continued suspicion between for instance the secular parties and the PJD. One interviewee mentioned that it was even difficult bringing all parties on the left to sit together. At a municipal level, parties cooperate in coalition building, but this is driven by pragmatic motivations.

Exchange visits are another form of training. The German political foundations in particular have organised several exchange visits for MPs to Germany. Apart from learning about a different political culture and communication methods, this also gives Moroccan MPs a chance to demonstrate their own achievements. Another DSO invited three Turkish AK Party parliamentarians to Morocco for multi-party discussions (including the PJD) in order to exchange ideas on parallel democratic developments in Turkey and Morocco. However, given the constraints faced

by parliament and political parties in the Moroccan political system, DSOs are aware that engaging with political parties will not bring about fundamental democratic change. In addition, some DSOs have encountered a lack of interest from political parties to take up their offers of support.

Capacity Building
In the area of parliamentary capacity building, DSOs have strengthened the capacities of staff and MPs working with parliamentary committees and parliamentary groups to draft bills and write reports. With support from DSOs, a Budget Analysis Office was set up to help MPs evaluate the government budget and propose amendments, and discussions were held on the reform of the organic finance law expanding parliament's involvement. However, such activities met with some resistance from parliamentary leaders, for whom things were advancing too quickly, leading to a weakening commitment from MPs. According to one interviewee, the Budget Analysis Office works well for the Upper House but less so for the Lower House, although the project did increase cooperation between the two Houses. Transcription equipment (which reduced the length of time to enter debate into the official record from three years to 24 hours), decentralisation and improving staff skills were much appreciated by staff, more than by MPs themselves. In general, DSO staff found it difficult to mobillise MPs, and the programme had to deal with a change in MPs due to the 2007 elections. Work with the parliament is also hampered by the fact that there is no unit in parliament that coordinates various democracy promotion efforts, given the multitude of actors: parliamentary groupings, committees, permanent staff, political parties, and so on. This is in contrast to the *Direction Générale des Collectivités Locales* in the Ministry

of the Interior which coordinates donor support for decentralisation very effectively.

Civil Society
The last entry point to consider here is support to civil society and human rights organisations. Many DSOs support civil society organisations in various ways, especially given the constraints faced by political parties. Some focus on developing their writing skills for project applications, managing their organisations, and financial planning. Some DSOs support the reform of the *Moudawana* by training women's rights NGOs, ensuring its application, and raising awareness among women of their rights, particularly in rural areas. Others support the Association for Combating Violence against Women, the Union d'Action Féminine, and the Ligue démocratique des droits des femmes. Another area of work is support to the IER and its dialogue with human rights organisations, and assistance to the human rights organisations mentioned earlier. An indirect measure of DSOs' impact is therefore improved effectiveness of the partner NGOs. However, DSOs often target the same well-known handful of NGOs which are not necessarily embedded in the larger society. Although some DSOs support NGO coalitions, such as the Espace Associatif and Forum des Alternatives, they face challenges in establishing effective NGO networks due to competition and rivalry. One interviewee was even sceptical about working with NGOs at all, given their perceived lack of legitimacy, representativeness and institutionalisation.

Support to civil society also comes in the form of promoting open debates and capacity building for policy analysis. The German foundations in particular are very active in this field and organise events with established and emerging think tanks, universities,

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independent intellectuals and academics, and they invite a mix of NGOs, politicians and government representatives. Through academic conferences and publications, they aim to increase an open and pluralistic exchange of ideas which would give input to the democratisation process and public administration reform. An important strand here consists of seminars on Morocco-EU relations and intercultural dialogues, for which the DSOs make use of their European and Mediterranean offices networks. Some of these debates help the parties in government to formulate and position themselves with regard to domestic public policies (for example trade liberalisation and social safety nets). As for media support, laws prohibiting foreign funding of the press are still in place, but it is possible to organise exchange programmes and events. Some DSOs engage in the training and education of journalists, but they have to be careful to avoid being seen as trying to influence the independent press.

Conclusion

Morocco is a very open country compared to other MENA countries, allowing foreign organisations involved in democracy support to 'set up shop' easily and work freely, without interference. However, this openness has arguably led to an 'overcrowding' of democracy promoters. As the Moroccan elite is very small, most of these actors work with the same people and organisations. As we have seen, the present actors are already exploring a wide range of entry points. Given this 'oversupply' of democracy support offers, Moroccan NGOs and other relevant actors are aware that they can 'shop around' for the best terms and conditions of support (often for projects that they have already worked out in quite

some detail internally). Indeed, Moroccan democratic actors are very pragmatic when working with external actors: as long as they do not interfere in defining goals, programmes, or activities. If there is transparency on both sides, and if the Moroccan organisation has a strong identity, sense of direction and possibility to diversify funding, it will not have a problem with accepting money from Western sources, as long as the organisation itself is democratic. However, recently there are signs that Moroccans have become increasingly wary of the West in general, given Iraq, Palestine, the issue of migration and the image in the West of Moroccans and Arabs (Khakee 2008:17). The portrayal of Dutch citizens of Moroccan descent in the Dutch media may therefore also play a role, as well as Dutch policy towards the Western Sahara issue.

Overall, we conclude that possibilities for democracy promotion in Morocco are limited, given the concentration of power with the king, and the absence of sufficient incentives for reform, both from internal and external actors. There is the possibility of working to change mentalities through policy dialogue and exchange visits with political parties, which may bring about more fundamental change in the long term. Another, perhaps more promising entry point lies with human rights NGOs such as the Organisation Marocaine des Droits de l'Homme and Association Marocaine des Droits de l'Homme, as they are the most professional and representative NGOs and can push for accountability from government, which political parties currently seem unable to do. As one interviewee argued, linking their reports on human rights and governance to diplomatic action (as the US has done) may be the most effective means to affect democratic change.

Possibilities to strengthen political society could for instance originate from the successful interparty meetings organised for women and youth, where the ideological differences were overcome during the trainings offered. These were mostly implemented on a local level. Following the decentralisation process in Morrocco this promises to be a road to follow. The need for a clearer programmatic distinction between the different parties is something NIMD could also take into account when considering entering with a programme in the country. The positive response of the staff of political parties may be regarded as a stimulus for developing this line further.

The most promising avenue may be to support Moroccan reformers. This could include some political parties, including the PJD, but mostly NGOs, think tanks, and academic institutions.

Hivos and NIMD could support development of their capacity for critical policy analysis leading to the broadening of the political stage, by encouraging pluralism and the exchange of ideas. Other relevant actors here are the Dutch Institute in Morocco (NIMAR), IKV Pax Christi (which supported a series of dialogue between Islamists, liberals, and members of the left in Morocco in 2007) and the National Observatory on Corruption, founded by Transparency Maroc in 2007 with funding from the Dutch embassy. Dialogue is key to a better understanding and development of a pluralist society, leading to democratisation.

Egypt

Engaging in a Pyramid Power System

Annie van de Pas

Egypt's political landscape in a nutshell

Two types of rule characterised Egypt in the twentieth century. Both hereditary and military rule left their marks on Egyptian contemporary history. Egypt officially gained independence in 1922 but British troops, safeguarding British interests in the Suez Canal, remained in the country until 1952. The monarchical period (1922-1952) was typified by corruption and a lack of internal legitimacy resulting from the British influence over the kingdom which eventually paved the way for the overthrow of the monarchy by a group of army officers who called themselves Free Officers. During that same period, between 1923 and 1952, Egypt experienced a period of parliamentary democracy. Free elections were held and an independent judiciary was upheld. During this relatively free period, pluralism flourished as minorities held important political and social positions. With the Free Officers Revolution of 1952, headed by Gamal Abdel Nasser, this period of pluralism and openness came to an end.

The nationalist and anti-colonial movement under Nasser's charismatic leadership, despite its authoritarian nature, resonated widely throughout the Arab world, even though Nasser's image was damaged after the defeat of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. Egypt's political landscape changed considerably after Nasser's death in 1970, but the foundation's laid by Nasser's one party state are still partially intact. His successors, Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak both had a military background and firm control over Egypt's political institutions. Under their leadership Nasser's concept of Arab socialism was abandoned and economic liberalisation intensified. Both Sadat and Mubarak started their terms of office with a relative relaxation of political repression thus opening up the parliamentary system. Sadat

abandoned his efforts for political reform though after the mid-seventies. After Sadat's assassination by Muslim extremists in 1981, Mubarak stepped in and embarked upon a period of relative political calm until he decreed emergency law in 1988 that is still in force today.

Egypt under Mubarak can be characterised as a semi-authoritarian regime with a military power base. Various democratic institutions are in place, such as regular elections, a wide variety of political parties and a – relatively – independent judiciary. At the same time, there is no opportunity for a genuine contest over the centre of power. But there is increasing debate about how Egypt should be governed. Mubarak, currently 83, is said to be grooming his son Gamal Mubarak for his succession, thereby re-introducing hereditary rule in Egypt. Despite Egypt's lack of a public platform, this has stirred debate between advocates of military rule, hereditary rule and parliamentary rule. Many oppose a return to hereditary rule and this debate will probably intensify in the near future. Be that as it may, the incumbents have proven regime resilient throughout the years and it is to be expected that this power transfer will not necessarily breed more political openness. Power transfers may give way to either openings or closings as occurred during Mubarak's tenure. The political dynamics and the consequences of these openings and closings will be scrutinised below and linked to the prospects and possibilities for democracy support in Egypt.

A Limited Political Opening: The 2005 Elections
Over the years Egypt has witnessed a political opening for democratisation as well as experiencing a revival of authoritarianism. International pressure on Mubarak – mainly from the US – to introduce po-

litical reforms mounted in the 1990s. The increased pressure contributed to relatively free and fair elections in 2005. Vote buying, ballot stuffing and violent incidents featured regularly in the second and third polling rounds, yet the relatively fair organisation of the elections culminated in the landslide victory for the Islamist movement of the Muslim Brotherhood *(al Ikhwan al Muslimun)*. During that same period, individuals, activists and politicians from all walks of life joined in the *Kefaya* movement (*Kefaya* means enough) that called for more openness and democracy. *Kefaya* particularly protested against the potential succession of President Hosni Mubarak by his son Gamal Mubarak. It was expected that this opening would spark off a more serious process of democratisation, yet these hopes proved to be short-lived. International pressure subsided and the Egyptian regime increasingly refocused on the succession of Hosni Mubarak – and a subsequent trouble free transfer of power. Political freedoms and reforms were of less concern for the regime. The repression and detention of Egyptian bloggers and members of the Muslim Brotherhood illustrate this.

The 2007 Constitutional Reform
Pressure to revise Egypt's 1971 constitution and to end the emergency law decreed by Mubarak in 1988 mounted in the 1990s. International and internal pressure from oppositional parties and groups to review the constitution, as well as a deteriorating economic situation in the new millennium gave impetus to a government-controlled constitutional reform process in 2007. Many Egyptian democracy activists and opposition movements devoted themselves to the anticipated political reforms that generated some positive results, such as entrenching the power of parliament. Yet, all in all, the positive results did not outweigh the negative outcomes

of the constitutional reform. The 34 amendments to the Egyptian constitution did not contribute to greater freedom and democratisation. The amendments did not limit the number of presidential terms. Furthermore, the new constitution stipulated a ban on the creation of political parties based on religion and security powers were significantly enlarged.

The amendments included a new, less democratic, election law and did away with the need for the judicial supervision of individual ballot boxes. It furthermore granted the president the power to refer terrorist cases to any judicial authority of his choice – including military tribunals whose verdicts are not subject to appeal. Many opposing the amendments felt that several elements of the emergency law – still in place today – had become permanently enshrined instead of annulled. According to critics the amendments consolidated Mubarak's position instead of redefining the balance of power. The amendments were adopted by the Egyptian parliament where the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) has a comfortable two-thirds majority. The outcomes of the constitutional reform process mark the end of a period of political opening that commenced in 2003. The reforms were also put to a national referendum; officially 27% of the population was said to have cast a vote. Yet according to critics this would not have been more than 5% of the franchised population.

Parties suffer from internal weaknesses and conflicts. These internal weaknesses have contributed significantly to the lack of popularity of secular parties in Egypt.

Actors

Political Parties: Elitist Parties versus Grass Roots Movements

Egypt has a wide variety of registered parties of which 24 are registered. Much remains to be desired with regard to the functioning of (secular) political parties in Egypt. Political parties are restricted by national regulations and strict legal boundaries. A major hindrance in this regard is the Political Party Affairs Committee (PPAC). This organ, whose members are appointed by the leader of the ruling National Democratic Party, can decide whether a party is allowed to exist or not. Eight out of its nine members are handpicked by the NDP and President Mubarak, thus placing control over political parties in the hands of the ruling party. The PPAC sets conditions and criteria for the establishment of parties, which the new parties often cannot abide. Since the constitutional reform of 2007 political activities and the establishment of a political party based on religion is forbidden. This law is a powerful tool enabling the committee to exclude potentially powerful and popular religious movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood. But other parties as well, such as the communist party, failed to obtain a license.

Apart from legal restrictions that hamper political life, parties suffer from internal weaknesses and conflicts. These internal weaknesses have contributed significantly to the lack of popularity of secular parties in Egypt. Many parties have no organisational capabilities, suffer from internal bickering, lack internal democratic mechanisms and are characterised by an ageing leadership. This leads to party proliferation and no recognisable programmatic identity. Apart from the NDP, the ruling party, a couple of well-known established parties, such as the Progressive National Unionist Party (*Whiz al Tagammu' al Watani al Taqadomi al Wahdawi*, socialist party) and the New Wafd (*Hizb al Wafd al Jadeed*, liberal party) have a long political history. Despite their history, they lack political vision and large grass root support. This is illustrated by the outcome of the relatively free elections held in 2005, where the Muslim Brothers scored 20% of the votes, despite only fielding candidates in 30% of its constituencies. The National Unionists and New Wafd only garnered 0.4% and 1.3% respectively. The decline of the secular parties is also connected to the system of regime co-optation (see text box in the introductory chapter). Many secular parties have been tempted to accept rewards, in financial and influential terms, by the regime. They lost political independence and are co-opted by the ruling elite. The same applies to a large extent to Egypt's civil society. Furthermore, disapproval and fear of the Muslim Brotherhood has in some cases resulted in secular parties siding with the regime on (undemocratic) issues of national security instead of pressing for democratic solutions. Many secular parties have therefore rendered themselves irrelevant and hardly appeal to the Egyptian voter.

New Political Players

A couple of younger political parties appear to have more outspoken agendas, yet these parties thus far lack a sizeable grass roots support base. The Democratic Front Party was established in 2007 and is currently a prominent liberal party with a relatively concrete agenda for democratic reform. Interestingly enough, its founders are an active NDP member, Osama al Ghazali Harb, and a former cabinet minister, Yehia el Gamal. Both resigned from the NDP due to disagreement with the NDP's political course and poor human rights track record.

The most successful opposition movement is the Muslim Brotherhood.

The Democratic Front can be considered an elitist party that is not expected to attract many votes. Another interesting liberal contester is the Al Ghad Party (Tomorrow Party) led by Ayman Nour. Nour entered the arena as a second presidential candidate in the 2005 presidential elections with an estimated 7.5% of the votes. However, in other elections Al Ghad received far more modest electoral gains. Al Ghad also has an elite based constituency rather than an embeddedness in diverse social strata of society. Nour has been jailed several times and was only recently released after serving three years in prison – according to many a gesture of appeasement with the Obama administration. Currently, his political activities are still very much curtailed by the incumbent regime and his freedom of movement remains limited.

Another new political player is 'Kefaya', the Egyptian Movement for Change *(el-Haraka el-Masreyya men agl el-Taghyeer)*, a protest movement that turned into a political party. Initially, Kefaya was one of the first movements in Egypt able to cross the divide between secular and Islamist politicians. Furthermore, diverse student groups have been active in the movement, which flourished between 2004 and 2005. The Kefaya movement has however failed to prolong its momentum as a result of two issues. First, the movement was unable to formulate a clear agenda for reform. Kefaya's protest was directed against Mubarak and his succession, yet the organisation failed to develop a programmatic democratic alternative that appealed to voters, activists and broader grass roots groups. Secondly, the movement suffered from internal conflicts which led to a divorce between its secular and Islamist followers as well as divisions between its secular members. In several ways Kefaya's decline is emblematic of

the problems that many political parties as well as civil society organisations experience in Egypt. Intra-party democratic mechanisms or internal conflict resolution procedures are absent, personal conflicts over power and strategy take the upper hand, and a reform agenda remains underdeveloped.

Egypt's Key Oppositional Force:
The Muslim Brotherhood
The most successful opposition movement is the Muslim Brotherhood. The Muslim Brotherhood was established in 1928 by Hassan al Bannah as a social movement centering on missionary activities *(Da'wa)*, the true call, and charitable work. It became politically involved during the monarchy and was twice banned for terrorist attacks in 1948 and 1954. Since the 1970s it has denounced violence and since the 1980s it has adopted a more positive attitude towards political participation, taking part in general elections in 1987 with the neo-Wafd party. Since the 1990s, the Brotherhood has adopted programmatic changes, showing more acceptance of equal rights for women and their participation as candidates in elections. The people were increasingly seen as the source of power. The Muslim Brotherhood's primary ideal to install an Islamic state became less prominent. This signalled that the Brotherhood increasingly respected and followed a path of multiparty and plural democracy. In 2000 the Muslim Brotherhood returned to parliament with 17 seats, a modest yet significant first electoral gain. In 2005 the Brotherhood decided to run in 30% of the constituencies and managed to obtain 88 seats out of a total of 454 seats, equivalent to 20% of the votes. The increased parliamentary focus of the Brotherhood was linked to its previously-adopted strategy of parliamentary integration. During the 1990s, involvement in politics was increasingly

In 2007, for the first time in its history, the Muslim Brotherhood applied for party registration. It was denied registration by the PPAC which, on the basis of its new rules, denies licenses to parties based on a religious ideology.

seen as advantageous by the Brotherhood which expected to derive more influence as a parliamentary oppositional force. During this period, the Brotherhood developed an agenda for political reform rallying for more political rights and respect for the rule of law. A reformist platform was launched in 2004, calling for political, economical and judicial reforms, as well as limiting the presidential powers. The reforms were aimed at enhancing Egyptian democratic checks and balances. Therewith, the Muslim Brotherhood, albeit socially conservative, established itself as a major advocate of political reform in Egypt. The parliamentary candidates ran as independents, yet it was quite clear to the voters that they represented the Muslim Brotherhood. The Muslim Brothers have long been ambiguous about registering as a party. A decision about departing from its roots as a social movement and making a distinct division between a political and social wing generated a lengthy internal debate. This ambiguity remains part and parcel of the Brotherhood's make-up, as its social works are part of its popularity and provide the movement with access to large networks. Nevertheless in 2007, for the first time in its history, the Muslim Brotherhood applied for party registration. It was denied registration by the PPAC which, on the basis of its new rules, denies licenses to parties based on a religious ideology.

Since its electoral victory in 2005, the parliamentary involvement of the Brotherhood has lost some of its appeal. The Brotherhood's parliamentary *deconfiture* is related to a number of factors. Firstly, the Brotherhood has had difficulty influencing politics through its political participation and presence in parliament. Given the fact that parliament is dominated by a NDP majority, parliamentary opposition has its hands tied. Secondly, after the 2005 victory,

the incumbent regime left no doubt that the Brotherhood would not be allowed to run in all districts in future elections. The Brotherhood would at best be tolerated and rewarded with a modest and toothless participation in parliament, yet a bonus of becoming really politically influential was out of the question. Thirdly, the regime clamped down heavily on the Brotherhood in the post 2005 election period. Literally thousands of members and important political figures and spokespeople were incarcerated between 2006 and 2009, conservatives and reformers alike, thereby increasingly instigating major caveats in the organisational structure of the Brotherhood. Recently, for the first time since the reign of Nasser, members of the Guidance Office, the Brotherhood's highest decision-making organ, have been arrested. This increased repression is alarming.

All of the above has reinforced the stance of those Muslim Brotherhood members who are of the opinion that engaging in parliamentary politics does not serve the movement particularly well. Those members increasingly wonder if the heavy toll that the movement pays for its increased political participation is not too high and prefer to opt for an emphasis on an extra-parliamentary role. This interpretation is linked to the long-standing internal divisions within the Brotherhood. The so-called reformist or moderate current is outspoken in its support for participating in parliamentary politics as a parliamentary opposition. So-called conservative members tend to emphasise the social role of the movement and contemplate a return to social activities and street politics, such as demonstrations. This conservative wing is gaining ground. A first example of a return to conservatism within the Brotherhood is its 2007 draft party platform. Its contents were presented as a general outline for

further discussion, yet internal divisions surfaced as many reformers openly denounced various controversial sections of the draft party platform. According to the draft, Copts and women cannot hold the position of president, and a special clerical advisory board would have veto power to reverse legislation that would go against the Koran. Clearly, despite embracing democracy, ambiguities concerning women and minority rights continue to be one of the features of the Brotherhood. According to various reformers, the 2007 party platform was not properly discussed and prepared internally – revealing a growing influence of the conservative faction. The conservative increasing hold over the movement has recently been consolidated by the election of new members of the Guidance Office who all represent the conservative bloc. One could say that the 2007 platform marks a clear departure from the reformist and moderate tone of the 2004 platform. It demonstrates that the Brotherhood's interpretation of democracy has returned to a conservative stance which is not that congruent with universal perceptions of democracy. Nonetheless, it is relevant to note that the ambiguities towards the position of women and minorities displayed in the 2007 platform apply to larger parts of the Egyptian population as well, as the section on perceptions of democracy will demonstrate.

The Brotherhoods' moderate and conservative wings, as well as its younger and older members have clashed more than once. Yet this has never resulted in a major party split in the past 25 years, with the exception of one group of outspoken reformists who attempted to set up a new, reformist party in 1990s. The lack of success with registering the *Al Wasat al Jadid* (the New Centre) party in 1995 can perhaps partially account for the preser-

vation of unity amongst the Brotherhood which takes care to keep its ranks closed. The Wasat Party was founded by outspoken reformist Muslim Brothers whose aim was to establish an Islamic-oriented but arguably less Islamist and more moderate political party, including Copts in its party management. Yet Al Wasat has thus far not been allowed to develop party activities by the PPAC. The main difference between the Wasat Party and the Muslim Brothers is that Al Wasat is based on Islam as a culture and value system, whereas the Brotherhood sees Islam as an intrinsic part of a political and social system. There are nevertheless indications that the Brotherhood is internally more divided than ever, as the power struggle between the conservative members of the Guidance Office and the Supreme Guide (Mahdi Akef) over the replacement of one of the members of the Guidance Office is currently fought out openly in the Egyptian media. This unprecedented openness signals that internal rifts over the Muslim Brotherhood's future internal and external course are intensifying.

The Brotherhood, also a social and charitable movement, increasingly faces competition outside the political arena. Apolitical Salafist movements are increasingly coming to the fore in Egypt. These movements are characterised by a strict obedience of Islamic rules and regulations based on early Islamic periods and the time of Prophet Muhammad. Several Salafi movements (albeit not in all cases well organised) fulfill charitable and social roles, just as the Brothers do. In some cases these groups have close relations with the Egyptian state and are sponsored by the state to form an apolitical counterweight to the Brotherhood. Several apolitical Salafis have criticised the Muslim Brotherhood for apostasy. These movements do not interfere with

67,000 Facebook members joined the 6 April movement.

politics, but this is not to say that they will remain apolitical. Given Egypt's history of Salafism, a return to political Salafi Islamism cannot be ruled out.

Democratisation
Growing Discontentment: The Rise of the Disenfranchised
The lack of performance of secular political parties, the crack down on the Brotherhood and the tightening of Mubarak's grip on political life are disheartening signs in a semi-authoritarian state that is focusing on regime maintenance rather than opening up its system. What is particularly bothersome in this regard is the apparent lack of political alternatives. At the political level – taking the absence of meaningful secular parties into account – a dangerous vacuum exists between political Islam and the ruling party. Even worse is a growing dissatisfaction of Islamists relating to the outcomes of political (non) participation and the issue of Mubarak's succession. The stagnation of the political system can fuel increasing political disengagement on the one hand, while public discontent and social unrest are mounting on the other.

The growing civil unrest is related to Egypt's high unemployment rates and the uneven distribution of economic wealth amongst its people. Massive strikes and demonstrations have regularly taken place in Egypt's major cities in the past two years. The biggest upheaval resulted in a massive demonstration on 6 April 2008 in the city of Mahalla al Kubra. This strike was organised in collaboration with a number of labour unions, political parties (including Kefaya, Al Wasat, and the Dignity Party Hizb Al Karama, a Nasserist Party) and the Egyptian Bar

Association. It started off addressing the low wages of factory workers, and culminated in a mass political event rallying political reforms. Parties as well as civil society – this time the Muslim Brotherhood included – tried to revamp the 6 April strike in 2009. Yet without significant success, as regime measures to avert mass demonstrations were largely successful and the organisers of the protest failed to collaborate with grass roots actors to ensure a mass turnout for the demonstrations.

The 6 April demonstrations did reveal the increasing use of Internet blogs and Facebook as communication tools to organise strikes: 67,000 Facebook members joined the 6 April movement. The Internet provided new ways of communication, yet it also made it easier for the Egyptian police to find and arrest key organisers in the advent of the 2009 demonstration. In addition, the Internet in Egypt is not a mass communication tool since most underprivileged Egyptians do not possess computers or Internet connections. The 6 April movement has thus increasingly been 'eliticised' by Internet users, this could be one of the reasons for the low turnout of demonstrators in 2009. Even worse, in the wake of the demonstrations some of the Facebook community members tried to dissociate the Muslim Brotherhood from the group of organisers – again discord between secularists and Islamists prevailed over a unified oppositional stance.
Massive strikes and demonstrations still take place on a regular basis throughout Egypt. They are often disconnected from political parties and movements. This could be an ominous sign of the unpopularity of parties and movements that many people do not see as representing the economic and social interests of citizens.

Diverging Perceptions of Democracy
Against Egypt's semi-authoritarian backdrop, it is difficult to establish what citizens think and what they agree and disagree on. When it comes to measuring attitudes towards democracy it is possibly even harder to collect trustworthy results. Various polls have been conducted on democracy and democratisation in Egypt, often as part of regional polling efforts. Many of them suffer from polling irregularities and are hence unreliable. Interpreting survey results remains a tricky business in the Egyptian setting. Some interesting outcomes are nevertheless included below because polling remains one of the few ways of gaining a deeper insight into popular sentiments in Egypt.

Several polls encourage support for democracy in Egypt (such as the Pew, Zogby and Maryland polls conducted between 2006 and 2008). The January 2007 Maryland poll suggests that 52% consider democracy a 'very good way' of governing Egypt and 30% say it is a 'fairly good way'. A similar positive outlook can be disseminated from the January 2009 Arab Reform Initiative poll. A majority of the respondents feel that democracy would lead to increasing stability, and that Egypt is well suited for democracy, leading to a positive impact on economic growth. Yet, at the same time, the respondents did not appreciate various freedoms that can be considered basic democratic necessities, such as the freedom to vote and freedom to participate in political and civil organisations. Different factors could explain this discrepancy, such as the growing disengagement from political parties and elections in general. The respondents' relatively low appreciation of the fairness of the recent elections suggests that such a link might exist. The poll reveals more interesting discrepancies that highlight perceptions

on democracy that differ from the universally accepted one. A large majority of respondents believe that women should have equal rights when it comes to work and education, yet only 34 per cent said that women have the same right as men to be the president of Egypt – by far the lowest score on this issue in comparison to Morocco, Jordan and Lebanon which were also part of this polling exercise. Unfortunately, polling material on minorities excluded the Egyptian sample.

The answers on women's rights issues suggest that Egyptian public opinion could very well converge with the values that the Muslim Brotherhood holds on minorities and women's rights. A World Public Opinion Poll of June 2009 indicated that three quarters of the respondents feel it is very important to live in a democracy, yet 60% also thinks that the Egyptian government should be based on a form of democracy unique to Islam, as compared to 39% who say it should be based on the universal principles of democracy. Three quarters also concur with the Brotherhood's draft party platform suggestion of a body of religious scholars that is to have veto power over laws it believes are contrary to the Koran. Two thirds state that a non-Muslim should be able to run for elected office, yet only 36% say a non-Muslim should be able to run for the office of president.

Judging from the polling results, the Egyptian population seems to have positive perceptions of democracy. Several important elements of democracy, such as a free press, personal freedoms, freedom of expression and freedom to elect are highly valued in various polls by the majority of respondents. However, the interpretation and meaning of democracy in relation to minority and

women's rights appear to diverge from established universal democratic values – as we have also seen in the case of the Muslim Brotherhood. External organisations need to take this reality into account when considering a democracy support programme in Egypt. However the precise format of political reforms, how far they should go and what they should entail, are not fully crystallised in Egypt. The diverging answers of the respondents also demonstrate that this debate is not finished and that perceptions on political reforms are still being formulated and rooted in society, a process that is slowed down by the lack of a public platform in Egypt's semi-authoritarian setting.

Assisting Democratisation and
the Eye of the Beholder
Egypt represents a case where bilateral and multilateral interests and international democracy support efforts collide. Egypt has been a regional player in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process for years, and precisely because of its neutrality and brokerage in this conflict the Egyptian state has received over USD 50 billion worth of support over the past years. The financial support for the regime contributes to the entrenchment of the incumbent rather than contributing to democratisation. Apart from this uncongenial reality, European efforts under the umbrella of the Barcelona Process and ENPI programme as well as US aided programmes in the field for democratisation through MEPI and GMEI (see text box introductory chapter) are considered to have failed for the greater part to assist democratisation sufficiently in Egypt. Apart from a short period in the advent of the Iraq war, when the US increasingly pressed for further democratisation in Egypt (resulting in the relatively fair 2005 elections), a policy that was abandoned shortly after

the commencement of the invasion of Iraq, little international pressure or conditions are attached to these costly democracy support initiatives. The new US administration has openly denounced referring to conditionality as a principle since it wants to take its relationship 'to the next level'. The new budget for democracy support reveals that significant cuts for US democracy support in Egypt are foreseen. Under these national and international conditions, democracy support can at best aim to have a modest impact in Egypt.

Against this backdrop, a wide variety of democracy support programmes are implemented in Egypt. Various external organisations, amongst which the German foundations (the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, The Friedrich Ebert Foundation and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation), USAID, the National Democratic Institute (US) and the Westminster Foundation (UK), have experience with implementing democracy support programmes throughout Egypt. These programmes focus on civil society support for human rights and women's organisations, parliamentary support initiatives, support to members of parliament through particular projects. Other initiatives include civic education projects, campaign trainings and courses for young politicians. According to most people consulted, the democracy support field is not overcrowded when it comes to political party assistance. In contrast to civil society support in which many external organisations are involved, few organisations focus on direct support to political society or have developed an approach embracing all the political actors present in Egypt. All persons consulted confirmed that external organisations work through Egyptian partner organisations, since the general public regards external assistance with suspicion.

Many democracy support efforts in Egypt are criticised for not connecting to civil and political grass roots movements but to elitist movements without a considerable constituency.

American and European aid is largely perceived as unwelcome foreign interference, a perception that has been carefully groomed and stimulated by the incumbent regime for internal legitimacy purposes. Many Egyptian partner organisations are either research institutes connected to universities or human rights and women's rights organisations, but also various other civil society initiatives partners with external agents. Politicians are involved indirectly in many of the projects carried out through these organisations.

The Inclusive Approach
Many democracy support efforts in Egypt are criticised for not connecting to civil and political grass roots movements but to elitist movements without a considerable constituency. The centres of attention are – often aid dependent civil society – elitist groups lacking considerable grass roots support. This is not thought to be conducive to democratisation in the long run, since it excludes Egypt's major political and civil players and consequently fails to have a considerable impact. The challenge for democracy support organisations is therefore to develop an inclusive approach including all relevant players, be it NGOs or political parties. Here one should note that Egypt's political and civil society is floating: banned parties can start as an NGO, NGOs can become political parties and sometimes NGOs are both NGO and a political party. A clear distinction between the two can therefore not always be made. Furthermore, external organisations need to take into account the fact that political parties as well as many NGOs are not held in high regard in Egypt and are not considered relevant actors for a process of political reform.

As regards reaching out to grass roots movements, various people consulted confirm that democracy support initiatives do not always choose the right organisations. Several civil society initiatives are dependent on foreign aid and would not exist without it. A human rights worker underscores that external organisations need to distinguish between genuine and aid-dependent human rights organisations and should select their partners carefully. Although many aid dependent human rights workers are genuine in their commitment to human rights, some are considered to be self serving rather than being genuinely dedicated to improving human rights conditions in Egypt.

Others stress that democracy support does not always manage to include representative groups, but add that this is also related to the position of these grass roots actors themselves, who 'do not need us', referring to external actors. Groups such as the Muslim Brothers have their own financial resources and prefer not to be dependent on external organisations according to one person consulted. Various interlocutors explain that – in the few cases where grass roots organisations such as the Brotherhood have been involved – moderate representatives are selected to participate in democracy support projects. Fully committed involvement of grass roots organisations in democratisation programmes can therefore be difficult and precarious, requiring a sound strategy for inclusion. However, at the level of political party assistance one should not neglect elitist groups in reaching out to grass roots movements. Given the current political vacuum in Egypt, if one wants to engage in democracy support, it is important to support both grassroots and elitist groups in order to support reviving political pluralism.

Following an inclusive approach is necessary yet challenging in Egypt.

Concerning the involvement of grass roots actors like the Muslim Brotherhood, the situation is complex. The Brotherhood does indeed have its own resources and highly values its independence. Yet at the political and parliamentary level, as well as on the level of the reformers within the brotherhood, several of its members and parliamentarians hoped for a legalisation of the movement to become a regular political force. International recognition and contacts would have helped this process, but this unfortunately has not materialised. And when international actors did seek contact with the Brotherhood on a very low profile, it met with fierce critique and resistance by the incumbent regime. The continued isolation of the Brotherhood is therefore not necessarily determined by the Brotherhood itself. External organisations, if embarking on political party assistance in an inclusive manner, including engagement with the Brotherhood, need to define terms of such engagement as well as press for recognition of the movement if they want to end the current repression of the movement. Moreover, external organisations need to realise that the window of opportunity for this engagement could close if the current clamp down on the Brotherhood continues and its increased parliamentary presence becomes too costly for the movement. Hence, timing is of great relevance.

Following an inclusive approach is necessary yet challenging in Egypt, for many reasons. Deep seated antagonism is not uncommon in Egyptian civil and political society. According to some, bridging the gap between secular and Islamist groups is 'impossible' and a bridge too far in the Egyptian context. However, this also depends on the way one approaches the matter. Strategies could be considered to avoid mishaps, such as

a regional approach, a low key approach, or possibly a more educational approach as is already being employed with young politicians, thereby ensuring that all relevant players are on board.

In general, most people consulted feel that external organisations at present do have some scope to manoeuvre in Egypt, yet there are certain red lines, in particular pertaining to the centre of power, that should not be crossed. These red lines are in flux and change over time, and, as well as creating blocks, they also open new windows of opportunity. Red lines do not only concern NGOs and political parties but also the media. Even large broadcasting stations such as Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya engage in far-reaching social topics but stay clear of directly attacking presidents and monarchs. A 2009 evaluation of the USAID programme in Egypt concluded that its programmes only garnered limited results. One of the major factors in its lack of success was the lack of support from the Egyptian government, according to an audit conducted by the USAID office. The Egyptian regime thus proves its resilience in reform. Therefore, external organisations need to have a built-in flexibility in their programmatic approaches in order to mitigate negative effects and adapt to changing operational freedoms. The experts consulted therefore advise taking small steps and avoiding overtly high ambitions when embarking on a programme in Egypt.

Conclusion

Egypt's uncongenial political landscape provides an argument for, as well as against, investing in democracy support for external organisations. Its semi-authoritarian system and the long-standing tradition of international financial support for the regime, can easily invoke a negative judgment on the effects and desirability of assistance to political society and democratisation. It is questionable if the efforts of relatively small external organisations outweigh major international interests, which tend to diverge from the goals set by democracy support organisations. Also, reaching out to grass roots organisations requires a considerable flexibility and willingness on the part of external organisations who are considering engagement with groups with whom they might not always share the same democratic views.

Not investing in democracy support in Egypt could nevertheless be harmful to Egypt's stability and international interests in the longer run. The continued and increasing isolation and repression of political Islamist grass roots actors and the upgrading of authoritarianism in Egypt could fuel a re-radicalisation of political Islam in Egypt. Viewed from this perspective, a renewed engagement with Egypt's political actors is all the more pressing. Despite all its shortcomings, the short-lived international pressure on the Egyptian regime did result in a limited opening. And as Carnegie Endowment Middle East specialist Michele Dunne successfully argued in a recent open editorial, it is a mistake to think that the international community needs to remain silent on human rights in order to appease the Egyptian regime for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Egypt shares similar interests when it comes to this peace process and as history has shown, pressure does help to create small openings. Periods of such openings have proven to produce fruitful discussions on political reforms and freedoms. Such periods are indispensable for sowing the seeds for a further democratisation and respect for human rights and freedom in Egypt.

Iran

The Development of Indigenous Democratic Opposition
in an Authoritarian Political Context

Political reforms in Iran now have so much momentum that external intervention seems irrelevant to their development. External intervention could even be a hindrance, as in Iran's political psyche the idea of political reforms supported by external sources is extremely suspicious. Iran's authoritarian ruling structure has an acute understanding of this political characteristic; this makes the situation even harder for external actors to be operative on the ground. External forces could contribute to a more effective policy on how to deal with Iran's authoritarian regime, and establish legitimate, productive and open links with leading opposition forces. This requires a proper understanding of political reform in Iran, in particular of the crucial role of Islamic political forces; hence the need to create partnerships with 'progressive Islamists'.

Iran's Political Landscape in a Nutshell

Political reform in Iran is an indigenous process dating back to the late nineteenth century, and it is characterised by alliances of secular and religious forces that gradually developed into mass movements. In the constitutional revolution (1905-11), Western-educated intellectuals and enlightened aristocrats on the one hand, and Shiite clerics and traditional merchants on the other, successfully demanded a constitution and the convention of the first parliament in Iran. The constitution created a legal basis for the formation of both religious and secular political groupings and it recognised the role of elections as a political mechanism for the development of a diversified civil society and, potentially, of a strong political society.

While the 'enlightened aristocrats' inspired a top-down trend of economic modernisation and political liberalisation, the Shiite clergy sanctified nationalist sentiments amongst the merchants and lower classes. Political conflicts undermined the partnership between these forces but the role of the British and Russian invading powers cannot be overemphasised in the failure of the constitutional revolution.

In the early 1950s Prime Minister Mohammad Mosadeq and his oil nationalisation movement created another window of opportunity for democratic reforms, but again conflicts between nationalist and religious leaders led to the failure of the movement. Mosadeq himself proved to be too optimistic with regard to the commitment of the US administration to democratic values.

The Rise of Shiite Nationalism

The Islamic revolution of 1979 was perhaps the most significant watershed in Iran's modern political history. It represented a broad coalition of secular and religious forces providing a new sense of nationalism. Given its deep roots in Iranian culture and history, Shiism not only inspired the vast community of believers, it also attracted the widespread support of secular political forces.

The revolution did not cast away the constitutional legacy. The new constitution was significantly articulate in its elevation of the role of the people in the legitimacy of the new Islamic state. In its final form, however, radical Islamists added an article that would give the new clerical elite an exclusive claim to political power. This doctrine of *velayat-e faqih* (guardianship of the jurist) effectively negated the principle of popular sovereignty.

It gave the senior Shiite scholars *(ulama)* with expertise in jurisprudence *(fiqh)* a position of religious and political guardianship over the nation. Not only did the *velayat-e-faqih* limit the liberties of the individual Shiite believers, it also undermined citizens' rights.

The concept of an 'Islamic republic' displayed this inherent ambiguity. While the nation enjoyed a God-given sovereignty, the supreme *faqih* had the authority to impose his will on the nation. In essence, the conservative clergy and militant Islamists set out to mould an authoritarian political ideology and build a theocratic state. Although inspiring resistance within the revolutionary ranks, the charisma of the leader of the revolution and founder of the republic, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, and the military invasion of Iran by Iraq in 1980 forestalled the power struggle for almost a decade. During the eight-year war with Iraq, Khomeini managed to keep political factions at bay and ensure the persistence of revolutionary unity. No wonder he referred to this war as a 'gift' *(ne'mah)*.

With the end of the war and the death of the father of the Islamic Republic in 1989, the conservative Shiite clergy had more difficulty in maintaining the loyalty of the nation to a political authority derived solely from the *velayat-e faqih*. In fact, this theory attracted little support from the highly-learned Shiite scholars who were predominantly opposed to religious involvement in politics. The Shiite establishment was historically a civil society institution dependant on religious taxes paid directly by the community of believers, and had therefore, unlike some of its Sunni counterparts, never been co-opted by the state. The doctrine of *velayat-e faqih* would abolish this independence, forcing the clergy to

obey the superior ruling of one supreme jurist. While Ayatollah Khomeini's political reading of Shiite *fiqh* enhanced the political capacity of Islam in Iran's nation building efforts, the *velayat-e faqih* constrained its capacity to broaden the base of national enfranchisement. The conservative forces tended to limit national enfranchisement to the dedicated followers of the juridical authority. This would deny the right of citizenship to a rapidly-expanding class of young, highly-educated men and women demanding social security, political freedoms, and economic prosperity. However, a group of reform-minded clergy and lay intellectuals provided an alternative reading of Shiite political philosophy, whereby the best form of government would be that which would give the people primary responsibility in running their own affairs. These 'progressive Islamists' invoked the constitutional tradition whereby some senior Shiite scholars endorsed a native version of democratic rule and even praised it as the next best thing to the 'world government of justice' of the Shiite Messiah, the *Mahdi*.

The Contest for Power
From 1989 to 1997, under the presidency of the pragmatic cleric Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, Iran's Islamic revolution seemed set on the course toward its Thermidor. Yet the ideology of revolution remained uncontested. With the rise of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to the position of Supreme Leader, power gradually shifted from the traditional Shiite clerical establishment to a new generation of state-sponsored clergy, as well as a corps of military and paramilitary forces.

The position of *velayat-e faqih* required both religious and political excellence. Ayatollah Khamenei, who initially lacked the required religious standing,

addressed this handicap by building a loyal estab-lishment. This rested on a powerful ideologically-oriented military-security apparatus centring on the Islamic Republican Revolutionary Guards (IRGC), supported by the paramilitary Basij (Mobilisation), and a network of non-transparent industrial and financial holdings. By establishing an elaborate system of patronage with access to state funds, Ayatollah Khamenei essentially created a state within a state.

While President Rafsanjani tried to focus on the economy, he found himself obliged to leave the ideological basis of the polity largely untouched. His policies resulted in the emergence of a new class of capitalists and this was effectively a crea-tion of the state through selective allocation of oil income, the main basis of Iran's 'rentier' economy (see text box introductory chapter).

Meanwhile, new clerics filled the ranks of the new Islamic judiciary. A group of committed revolution-aries that had made sacrifices in the war with Iraq was also expected to play a major role in the new political and economic environment. Religious and ideological zeal soon translated into a fierce contest for political power and economic resources.

In this period demands for political reform and so-cial justice emerged within the regime itself. These critical trends were both an expression of an internal power struggle and a result of serious religious and political disputes on broader social and economic levels. Both contributed to a politico-religious cri-tique that shaped demands for political reform lead-ing to the landslide victory of the reformist Khatami in the 1997 presidential elections.

Political Reforms and the Rise of
a Democratic Agenda
The idea of 'political reform' was inspired by the challenge of sustaining an Islamic nation state in a changed local and global environment. The reform movement thereby sought to fulfil the unfinished task of nation building that had begun with the 1979 revolution but had been constrained by theocratic tendencies. The reformists thus sought to prevent the entrenchment of authoritarian/totalitarian im-pulses in the ruling regime.

Various perceptions of democracy fed the idea of political reform in a religious context. One group of religious and political reformists tried to distin-guish between divine and secular aspects of the prophetic experience, arguing that religion had no blueprint for political rule. They thus concluded that the ultimate religious goal of expanding freedom and justice was only possible in contemporary times in the context of a secular democratic political order. The reformist cleric Mohammad Mojtahed-Shabestari went as far as arguing that Muslim believers, even if they managed to win political power through elections, should not try and institute the laws of *sharia* at the cost of social and individual freedoms. Other religious intellectuals of-fered interpretations of religion compatible with the achievements of modernity. Abdolkarim Soroush, for example, believes in a religious democracy, with-out a clerical class. He stands for an ethical rule, advocating that everyone should be free to choose his or her interpretation of religion, which could then lead to political pluralism.
The continued quest of nation building in the Islamic state provided for a degree of tolerance for the criti-cal interpretations of the role of religion, and that of the Shiite clergy in particular, in political rule. After

all, the political legitimacy of the Islamic republic could not be maintained over the long haul without a sense of the nation that it would represent. This implied tolerance of a public sphere where political dissent could be 'legitimately' expressed; hence the need for broadening political society, and for a diversified civil society, where new political protagonists were raised.

The contest for power became the driving force for expanding electoral politics. Given the crucial role of the state in allocating (oil) resources, large groups of people were affected by the state's economic policies; and hence by the victory of one political tendency over the other. Elections were thus gradually taken more seriously by Iran's political and civil society.

In the 1997 elections, the main political protagonists were the politically radical, yet religiously conservative clerics, and the liberal religious reformers. The conservatives stressed the importance of consolidating the Islamic state as a theocratic regime, granting special status to the clergy. The reformists advocated a shift toward democratic values and state structures. They persisted in their loyalty to the Islamic state, but sought to revive 'liberty' and 'equality' as the primary values of the revolution. The public nature of this contest necessitated peaceful means for power sharing. Electoral politics also reflected post-revolutionary socio-economic, demographic, and communicational developments. Hence, the contenders claimed to represent public grievances. The revolutionary experience, itself characterised by a high rate of public mobilisation and politicisation, was fundamental in legitimising the new participatory politics.

By 1997 Iran had simply become much too populous, young, technologically advanced, and socially complex to remain loyal to political authority based solely on a juridical understanding of religion. The emergence of a public sphere in which elections and the free press became the scene for the formation of public opinion, was due to the favourable response of the nation to the reformist efforts to revive the emancipating and egalitarian aspirations of the earlier revolutionary and constitutional traditions. While remaining loyal to the edicts of Shiite scholastic tradition, it became a vehicle for demanding freedom of assembly, association and expression. More importantly, the reform movement created an impetus for civil society. In a matter of three years, the reform movement found a life of its own and the radical demands of the civil society actors threatened the very foundation of the authoritarian regime. The 1999 student riots were a clear example of the seriousness of this threat.

Actors
Resurgence of the Radical Islamists
From 1997, the division in the political sphere between conservative and reformist tendencies was increasingly acknowledged by the authoritarian state. Among the reformists explicitly secular views emerged, questioning the legal legitimacy of *velayat-e faqih*, while conservative radicals produced a populist discourse tinged with messianic notions of Shiism. The latter openly criticised the Rafsanjani clan and the pragmatic or even reformist clerics, whom they viewed as corrupt and serving foreign interests. The neo-conservatives were also determined to establish social order through strict enforcement of outmoded religious codes in both

In terms of change in the political culture, the civil protest movement of 2009 even surpassed the Islamic revolution.

public and private life. With their support in the Islamic Republican Revolutionary Guards and the Basij, these neo-conservative forces posed a serious threat not only to democratic forces, but also to the clergy as the main political class.

The IRGC and the Basij helped the neo-conservative forces win the 2003 local elections that brought Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to political prominence as mayor of Tehran. Thereafter, they played a significant part in the victory of Ahmadinejad in the 2005 presidential elections, and supported him yet again in 2009. Even before the contested elections of 12 June, 2009, reformist critics had warned against increasing military influence in all aspects of life, and its threat to the independence of the Shiite clergy. The prospect of militarism also concerned the prominent clergy who were worried about their own privileges. Both reformists and moderate conservatives feared radical tendencies with regard to national security, since these might bring Iran to a head-on confrontation with the US and upset internal stability by antagonising the general public who resented increasing state intrusions in both public and private life. This public resentment found its first expression in the 2009 presidential elections. These elections once again exposed the highly competitive character of Iran's political and civil society. It also tested the political and organisational capacity of the small reformist political parties and civil society organisations after four years of harsh repression. In the run-up to the elections, they managed to attract the support of almost all progressive political and religious forces, and even of some senior Shiite clerics. In the course of the campaigns and during the mass civil protests against the rigging of the elections, this alliance became a challenge to the regime. Whereas in 1997 public

demands for accountability and transparency had been expressed through the small and easily-controllable press, these were taken to a higher level in the 2009 elections because of more advanced communication technologies such as Twitter, Facebook, blogging and YouTube. But the reformist democratic rhetoric proved helpless against the repressive machine of the regime. The arrest of the reformist leaders and the shut-down of their operations has all but destroyed the organisational capacities of the reformists groups.

Democratisation
Elections as an Impetus to Democratisation
While the 1997 elections gave an impetus to reforms and the formation of civil society organisations, another massive turnout in 2009 gave rise to more serious demands for social and political change. In terms of change in the political culture, the civil protest movement of 2009 even surpassed the Islamic revolution. Yet ironically, both movements resulted from the Islamic state's summoning of the 'Muslim nation' to elections. Both also used the religious language of the revolution while demanding recognition for rights as guaranteed in the constitution.

The reform movement of the late 1990s had opened up a site in the public domain for seriously challenging the absolute authority of the supreme jurist. The civil movement of the late 2000s, however, created a new political context, with more rigour to make the state accountable. The widely-recognised interpretation of the 2009 elections as a 'stolen election' meant that electoral politics ceased to be a mere instrumentality at the service of the politico-religious

The regime cannot deny or ignore the impact of the movement at the core of Iranian society.

establishment. The mass mobilisation ahead of the election made it a channel for the demands of the nation for political reform. The authoritarian regime either had to stop holding elections altogether, or to surrender to demands for free and fair elections.

The election campaign in support of reformist candidates (Mir Hossein Musavi and Mehdi Karrubi) built up social capital at an astonishing pace, and at an unprecedented scale, in Iran's civil society. In terms of political enthusiasm and intra-community trust, the 'green wave' of democracy may be regarded as a peaceful revolution, mobilised by nationalist sentiments and organised by grass roots networks established over the previous decade. The resort to brutality against the protesters not only prevented the regime from capitalising on the high turnout in elections, it even eroded much of its legitimacy acquired over the past thirty years. If the ruling system is to weather this revolution short of a regime change, it needs to make fundamental changes to persuade the public to consent to its continued rule. So far there is no sign that the regime recognises this as an urgent need.

But ultimately the regime cannot deny or ignore the impact of the movement at the core of Iranian society. The will of the nation to defend its vote through peaceful political rallies is an indication that the duality of the constitutional structure of the Islamic Republic should be resolved in the interest of popular sovereignty. Between popular demand for true sovereignty and its realisation stands the Supreme Leader. His power base has almost completely shifted from the traditional clerical establishment to the military and paramilitary organisations, with a militant group of younger Islamist ideologues (including Khamenei's son) pushing for total politi-

cal, economic and military control. However, the populist movement that brought Ahmadinejad to power in 2005 seems to be in disarray. The open attacks of Ahmadinejad against Hashemi Rafsanjani, the powerful chairman of the Assembly of Experts, comprising the most senior Shiite clergy, are a clear indication that the clergy are no longer willing to serve as a power base for Ayatollah Khamenei.

The regime is on the verge of a big change, as it faces serious difficulty in sustaining itself in the face of growing public discontent. By maintaining social order and pumping oil revenues into the economy, the regime had so far managed to bribe the nation into acquiescence. But these populist handouts (via generous subsidies on petrol, electricity, gas, bread and other basic foodstuffs), its overwhelming coercive force, and its success in maintaining a semblance of national stability in a tumultuous region do not seem to be working as effectively as in the past.

The Role of the Middle Class
The modern middle class is the leading voice of public discontent in Iran. Despite its fundamental contributions to the working of the state machinery over thirty years, it has received little in reward. The members of the middle class are also the most alienated from the regime's ideology and have suffered the brunt of social and political repression. The civil protests following the 2009 elections indicated that their pent-up demands eventually motivated them to overcome the fear of reprisal.

The constitutional revolution of the early twentieth century has inspired the Iranian modern middle class with liberal and social-democratic ideals and endowed it with a rich associational life rooted in a

A civil society relying on middle class resources may provide the environment for critical voices and a network of strong cultural, social and political NGOs.

tradition of urban guilds and professional associations. The historical independence of the Shiite religious authorities from the state has added to the moral strength of the community of believers, most of whom are members of the middle class. All this has created a public sphere that refuses to be colonised by the state, to borrow a phrase from Jürgen Habermas.

Civil society flourishes on the fertile ground of the middle class, from which the student unions, women's rights groups and intellectuals emerged. It is most sensible to secular values of sociability and governance, and hence a potential ally of Western democracies. In addition, the Iranian middle class has the widest access to new means of communication and could adapt Western cultural models to local conditions. The Islamists consider the middle class as their main enemy because the symbols of modernity penetrate even the most traditional households. The middle class though is not yet totally out of the regime's ideological orbit. Their experience with the foreign policy blunders of the West as well as their religious and nationalistic sentiments can still be used for spiritual bribery.

A civil society relying on middle class resources may provide the environment for critical voices and a network of strong cultural, social and political NGOs. Conditions for the formation of such a network have never been more opportune. Here foreign donors, too, can play a significant role. The global NGOs in particular can help in supporting victims of repression, and in helping dissidents to maintain open sources of information. They can also support the boycott of the government by civil society groups of academics, artists, human rights activists, The regime is trying to eliminate an

organised form of reform, but the social networks are likely to operate independent of official reformist groupings. New voices of dissent are emerging despite repressive measures and giving these voices a chance to be heard is a significant task that can be assisted by the global civil society. Independent media outlets that can bypass the regime's filtering of information are essential to keep the public engaged in debates about their own destiny. So far, media outlets such as the Persian programmes of the BBC and the Voice of America have become forums for Iranian dissidents to express their views. More recently, the blogs and the Internet social networks have also become both forums for political debate and a vehicle for networking and the organisation of dissidents. Also the Amsterdam-based Radio Zamaneh is popular among Iranians and held in high esteem.

The numerous Muslim believers in the ranks of the Iranian middle class have a natural proclivity towards democratic interpretations of Islam and against 'fascistic interpretations' of this religion. Opposition leaders like Musavi and Karrubi, as Muslim believers, have managed to rally a large number of young Muslims of both sexes around a colourful and lively Islam of peace against the dark and violent Islam of the vicious vigilantes. Secular and religious forces within civil society that demonstrate they are able to cooperate on peaceful change could also agree on the secularisation of the polity and non-discrimination against minorities regardless of faith, world-view or lifestyle.

Emergence of an Indigenous Democratic Opposition
The Iranian reformist forces have in fact offered a rational justification for the tolerance of dissent within

The middle class is creating an Islamic identity articulated in terms of a discursive field of political and social critique, expressed in an environment of competition where newly-constructed identity structures demand recognition.

the Islamic system as a means for the survival of the system itself. Promoting elections as the medium for peaceful assertion of demands would erode the basis for another revolutionary regime change. This wave of democracy has created opportunities for incorporating the discourse of democracy into domestic politics thus posing a serious challenge to authoritarian culture. The current civil protest movement has produced a suitable condition for the emergence of a viable democratic opposition in an Islamic political context. These processes will also have an inevitable impact on Muslim politics beyond Iran, as well as on wider global developments.

With the attempt by hard-line Islamists and ultra-conservative clergy to monopolise political power and marginalise political figures with clear religious and revolutionary credentials such as Khatami, Karrubi and Musavi, new coalitions have become possible that may pose serious challenges to authoritarian tendencies. Perhaps the most important concern of the reformist campaign is how to limit the supreme leader's authoritarian powers. The civil campaign is part of the struggle to criticise the theocratic/authoritarian interpretations of Shiite political philosophy. This enterprise has given voice to hitherto peripheral groups, such as youngsters, women, intellectuals, artists, ethnic and religious minorities, which tend to appropriate Islam in their own interest. They aim to expand the public sphere under an authoritarian ruling structure that derives its moral legitimacy from Islam. The middle class is creating an Islamic identity articulated in terms of a discursive field of political and social critique, expressed in an environment of competition where newly-constructed identity structures demand recognition. The electoral domain serves as a field of contest for capturing public support and does not

so much reflect the interests of Khatami, Musavi, Karrubi or Rafsanjani, but rather a subliminal undercurrent of public resistance against absolutist political tendencies. This resistance is now fuelling a collective effort to develop an indigenous language of democracy.

This situation poses a serious challenge for the Islamic political power as the legacy of the 1979 revolution, and for the entire enterprise of creating a religious society and polity in which new generations of committed religious believers and loyal revolutionary souls were supposed to be raised.

Conclusion
External Democracy support
If the current democracy movement manages to weather the regime's crackdown, a powerful opposition force will emerge by expressing itself through loopholes in the repressive net. It will need the support of Western democracies and global pro-democracy civil and political society in order to build up pressure to release the detained activists and opposition leaders. It will also help to expose the moral deficit of Iran's authoritarian regime by revealing its atrocities against its own citizens.

The movement's power should not be overestimated; the hard-line Islamists still command large military and financial resources. However, they no longer command the allegiance of large sections of the community of Shiite believers. The protest movement can make lasting gains only if it can contribute to the formation of alliances between moderate social, religious and political forces. International support will be crucial.

The protesters today have an easier task. They do not intend to bring down the regime: they only want to guide it in the right direction.

The activists will be prepared to live with outcomes that are a far cry from democracy, as long as they do not solidify authoritarianism. The most plausible scenario is the continuation of civil protests aimed at significant reductions in Khamenei's powers, while stopping short of demanding regime change. In this scenario political reforms will all take place within the parameters of existing laws and procedures, for which even strong conservative allies may be found within the regime itself. In this case, the armed forces will be legally obligated (and persuaded by senior clergy) to express loyalty to the nation, and the constitution will determine the extent of the power of *velayat-e faqih*. This would resolve the constitutional paradox of the 'Islamic republic' in the interest of the republic.

International expertise can help opposition forces to pursue all legal avenues to prove electoral fraud, as well as resist the effort of the regime security apparatuses to destroy evidence of atrocities. The opposition forces can also use international moral support to claim their constitutional right to free assembly, as well as in pressing for a thorough investigation into the killing of peaceful demonstrators and the role of vicious vigilante forces. Domestic and international public debate about the threat of the so-called 'fascistic' interpretations of Islam to regional and international security will also be crucial.

Debates over such issues can be disseminated through the international media, global NGOs, the blogosphere and academic circles. While opposition forces may claim time on Iran's national radio and television, external partners can offer them international podiums. The global political and civil society could also press Iran's Islamic regime to recognise democratic opposition and to put pres-

sure on the regime to abide by its international commitments under the UN Human Rights Charter. Any negotiations with the regime over the nuclear issue should be tied to human rights violations in Iran. One area that organisations like Hivos and NIMD can help Iranian activists in is the area of providing media facilities as well as retrieving material evidence revealing the regime's atrocities against its own citizens. Another way is by putting pressure on Western governments to link negotiations with Iran on the nuclear issue with human rights issues.

As long as the regime's political and economic lifelines are in the flow, the effect of public pressure would be minimal. But if the Western democracies demand it perform its obligations under the UN Human Rights Charter, such pressures taken together could press the regime to relax repression. In that case, the possibility of negotiations between Iran and the US could also present itself, not only on the nuclear issue, but also on human rights issues. Iran's democratic opposition forces can also learn many lessons from their international partners in combining their street politics of peaceful demonstrations with negotiation at the top and pressure from below, in particular through negative resistance and perhaps through strikes. Economic problems are expected to spread the political discontent of the middle class and increase the economic misery of the working class. One should recall the decisive role of the oil workers' strike in bringing down the monarchy. The protesters today have an easier task. They do not intend to bring down the regime: they only want to guide it in the right direction.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Middle East and North African region is under-going a dual process of upgrading authoritarianism and a revival of political activism. The existing systems tend to marginalise efforts that try to produce genuine reform. The question at the core of this report is: given this context, how and what role can external actors play in supporting democratic reforms in MENA?

As analysed in the preceding chapters, the impact of EU and US programmes and policies have thus far failed to make a positive contribution to democratic change. The reasons for this 'failure', as distilled from the chapters, are threefold: (i) There is an absence of coherent strategies and policies are often half-hearted; (ii) The programmes have been formulated and implemented in a top-down manner. (iii) Some groups with grassroots constituencies have not been sufficiently engaged. Therefore, the challenge for external actors is to develop and employ an approach that takes these aspects into consideration within their social political context.

An inclusive and realistic strategy needs to define and reflect regional and local stakeholders' priorities. It needs to include a wide range of actors such as political parties and civil society groups, secular and Islamist alike. However, given the uncongenial context as well as the suspicions towards external (western) actors in the region, implementing such a strategy needs to be devised realistically, without overtly high ambitions, and with a clear picture of what external actors can and may achieve.

Recurrent themes, deduced from the cases, should be taken to heart by external organisations such as Hivos and NIMD. First of all, the international context plays a significant role in all three countries

discussed in this report. With regard to the role of the international community, the Iranian case concludes by stating that any discussion on the nuclear issue should be tied to talks on human rights in the country. The Egyptian case demonstrates how external pressure from the international community has positively added to internal demands for reform, and that an absence of such pressure is negatively felt. The Moroccan case also shows that EU programmes targeting democracy support have tackled technical issues, rather than genuinely taking on issues of reform. Taking this aspect of the international context as a significant facet, it is not surprising that the period of liberalisation in Morocco and Egypt took place at the outset of the new millennium. During this period the international community pressed more actively for reforms in the region. The current decrease of this pressure might create new effects which external organisations should take into account.

External organisations, such as Hivos and NIMD, need to carefully (re)position themselves within this changing international context. They cannot fulfil the role of the international community and cannot mitigate the effects of this influence, but they need to be extremely aware of their place within this context. Where possible, external organisations need to ally their efforts directed towards internal and external pushes for reform, in order to be effective. Where this is not possible, external organisations need to be extra vigilant. The cases of Morocco and Egypt in particular show that external organisations need to approach and bond with grassroots actors in the region. This also means including Islamists when possible. Morocco is in this sense a positive example. Given its geographic position and the domestic characteristics of its Islamist movements, they are

by and large – albeit not always structurally and on personal basis – included in democracy support programmes. In Egypt (and the same holds true for, amongst others, Jordan, Lebanon, Algeria) this is not so much the case.

The lack of an inclusive approach of external organisations makes it all the more vital to devise mechanisms and criteria for connecting to embedded, often Islamist, actors that are indispensable on the road to reform. External organisations urgently need to decide how they are going to approach such actors in order to develop an inclusive approach. Opportunities are closing, as the Egyptian and Moroccan cases demonstrate. Timing is important, because, in both cases, the Islamists are losing hope in the possibility of achieving some form of power in the politically-conventional way, through parliament. Yet, continued isolation of these groups is not an option either, as this might fuel re-radicalisation in the long run. Commitment to democratisation is not only valuable for the recipient countries but also for international stability. External organisations need to decide with whom and under which conditions they are willing to work, preferably before embarking on a programme in the region. Such conditions could comprise, for example, a denouncement of violence or a pledge to abide by the democratic rules of the game.

The Morocco and Egypt cases demonstrate the unpopularity of political parties in the respective countries. Polling results suggest that both Moroccans and Egyptians view democracy positively, yet they do not think highly of political parties as adequate vehicles for democracy. Such sentiments are understandable given the lack of development of, and within, parties. There is often no identifiable

programme within political parties, leaders are ageing and, internally, there is a lot of bickering. Also, it is often made specifically difficult for organisations to freely associate and officially register as a political party. Yet political society remains a necessary ingredient for a more pluralistic democracy. In particular the Egyptian chapter demonstrates that the current political vacuum that exists there could fuel re-radicalisation. Revitalising political society is therefore still an essential levelling factor against the current political vacuum existing in Morocco, Egypt and other countries in the MENA region.

Iran presents a different case altogether. The Iranian case, a so-called authoritarian regime, presents a picture in which external actors have virtually no access whatsoever to the country. In addition, Iran's well-embedded reform movement is internally oriented. Because political parties – as we recognise them – do not exist in Iran, it is recommended that external actors need to focus on presenting civil society and political activists with an international podium and offering the possibility of exchange with international counterparts. The Moroccan case also concludes by suggesting facilitating a podium to bring reformers together. As stated in the chapter on Morocco, external organisations need to engage more with political reformers in order to be programmatically more productive. This implies that external organisations need to determine how they want to give more prominence to reformers in a future programmatic framework. The Morocco case also suggests that one should in this context focus both on political as well as civil society. In the quest for accountability from the governments, civil society can indeed play a significant role. Supporting civil society is thus one of the recommended routes for external democracy support.

This brings us to complementarity. All three cases highlight different potential focus areas. Morocco, in contrast to Egypt, finds the field for political-society support crowded, whereas in Egypt civil-society support seems to be at the core of supporting external organisations. External organisations need to investigate more thoroughly what partner organisations are planning, and look jointly for a 'complementary approach' avoiding duplicating efforts. More intensive donor coordination is also necessary in this context because, as the Moroccan case shows, the political-society support programmes appear to be either isolated or fragmented projects of a variety of organisations without active coordination between these projects. To a large extent, the same holds true for other countries as well.

Another avenue open for exploration of external organisations such as Hivos and NIMD is targeted subject specificity in democracy support. As demonstrated in this report, many programmes currently address the following issues: human rights, electoral civic education, training civil and political party activists, and campaigning. Other organisations aim at improving the preconditions for democracy such as the right to freedom of association. But very few focus on what political reforms should exactly entail. In authoritarian and semi-authoritarian settings there is scant opportunity to discuss the depth and content of reforms. This partially explains why political and civil activists are clamouring only for the resignation of Mubarak, for instance, but a clear picture of what the political landscape should look like without the incumbents often remains absent or, at best, vague (with the notable exception of Iran where a clearer picture on what reforms should include seems to have emerged amongst activists). To a large extent, the same applies for the general

populace. Civic programmes where issues of de-mocracy and reforms are tested, debated and ex-plained could also be of interest. Offering platforms to analysing alternatives could be an opportunity for external actors to explore programmatically.

To summarise, if they are dedicated to supporting democratisation in this challenging region, external organisations should look for ways to broaden the political space in the region and encourage genuine political contestation. This challenging ambition needs to be combined with a go-slow approach. External organisations have varying but limited room to manoeuvre in all three cases debated in this report and cannot employ overtly-ambitious and visible approaches – which will be thwarted by the incumbent regimes, especially when international pressure is absent. External organisations therefore need to be willing to walk this tightrope and walk it with patience.

To be able to work in the MENA region, external democracy support organisations should:

- Be extra vigilant as incumbent regimes have introduced cosmetic democratic reforms and can adapt to changing circumstances and pushes for reform. External organisations need to take this context into consideration. Where possible external organisations should align their programmes with international pressure or conditionality.
- Be inclusive in an approach. External organisations should engage (more) with embedded actors, in particular Islamists.
- Develop criteria and rules of engagement to engage with embedded groups such as islamists.
- Take stock of the unpopularity of political parties and the political vacuum that often coincides with this. As parties and movements are indispensable factors to level the playing field, external organisations need to determine sound strategies to strengthen the whole of the political party spectrum.
- Engage more with political reformers in order to be programmatically more effective, and if necessary target civil and political society simultaneously for this end.
- Be complementary to other internal and external approaches and avoid programmatic duplication. Try different programmatic approaches and roads less travelled, such as centring on the content of political reform, and what it should entail.
- Have modest ambitions and adopt a go slow approach as the freedom of movement for external organisations is limited.

Suggestions for further reading

Morocco

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Egypt

http://www.arabist.net; interesting updates on Egyptian and Maghreb politics and society

http://www.carnegieendowment.org; leads to a diverse offer of publications on democracy assistance and politics in MENA, the Arab Reform Bulletin and has MENA country profiles

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http://www.FRIDE.org contains interesting papers on EU democracy support in MENA

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Beyond Orthodox Approaches: Assessing Opportunities for Democracy Support in the Middle East and North Africa offers an exploration of how organisations like NIMD and Hivos can best support democratisation in the region. Being aware of the challenges that come with working in (semi) authoritarian settings, NIMD and Hivos jointly initiated a research trajectory on this topic.

Posing questions on the obstacles to and possibilities for democracy support in the Middle East and North Africa, *Beyond Orthodox Approaches* offers an insightful overview of the political landscape of the region and a thorough analysis of the potential programmes that external democracy support organisations could consider.

This report includes case studies from three countries: Morocco, Egypt and Iran. The insights offered in these cases, contextualised within their respective socio-political systems, echo the challenges facing other non democratic societies. The idea of looking beyond orthodox approaches is one that NIMD and Hivos believe should be explored when working in this region.