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Durable, Yet Different: Monarchies in the Arab Spring

ANDRÉ BANK, THOMAS RICHTER and ANNA SUNIK

Abstract: Over three years into the Arab Spring, the Middle East is characterized by a striking difference in durability between monarchies and republics. Beyond this difference, some significant gaps within the group of the eight Middle East monarchies have so far been overlooked. Drawing on the existing monarchy research, we first make the case that there were three distinct types of durable monarchies prior to the Arab Spring. Confronted with social and political crises, each type reacted differently to the challenges presented to them after 2011. While five “rentier” and “dynastic” Gulf monarchies (Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE (United Arab Emirates)) mainly rely on material distribution and family rule, the non-oil “linchpins” of Jordan and Morocco, attracting additional external funds, undertook constitutional changes in an attempt at procedural legitimation. The Sultanate of Oman, however, falls in between. This “linchtier” monarchy used modest material cooptation, a selected personal reshuffling at the top of the regime as well as targeted institutional adaptations. We illustrate our findings with similarly structured brief case studies of the three prototypes of Qatar, Jordan and Oman.

Keywords: Middle East monarchies, Arab Spring, Jordan, Oman, Qatar

1 Introduction

Over three years into the Arab Spring, the political upheavals in the Middle East have led to the breakdown of some authoritarian regimes and tested the durability of others. The eight authoritarian monarchies in the region, in particular, have proved strikingly durable, while a number of heads of state in authoritarian republics (Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Libya) have been ousted. While the phenomenon of widespread monarchical durability is certainly relevant, it tends to obscure the diversity that exists within the group of the eight Arab monarchies. After all, the monarchies have experienced quite different challenges to their authoritarian rule in the context of the Arab Spring. The Sunni Khalīfa monarchy in Bahrain has been under massive pressure from the primarily Shīʿī majority and survived the crisis in February and March 2011

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only with the help of a mixture of repression, family loyalty and external military support from other Gulf states as well as the acquiescence of the monarchy's Western backers. More confined compared with Bahrain but still remarkable, protests have taken place in Jordan, Kuwait and Morocco, leading to unprecedented criticisms of the ruling monarchs. The monarchies in Oman and Saudi Arabia have also experienced new forms of mobilization and activism in the context of the Arab Spring, though with less intensity. Finally, the smaller Gulf monarchies in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have remained largely calm.

This article focuses on the diverse strategies monarchical regimes have used to endure the challenges kindled by the Arab Spring. Our analysis proceeds in three steps. First, we make the case that there were *three* distinct types of durable monarchies in the Middle East prior to the Arab Spring: a first group consisting of the five Gulf monarchies of Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, a second group consisting of the non-Gulf monarchies of Jordan and Morocco and a third, hybrid category, represented by the Sultanate of Oman, which blends some features with the other Gulf monarchies, for example, the oil wealth, and others with Jordan and Morocco, for example, the non-dynastic character of political decision-making. Our argument about three distinct types of monarchy supplements the commonly held *dualism* in Middle East monarchy studies, which typically distinguishes the Gulf monarchies, including Oman, from Jordan and Morocco.¹

Next, we examine the cases of Jordan, Oman and Qatar in the context of the Arab Spring. The aim of this section is to exemplify the character of each monarchical type and then to draw some comparative conclusions about the monarchies' durability after 2011. Our findings indicate that the monarchies' reactions to regime challenges during the Arab Spring resemble their politics prior to the unrest. In other words, the differential interplay between the key aspects of external support, rents and cooptation, family participation and legitimacy claims continues to be relevant. At the same time, a number of monarchical reactions have been unprecedented. First, the Arab Spring has led to extensive inter-monarchical cooperation through financial, diplomatic, and even military support. Second, there has been an extraordinary rise in state expenditures. Third, the Arab Spring has provoked constitutional reforms. Not all of the monarchies are equally engaged in all of these activities. While all of the oil rentier states increased state spending, constitutional reforms were limited to Jordan, Morocco, and to some extent Oman. Over three years after the beginning of the Arab Spring, Arab monarchies are thus durable, yet different.

The final section of the article discusses some lessons for the debate about the current state of monarchies in the Middle East and their potential future(s).

2 Middle East monarchies before the Arab Spring

Studies of the remarkable durability of "ruling and reigning"² authoritarian monarchies in the Middle East have emphasized four central explanatory factors. First, all Middle East monarchies have profited from different types and levels of external support. Second, many monarchies have access to large rents and are able to efficiently distribute them to main target groups, thereby buying political loyalty. Third, Middle East monarchies have developed ways of including

¹ Herb, *All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution, and Democracy in the Middle Eastern Monarchies* (1999); Lucas, "Monarchical Authoritarianism: Survival and Political Liberalization in a Middle Eastern Regime Type", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 36.1 (2004), pp. 103–19; Luciani, "Allocation vs. Production State", in *The Rentier State*, eds Beblawi and Luciani (1987), pp. 63–84; Barany, "Unrest and State Response in Arab Monarchies", *Mediterranean Quarterly* 24.2 (2013), pp. 5–38.

² Anderson, "Dynasts and Nationalists: Why Monarchies Survive", in *Middle East Monarchies: The Challenge of Modernity*, ed. Kostiner (2000), pp. 53–70.

family and/or core elite members in political decision-making. And fourth, monarchies have continuously employed traditional, religious and procedural legitimacy claims to justify their rule vis-à-vis broader parts of the population.

(1) Studies of the monarchies' foreign support put on the center stage the external military support of global powers like the USA or, historically, the UK as well as that of regional powers, such as Iran or Saudi Arabia. There is serious doubt that Oman could have successfully resisted the Dhufār rebellion of the 1970s or that the Kuwaitī monarchy could have made a political return after the Iraqi invasion and occupation of August 1990 without the direct intervention of external powers. But "softer" forms of external support are also highly relevant. Laurie Brand and Sean Yom stress the importance of largely unconditional foreign aid for financing the repression and cooptation of the domestic opposition, citing evidence from Jordan.³ Military aid and arms deals are additional ways to cement the support of foreign powers like the USA, especially with regard to the oil-rich monarchies on the Arabian Peninsula.⁴ At the same time, military aid and arms deals do not obviate the need for domestic expenditures for funding the repression or cooptation of the domestic opposition. Sean Yom and Gregory Gause have recently argued that a combination of US "diplomatic assurances, economic grants and military interventions" has decisively contributed to the monarchies' recent durability.⁵ However, too excessive reliance on external support can also delegitimize and thus destabilize a regime, as was the case with the massive dependence on US security assistance by Saudi Arabia after the Gulf War in 1991. Ultimately, US troops had to leave the country to avoid regime-threatening escalation.

(2) Rentier-state perspectives concentrate on the political economy of the so-called oil monarchies.⁶ According to Giacomo Luciani, the durability of Middle East monarchies can be explained by the continuous and high rent influx, which results from the export of oil and natural gas to world markets. It also relates to the rent payments made to loyal and geostrategically important clients, such as Jordan and Morocco, by external powers.⁷ The two approaches are complementary, as the monarchies' rent revenues based on exporting natural resources are supplemented by external financial support.⁸ Rent revenues, so the argument goes, are distributed to key social groups in order to stabilize political rule. Rentierism tries to explain the consolidation of monarchical rule by highlighting the continuous capacity of targeted state spending. The "hard case" in this regard is the anti-Shah revolution of 1979 in Iran, where the monarchical regime maintained an increasing level of rent income and state spending during the 1970s. Revenues from the export of oil were also the dominant element of state funds in pre-revolutionary Iraq during the 1950s, as well as in Libya one decade later.

(3) The third perspective is directed specifically against a narrow rentierist view. In his groundbreaking volume, *All in the Family*, Michael Herb argues that the conditions for

³ Brand, *Jordan's Inter-Arab Relations: The Political Economy of Alliance Making* (1995), pp. 81–3; Yom, "Jordan: Ten More Years of Autocracy", *Journal of Democracy* 20.4 (2009), p. 163.

⁴ Gause, *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States* (1994), p. 127.

⁵ Yom and Gause, "Resilient Royals: How Arab Monarchies Hang On", *Journal of Democracy* 23.3 (2012), pp. 74–88, p. 85; Frisch makes a similar argument, explaining monarchical durability in the Middle East as a combination of the geostrategically important position of the respective state (external dimension) and the maintenance of the broad regime coalition supporting the monarchy (internal dimension). Frisch, "Why Monarchies Persist: Balancing between Internal and External Vulnerability", *Review of International Studies* 37.1 (2011), pp. 167–84.

⁶ Luciani, "Allocation vs. Production State", pp. 63–84; Gause, *Oil Monarchies*.

⁷ Luciani, "Oil and Political Economy in International Relations of the Middle East", in *International Relations of the Middle East*, ed. Fawcett (2009), pp. 81–103.

⁸ Yom and Al-Momani, "The International Dimensions of Authoritarian Regime Stability: Jordan in the Post-Cold War Era", *Arab Studies Quarterly* 30.1 (2008), pp. 39–60; Yom and Gause, "Resilient Royals".

monarchical durability can be best understood when the peculiarities of royal family politics are taken into account, in particular regarding the inclusion or non-inclusion of parts of the family in key decision-making institutions.⁹ Following Russell Lucas,¹⁰ Herb differentiates between so-called “dynastic monarchies” and “linchpin” or “non-dynastic” monarchies. In the five dynastic monarchies of the Persian Gulf, the ruling families determine political decision-making by consensus. The family acts as a “ruling institution” and monopolizes the central positions in both the administration and the security apparatus.¹¹ In the lynchpin monarchies of Jordan and Morocco, as well as the collapsed monarchies of Egypt (1952), Iraq (1958), Libya (1969) and Iran (1979), the monarch — with the support of the respective royal court (*al-dīwān al-malikī*) — maintains the balance between other influential institutions like the army or the parliament. This is the crucial difference to dynastic monarchies: The lynchpin around which other centers of political power revolve is the monarch himself — and not the royal family. While generally convincing, Herb’s perspective does not sufficiently substantiate the core argument that family participation alone shields monarchies from breaking down. All dynastic monarchies are also oil-rich, and thus it is impossible to separate family participation from high rent income and large public spending schemes when discussing the question of durability. The analysis also does not adequately explain the durability of the non-dynastic monarchies in Jordan and Morocco. There, non-family-based mechanisms for elite cooptation must be employed, drawing on the support of core groups, such as influential tribes, political parties or the military and security apparatuses, more directly. The aim of core personnel reshufflings in and between these core groups is to strengthen certain elite segments and to weaken others.¹²

(4) The fourth prominent perspective on monarchical durability addresses the use of specific forms of legitimation.¹³ Oliver Schlumberger differentiates between different “core competences” of legitimation for durability.¹⁴ Religious legitimacy claims are of particular importance in Jordan, Morocco and Saudi Arabia as they can be employed to delegitimize the Islamist opposition, in particular in times of political crises.¹⁵ Tradition and in particular tribal networks as well as kinship symbols and networks can also be considered necessary (re)sources of legitimation, as indicated by the continuing presence of primordial patterns of political exchange and communication among the Gulf monarchies.¹⁶ Material legitimation refers to the political-economic dimension in the allocation or distribution of state resources — the key to ensuring the loyalty of influential social groups. An additional component, which is mostly used in more liberalized monarchies, can be called procedural legitimation. This entails the (re-)introduction of

⁹ Herb, *All in the Family*.

¹⁰ Lucas, “Monarchical Authoritarianism”.

¹¹ Herb, *All in the Family*, p. 235.

¹² Bank and Schlumberger, “Jordan: Between Regime Survival and Economic Reform”, in *Arab Elites. Negotiating the Politics of Change*, ed. Perthes (2004), pp. 35–60.

¹³ Hudson, *Arab Politics: The Search for Legitimacy* (1979); Schlumberger, “Opening Old Bottles in Search of New Wine: On Nondemocratic Legitimacy in the Middle East”, *Middle East Critique* 19.3 (2010), pp. 233–50.

¹⁴ Schlumberger, “Old Bottles”, pp. 239–46.

¹⁵ Krämer, “Good Counsel to the King: The Islamist Opposition in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Morocco”, in *Middle East Monarchies: The Challenge of Modernity*, ed. Kostiner (2000), pp. 257–88. In Jordan, the ruling Hashemite king as well as the Alaoui dynasty in Morocco can trace their descent to the Prophet Muhammad. The Hashemites additionally style themselves as protectors of Al-Quds (Jerusalem), while the Al Saud consider themselves the “guardians of the two holy sites” Mecca and Medina and promote a strict conservative brand of Hanbali Islam (“Wahhabism”) as a state ideology.

¹⁶ Demmelhuber, “Political Reform in the Gulf Monarchies: Making Family Dynasties Ready for the 21st Century”, *Orient* 52.1 (2011), pp. 6–10. On tribalism, see the classical study by Khoury and Kostiner (eds), *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East* (1990).

parliamentary life, albeit controlled, as well as gradual top-down reforms ranging from constitutions, laws concerning parties, media freedom or the introduction of elite-led reform committees, as in Morocco and Jordan in the 1980s.¹⁷ Similar use of participatory elements has been displayed in the smaller Gulf monarchies. Here, the *majālis* or *dīwāniyyā*, by following agreed-upon procedures, are also part of a legitimation of rule.¹⁸

Whereas the long-term durability of monarchies in the Middle East is mostly explained with respect to one of the four above-mentioned aspects,¹⁹ explanations based on the combination of various elements are rare. An exception to this is work by Sean Yom and Gregory Gause, who have recently identified rentierism, foreign patronage and cross-cutting coalitions of popular support as three central aspects to account for monarchical durability in the region.²⁰ Our macro-comparative analysis of all Middle East monarchies from 1945 to 2011 reveals three main groupings among the eight surviving monarchical states.²¹ In Table I, we summarize some of our main findings.

Whereas rents and elaborate family participation are of overwhelming importance for explaining monarchical durability in Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the factors that matter most for Jordan and Morocco are military and financial support by external actors combined with religious-traditional legitimacy claims. Oman falls between the two categories as the sultan relies on a traditional legitimacy claim, which is supported by his close relationship to the religious sector. At the same time, contrary to the “dynastic monarchies” of the Gulf, the sultan rules without the support of close family members but still presides over a (albeit poorer) rentier state. Oman does not fit neatly into the rentier-dynastic monarchy category, but neither is it a typical linchpin monarchy like Jordan or Morocco.

3 Comparing monarchies in the Arab Spring: Jordan, Oman and Qatar

Since early 2011, the Arab Spring has defined politics in the Middle East’s eight authoritarian monarchies. The three monarchies we present as case studies — Jordan, Oman and Qatar — exemplify each of the three groups illustrated above: the poorer linchpin monarchies, the dynastic rentier states in the Gulf and hybrid “linchtier” Oman. When faced with crisis and pressures to reform, Jordan, Oman and Qatar turned to their established toolkits, which had been formed and tested in previous periods. The rentiers raised public salaries and subsidies while continuing to rely on extensive family networks. Linchpins Jordan and Morocco, only able to distribute modest amounts of public spending and subsidies, launched constitutional and electoral reform

¹⁷ Albrecht and Schlumberger, “Waiting for Godot: Regime Change Without Democratization in the Middle East”, *International Political Science Review* 25.4 (2004), pp. 371–92; Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World: Incumbents, Opponents, and Institutions* (2005). On “committeisation”, see Bank, “Rents, Cooptation, and Economized Discourse: Three Dimensions of Political Rule in Jordan, Morocco and Syria”, *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 14.1/2 (2004), pp. 155–79.

¹⁸ Demmelhuber, “Political Reform”. In addition, elections play an increasingly important role in many Gulf monarchies since the Arab Spring, see Zaccara, “Comparing Elections in Gulf Cooperation Council Countries after the Arab Spring: The United Arab Emirates, Oman, and Kuwait”, *Journal of Arabian Studies* 3.1 (2013), pp. 80–101.

¹⁹ For example, Herb, *All in the Family*; Hudson, *Arab Politics*; Luciani, “Allocation vs. Production State”; Luciani, “Oil and Political Economy”.

²⁰ Yom and Gause, “Resilient Royals”.

²¹ Bank, Richter, and Sunik, “Long-Term Monarchical Survival in the Middle East: A Configurational Comparison, 1945–2012”, *Democratization* online first (2013), pp. 1–22, which extensively covers cases of broken-down monarchies to establish the conditions for both survival and breakdown. In contrast, this paper provides a closer look at the strategies of survival and therefore only includes the durable monarchies in the analysis.

Table I: Middle East monarchies before 2011.

	External support	Rents and cooptation ^a	Family/elite participation	Legitimation
Jordan and Morocco	Diplomatic and financial support by Western powers	Semi-rentiers dependent on foreign aid; modest state spending schemes	No family participation; rotation of core elite groups in decision-making	Religious and traditional forms of legitimation; some participatory elements via parliaments
Oman	Diplomatic, military and financial support by Western powers	Moderate rent revenues from oil and gas exports; intermediate state spending schemes	Marginal family participation in decision-making; low degree of elite rotation	Traditional forms of legitimation; informal participatory elements, for example, proceduralism via <i>shūrā</i> and <i>majlis</i> ; few formalized participatory elements via consultation councils
Bahrain, Kuwait, ^b Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE	Diplomatic, military and financial support by Western powers	Moderate (Bahrain) to high rent revenues from oil and gas exports and extensive state spending schemes	Extensive family participation in decision-making	Barely any religious form of legitimation (except for Saudi Arabia); traditional and informal participatory elements, for example, proceduralism via <i>shūrā</i> , <i>majlis</i> and <i>dīwāniyyā</i> ; weak formalized participatory elements

^a Our understanding of the rentier state goes beyond the classical definition by Luciani, “Allocation vs. Production State”, where he defines the threshold of 40% of state revenues, which should originate from primary commodities in order to be classified as a rentier state. More recent literature argues that rent abundance, that is the per capita value of available rent revenues, is a better indicator of the distribute capacities of the state. See, for instance, Dunning, *Crude Democracy: Natural Resource Wealth and Political Regimes* (2008) and Basedau and Lay, “Resource Curse or Rentier Peace? The Ambiguous Effects of Oil Wealth and Oil Dependence on Violent Conflict”, *Journal of Peace Research* 46.6 (2009), pp. 757–6. Relying on data for the period between 1970 and 2010 provided by Haber and Menaldo, “Do Natural Resources Fuel Authoritarianism? A Reappraisal of the Resource Curse”, *American Political Science Review* 105.1 (2011), pp. 1–26, Oman had an average annual per capita income from hydrocarbons of \$3,084, Bahrain of \$3,848, Saudi Arabia of \$6,319, Kuwait of \$18,035 and Qatar of \$25,053. We are grateful to one reviewer for advising us to be more precise on this issue.

^b Kuwait — and to some extent also Bahrain — have a tradition of formalized participation tradition not unlike the linchpin monarchies; however, the primary line of legitimation is the one based on cooptation through the redistribution of oil profits, while tribal-traditional or formalized participatory legitimation is secondary.
Source: Authors’ own compilation.

campaigns aimed at pacifying the opposition and boosting their procedural legitimacy. Oman increased public spending substantially while initiating a modest constitutional reform process.

3.1 Jordan

The Arab Spring, the first and foremost events in Egypt, immediately impacted the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, where King ‘Abd Allāh II has ruled since 1999. Following violent clashes in the rural and tribal-dominated areas, “street politics” in Jordan increasingly shifted in

January and February 2011 to the cities of Amman and al-Zarqā'. The urban Muslim Brotherhood, which represents the traditional opposition in Jordan and advocates a constitutional monarchy with a real division of powers, gathered momentum. The Hashemite regime permitted demonstrations to take place, but under a massive state security presence. Alongside the traditional opposition, the Youth of 24 March and the *hīrāk* emerged as new and overwhelmingly Transjordanian movements during the spring of 2011. In the end, however, the protests in Jordan did not achieve the intensity or breadth of those in many other states in the region. The respective interplay of the four explanatory aspects of external support, rents and cooptation, family and elite participation, and the regime's changing legitimacy claims goes a long way toward explaining why the Jordanian monarchy has thus far survived the uprisings of the Arab Spring.

3.1.1 *External support*

For the Hashemite monarchy in Jordan, the provision of external support has been a crucial structural factor in explaining its durability ever since the establishment of the state in the early 1920s. Long considered the "epitome of artificiality"²² in the Middle East, Jordan lacks basic resources, foremost minerals, water and food-stock. As a non-oil monarchy, the Hashemite regime has tried to exploit Jordan's geostrategic location in the midst of the Middle East, directly bordering the conflict hotspots of Israel/Palestine, Iraq and, most recently, Syria. Jordan's location and the monarchy's generally pro-Western outlook have been rewarded by substantial external support in the forms of military and economic aid as well as diplomatic support, primarily from the USA but also from different European states and Japan. Together with the transitional republics Egypt and Tunisia and the pro-Western non-oil monarchy of Morocco, Jordan has been included in the G8's assistance package of \$38 billion for 2011–13. Even though Jordan will receive only a portion of this massive sum, its very inclusion in the "lucrative club" testifies to its crucial standing in Western geostrategic thinking vis-à-vis the Middle East. Overall, the continuous and increasing external support coming from outside the region has shielded the Hashemite monarchy from substantial and continuing criticism from within Jordanian society, and especially from within its traditional Transjordanian base. Jordan's buffer state position is furthermore important for regional actors, most notably Saudi Arabia and the other GCC states, who also support their poorer neighbor. At the onset of the Arab Spring in 2011, both Jordan and Morocco were invited to join the GCC. The inter-monarchical support to Jordan did not stop there, as the GCC states pledged to provide \$5 billion of aid over a period of five years.

3.1.2 *Rents and cooptation*

Even though Jordan does not enjoy considerable revenues from exporting natural resources, in the context of the Arab Spring it has used state revenues to coopt crucial social support groups. Early on, as events began to unfold, King 'Abd Allāh II raised public sector wages, hoping to minimize discontent within the state bureaucracy. Second, he decided to rescind previously announced subsidy cuts on fuel and cooking gas. These measures were aimed at preventing social protests from spreading to poorer neighborhoods, including the countryside, from which the traditional Hashemite support base hails. As a third part of his cooptation strategy, King 'Abd Allāh II has visited major tribal confederations since early 2011, promising

²² Krämer, "Good Counsel".

future investments and emphasizing their continued importance in monarchical Jordan. Overall, the effects of the monarchy's cooptation strategy in the context of the Arab Spring have been inconclusive. While it has appeased members of the state bureaucracy, at least in the short term, it has not prevented protests from emerging in the rural and tribal-dominated countryside.

3.1.3 *Family and elite participation*

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has been described as a linchpin monarchy,²³ in which the king — and not the royal family — rules and reigns. In Jordan, elite politics thus serve less to produce consensus within the ruling family, for example, by rewarding certain sons or brothers from a specific family line. Rather, the aim of core personnel reshufflings is to strengthen certain elite segments and to weaken others.²⁴ This pattern of elite politics has clearly been at play in Jordan since the beginning of the Arab Spring, when King ʿAbd Allāh II accelerated the personnel reshufflings, most strikingly by appointing four different prime ministers over the course of two years. On 1 February 2011, as an early concession to the emerging protest movement, he sacked the then prime minister Samīr al-Rifāʿī and replaced him with Maʿrūf al-Bakhīt from the ʿAbbādī tribe, the largest Transjordanian confederation. As a general, al-Bakhīt represented the security apparatus and his appointment signaled that substantial political reform was not to be expected. After massive criticism for his conservatism, al-Bakhīt resigned on 17 October 2011, and was succeeded by ʿAwn al-Khaṣāwna a week later. As a vice president of the International Court of Justice, al-Khaṣāwna represented a more liberal position. He initiated dialog forums with opposition groups. Though loyal to the king, in the end al-Khaṣāwna was considered politically too independent. He resigned in early May 2012 and was succeeded by Fāyiz al-Ṭarāwna, a conservative from a tribal family in al-Karak, during whose term a new electoral law was drafted (June 2012). Al-Ṭarāwna stayed as prime minister until 2 October 2012, before moving on to become the head of the Royal Court (*al-dīwān al-malikī*). His successor was ʿAbd Allāh al-Nsūr, who was tasked with organizing parliamentary elections on 23 January 2013. Al-Nsūr remained prime minister even after the elections, which saw a landslide victory for pro-regime candidates yet again. Taken together, Jordanian elite politics during the Arab Spring have allowed King ʿAbd Allāh to divert responsibilities, when convenient, away from himself and to the prime minister. In addition, he has rewarded different elite segments — tribal security conservatives and more liberal reformers — and their respective networks, but has always kept them in a precarious position.

3.1.4 *Changing legitimacy claims*

The Hashemite king in Jordan regularly employs traditional and religious tropes to legitimize his rule. Learning from the example of Morocco under King Muhammad VI, King ʿAbd Allāh II adopted constitutional reforms as a strategy for countering the protests in the first months of 2011.²⁵ On 14 August 2011, King ʿAbd Allāh II announced a total of forty-two

²³ Herb, *All in the Family*; Lucas, “Monarchical Authoritarianism”.

²⁴ Bank and Schlumberger, “Between Regime Survival and Economic Reform”.

²⁵ Bank, “Jordan and Morocco: Pacification Through Constitutional Reform?”, in *Protest, Revolt and Regime Change in the Arab World: Actors, Challenges, Implications and Policy Options*, ed. Asseburg (2012), pp. 31–3.

mostly minor amendments to the constitution of 1952, prepared by a commission he had appointed himself. The central changes relate to the establishment of a constitutional court; restrictions on the powers of the security courts, which had even recently been used against opposition; independent election monitoring; and the right to freedom of expression.²⁶

3.2 Oman

In the Sultanate of Oman, where Sultan Qābūs bin Saʿīd Al Saʿīd has ruled since taking power from his father in a palace coup during the summer of 1970, protestors took to the streets in mid-January 2011 demanding higher wages and complaining about increasing levels of corruption among government officials. These protests, which started quite small, were spurred on by events in other Arab countries, especially in Bahrain. Although the sheer numbers involved in Oman's protest movement never rose to the level of those in Egypt, Tunisia or Bahrain, part of the movement, maybe for the first time in modern Omani history, challenged the uncontested role of the sultan as the nation's father.²⁷ Regime responses to the comparatively modest first wave of protests were hesitant, suggesting that the regime was taken by surprise. As with Jordan, a specific combination of the four explanatory aspects accounts for the survival of the sultan's regime during the first three years of the Arab Spring.

3.2.1 External support

The Sultanate of Oman occupies an important geostrategic position. It faces the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Oman, which leads into the Persian Gulf through the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial international maritime shipping route, especially for oil. In the past, Oman regularly received military aid from the USA and the UK and provided Western military forces access to its harbors and airfields.²⁸ With plans underway to use Oman as a new hub for oil exports from several Gulf states, bypassing the Strait of Hormuz via a range of new pipelines, its geostrategic importance will further increase over the coming years. External support, especially from the British, has been crucial for the survival of the Al Saʿīd family since the late nineteenth century²⁹ and was instrumental in building the modern monarchical state around Sultan Qābūs in the early 1970s. British military forces proved decisive for the suppression of the armed rebellion in Dhufār (southern province of Oman).³⁰ During the Arab Spring, Oman has remained crucial for Western interests in the region³¹ and the Omani military has continued to buy high-tech weapons from the West.³² At the same time, Oman has benefited from the inter-monarchical Marshall plan initiated by Saudi Arabia, which plans to provide Oman with about \$10 billion over the next decade.³³

²⁶ For the latest version of the Jordanian constitution, see www.representatives.jo/pdfcenter/others/cons.pdf.

²⁷ Valeri, "Qaboos Can Make Mistakes like Anybody Else' — The Sultan of Oman De-Sacralized", *Jadaliyya*, 18 Nov. 2012.

²⁸ Katzman, "Oman: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy", CRS Report for Congress (Dec. 2011).

²⁹ Joyce, *The Sultanate of Oman: A Twentieth Century History* (1995).

³⁰ Valeri, *Oman: Politics and Society in the Qaboos State* (2009).

³¹ Kaplan, "Keep Your Eye on Oman", *Real Clear World*, 30 May 2013.

³² Mohammed, "Kerry Visits Oman for Arms Deal, Talks on Syria, Mideast", *Reuters*, 21 May 2013.

³³ Ottaway and Muasher, "Arab Monarchies: Change for Reform, Yet Unmet", *The Carnegie Papers* (Dec. 2011), p. 18.

3.2.2 *Rents and cooptation*

Oman does not possess the abundant hydrocarbon resources of most of the other Gulf monarchies and should be considered a rentier state on a moderate level.³⁴ Waves of modern state building, including the construction of basic infrastructure and the creation of education and health systems, began under the reign of Sultan Qābūs during the early 1970s and were entirely paid for by oil money. Perhaps unsurprisingly, one of the main reactions of the Omani regime to the events of the Arab Spring was an intensification of large-scale public distribution. In February 2011, the sultan declared an over 40% increase in the minimum wage, the creation of new unemployment benefits and an increase in monthly stipends for students. He also promised the creation of 50,000 new public sector positions and announced a new \$2.6 billion package of infrastructural investments and additional benefits.³⁵ The cycle of increasing state spending has largely continued since then. The minimum wage was increased again in early 2013. The creation of new state employment remains a high priority and social spending is poised to increase over the years to come.³⁶

3.2.3 *Family and elite participation*

Even though about fifty to sixty male descendants of Saʿīd bin Sulṭān, who ruled from 1804 to 1856, are alive today, none occupies a core government position. Sultan Qābūs is the prime minister and has directed the foreign ministry, the ministry of defense and the ministry of finance since the early days of his reign. Qābūs is also the supreme commander of the defense forces and the police.³⁷ During past decades, there have only been a handful of key decision-makers belonging to the wider royal family. Overall, core members of the Al Saʿīd family are very much separated from politics, though they occupy a privileged social position. The regime coopts core elites, members of important Sunni tribes, Ibadi families and influential merchant networks by giving them positions within cabinet and the bureaucracy. Similar to Jordan, the sultan has reshuffled his cabinet several times since protests broke out in February 2011. The first reshuffle was on 27 February 2011, and the second one between 5 March and 7 March 2011, sacking some prominent cabinet figures like the long-time serving minister of national economy ʿAbd al-Nabī Makkī, who has been blamed for abusing his office for private purposes by many of the Omani protesters. The third cabinet reshuffling took place in February 2012, almost four months after the election of the new *majlis al-shūrā*. In addition, there have been continuing changes in high bureaucratic positions below the ministerial level.

3.2.4 *Changing legitimacy claims*

After Sultan Qābūs succeeded his father in 1970, he established a range of new symbolic elements representing his political power. The ultimate goal of this process was to create an image of unity between him as the new monarch and the new state of Oman.³⁸ For example, the day of Qābūs'

³⁴ Bahrain is probably the only exception among these other Gulf monarchies revealing similar levels of rentierism as Oman.

³⁵ Ottaway and Muasher, "Arab Monarchies", p. 18; Lucas and Richter, "Arbeitsmarktpolitik am Golf: Herrschaftssicherung nach dem 'Arabischen Frühling'", *GIGA Focus Nahost* 12 (2012), pp. 1–8.

³⁶ Dickinson, "A Calm Arab Summer Follows Oman's Arab Spring — The National", *The National*, 11 Feb. 2013.

³⁷ Valeri, *Le sultanat d'Oman: une révolution en trompe-l'œil* (2007), p. 158, Katzman, "Oman", p. 1.

³⁸ Chatty, "Rituals of Royalty and the Elaboration of Ceremony in Oman: View from the Edge", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 41.1 (2009), pp. 39–58, Eickelmann, "Kings and People: Oman's State Consultative Council", *The Middle East Journal* 38.1 (1984), pp. 51–71.

accession to the throne (23 July 1970) later became named Renaissance Day (*'īd al-nahḍa*), pointing to the beginning of the modern period for Oman. The conflation of the identity of the modern Omani state with the image of the sultan, whose persona is omnipresent in the daily life of every citizen, is the central pillar of Qābūs' legitimation strategy. In addition to relying on this strong symbolism, the sultan initiated a small but significant formalization of the traditional *shūrā* principle in the late 1970s, which culminated in the establishment of the Consultative Council (*majlis al-shūrā*) during the 1990s. While members of this council are elected, their power remains restricted to making recommendations to the ruler.³⁹ In 1996, Qābūs declared the creation of the second chamber, the State Council (*majlis al-dawla*), which contains members personally selected by the sultan from the core elite and previous high-level bureaucrats. Together, the *majlis al-shūrā* and the *majlis al-dawla* constitute of Council of Oman (*majlis 'Umān*).

In general, the initial events of the Omani Arab Spring in early 2011 did not considerably change the regime's legitimacy practices. Sultan Qābūs remains the father of the nation and the grand modernizer, who maintains firm control even during extraordinary times. The only noticeable moves were in the sphere of procedural legitimization. In October 2011, after the *majlis al-shūrā* election, the sultan amended the Omani basic law to include the presidents of the *majlis al-shūrā* and the *majlis al-dawla* as well as members of the Supreme Court in the Defense Council, which is in charge of succession if the Al Sa'īd Family Council fails to select the next sultan. The second procedural amendment relates to the *majlis 'Umān*. Altogether, forty-five new articles to the basic law were introduced. Some of the most significant changes relate to the new right of the *majlis al-shūrā* to review the annual state budget, to question the performance of selected ministers and to draft new legislative initiatives.⁴⁰

3.3 Qatar

Qatar has been one of the few Middle East monarchies to remain almost completely unchallenged during the Arab Spring. Therefore, large adjustments and reforms like those made by its monarchical neighbors were not necessary. Qatar's small size and comparatively homogenous citizen population makes its politics even more personalized. The institution of the *majālis*, fora in which Qatari citizens can voice their grievances and demands without the need to resort to open public protest, together with Qatar's enormous hydrocarbon-based wealth that it continuously distributes to all citizens provide stability and predictability to daily politics even during the tumultuous Arab Spring.

3.3.1 External support

The biggest change for Qatar since the beginning of the Arab Spring has been its foreign engagement.⁴¹ In fact, in contrast to almost all of its neighbors, Qatar seemed to look at the upheavals in the region as an opportunity rather than a threat. Before the Arab Spring, Qatar attempted to shape its role as an important mediator.⁴² In 2011, Qatar for the first time took an active stance for one conflict party by supporting the rebels in Libya and leading the Arab League in calling for the

³⁹ Valeri, *Oman*, p. 161.

⁴⁰ Royal Decree 99/2011, www.mola.gov.om/maraseem/948/99-2011.pdf.

⁴¹ For a related argument on Saudi Arabia, see Al Tamamy, "Saudi Arabia and the Arab Spring: Opportunities and Challenges of Security", *Journal of Arabian Studies* 2.2 (2012), pp. 143–56.

⁴² Kamrava, "Mediation and Qatari Foreign Policy", *The Middle East Journal* 65.4 (2011), pp. 539–56; Peterson, "Qatar and the World: Branding for a Micro-State", *The Middle East Journal* 60.4 (2006), pp. 732–48.

establishment of a no-fly zone. Qatar then participated in the NATO military operation Unified Protector that decisively contributed to ending Gaddafi's regime. Beyond Libya, Qatar widened its support of opposition movements in other Arab Spring countries, the most notably by backing Islamist groups in the Syrian conflict.⁴³ Together with Saudi Arabia, Qatar took over the role as a donor and supporter state to post-revolutionary republics such as Egypt, for whom Qatar until the toppling of the Muslim Brotherhood-led regime in July 2013 was the "biggest financial backer",⁴⁴ and to weakened monarchies such as Jordan.

Qatar, however, also has strong relations with Western powers due to its strategic location and its vast oil and gas resources. Although there is no immediate threat to Qatar, the tiny monarchy is firmly entrenched in the regional security framework. The entanglement of the USA in the Gulf region and its military presence in Qatar (a major share of which is paid for by the Qatari government) act as a prevention against aggression from regional powers — mainly from Saudi Arabia, but also from Iran. After Operation Desert Storm, Qatar signed a defense cooperation agreement with the USA in 1991 and currently bases the forward headquarters of the US Central Command at Khūr al-'Udaid and the US Army at al-Sailiyya. The USA, the UK and France are the main arms suppliers to the country.⁴⁵ On the regional level, Qatar is also engaged in the GCC and gave at least token support to the intervention of the GCC Peninsula Shield Force in Bahrain in March 2011. The activist foreign policy, which has since subsided, signified Qatar's perception of being secure and stable.

3.3.2 *Rents and cooptation*

Qatar is the prototypical example of a rentier state. About 85% of the country's export earnings and 70% of government revenues are derived from oil and gas, accounting for more than 50% of GDP. Qatar has the third largest proven natural gas reserves in the world and is currently the wealthiest state in the world in terms of GDP per capita as well as among the top three countries with the lowest unemployment rate.⁴⁶ This allows the mini-state great leverage in dealing with domestic and external matters. The attraction of the massive amount of US presence as well as the growing engagement in regional politics would not have been possible otherwise. Whereas Jordan needs foreign financial assistance to support the cooptation of all relevant actors, Qatar uses its vast financial resources to provide assistance to other states. It also uses its resources to provide the overwhelming benefits Qatari nationals enjoy, including free health care and education, water, electricity and other utilities; every university graduate also has a guaranteed civil service job and further benefits await at marriage. In addition, the overflowing state resources support all kinds of societal and charity organizations that might otherwise have been created by independent civil society actors in part to challenge the state's control of political or semi-political activity.⁴⁷ Domestic opposition is therefore practically nonexistent. Although that does not mean that all criticism is stifled, most of it is reserved for rather apolitical issues and therefore not threatening the regime. Cooptation is

⁴³ Stephens, "Syrian Politics in Doha", RUSI Analysis, 14 Nov. 2012.

⁴⁴ Doherty and Taylor, "Qatar, Libya Give Egypt Five Million Dollar Boost Amid IMF Talks", *Reuters*, 10 Apr. 2013.

⁴⁵ Blanchard, "Qatar: Background and U.S. Relations", CRS Report for Congress (June 2012), pp. 10–12.

⁴⁶ Dargin, "Qatar's Natural Gas: The Foreign-Policy Driver", *Middle East Policy* 14.3 (2007), pp. 136–42; CIA, "Country Comparison: GDP — Per Capita (PPP)", *CIA World Factbook* (2013).

⁴⁷ Kamrava, "Royal Factionalism and Political Liberalization in Qatar", *The Middle East Journal* 63.3 (2009), pp. 401–20.

further eased in Qatar by the fact that Qatari nationals amount to only about 15% of the overall population while the rest consists of expatriates, mostly low-wage guest workers from South Asian countries. As “low-status” jobs can thus be “outsourced”, it is easier to include practically every Qatari into the elite circle and guard against splits. Although no public protests took place during the early phase of the Arab Spring, the Qatari government took preemptive action by further raising the already high salaries and social benefits of state employees at a cost of \$8.24 billion.⁴⁸

3.3.3 *Family and elite participation*

Among the small Qatari population, however, there are naturally different levels of inclusion and cooptation. As most concerns of Qatari citizens are taken care of by the regime and political activity is either discouraged or illegal (as is the case with political parties), the ruling family can monopolize the most crucial state posts with relatively minor resistance. The most important state posts of emir, prime minister, minister of defense, minister of interior and minister of trade are occupied by members of the Al Thānī family. Some even have more than one portfolio concurrently; the former emir was at the same time the minister of defense and the former prime minister was also the foreign minister,⁴⁹ concentrating the actual executive power even more. Still, important families like the Al ‘Attiyya and Al Kuwārī are also included in the cabinet and other bodies. The elections for two-thirds of the national advisory council have already been postponed numerous times, last in 2013, so control will stay in the hands of the royal elite for the foreseeable future. Family rule has been further strengthened by the replacement of the Palestinian management director of al-Jazeera, Waḍāḥ Khanfar, with an Al Thānī family member.

3.3.4 *Changing legitimacy claims*

The Arab Spring did not change much in the domestic legitimacy strategy of the Qatari regime. The reliance on output legitimacy was not hampered as the demand for oil and gas remained stable and foreign policy remained a government prerogative. The perception of personal legitimacy and leadership plays an important role, however, as former Emir Ḥamad bin Khalīfa is still highly popular in the small Gulf monarchy. After he ousted his father Khalīfa bin Ḥamad in 1995, Qatar’s development skyrocketed. The new emir, together with his politically active wife, Sheikha Mūza, quickly started on a modernization path. They pushed through education reforms, created cultural programs, strengthened economic and political ties with regional and global powers, and initiated a process of nation-branding on an international scale, one expression of which is the successful bid for the 2022 FIFA World Championship. The emir and his wife also intensified attempts to create a common Qatari national identity by establishing institutions fostering tradition and Qatari cultural heritage.⁵⁰ This formed a counterweight for the population to the strong Western, in particular the USA, influence in the small Gulf state. The current support for Islamist groups across the region is also often seen as a legitimizing strategy to counteract potential Islamist opposition, which has however not (yet) emerged. In fact, the position of the Al Thānī family seems so secure and stable that the emir gave up his highly personalized rule

⁴⁸ Anon., “Qatar Hikes Salaries, Pensions for State Employees”, *Arabian Business*, 7 Sept. 2011.

⁴⁹ The current Prime Minister, ‘Abd Allāh bin Nassir bin Khalīfa Al Thānī, is simultaneously the minister of interior, indicating a stepping back from the interventionist foreign policy of the previous government.

⁵⁰ Fromherz, *Qatar: A Modern History* (2012).

and abdicated in favor of his son at the end of June 2013.⁵¹ This constitutes the first time since 1960 that power was passed down the Al Thānī line without a palace coup.

3.4 Comparing continuities and changes

Apart from a number of striking developments, the reactions of Middle East monarchies to the Arab Spring have mostly followed earlier patterns. Each group of monarchies used its accustomed method of regime stabilization. The three examples discussed above quite clearly demonstrate this continuity. Linchpin Jordan managed to extract additional funds and assistance from both Western and regional backers while at the same time King ‘Abd Allāh II has increased his efforts in shuffling the country’s political elite. Rentier Qatar, on the other hand, did little beyond increasing the amount of government benefits to its citizens. “Linchtier” Oman fell in between. It increased government benefits from its own resources, attracted financial assistance from its monarchic neighbors, and at the same time implemented selected changes to high-level state posts.

However, some new and remarkable developments were also significant. The extent of inter-monarchical support, spearheaded by Saudi Arabia and newcomer Qatar, has reached unprecedented levels with the GCC states’ invitation to Jordan and Morocco to join the organization. By contrast, Yemen, an actual GCC neighbor state, has been waiting for years to receive such an invitation. Massive amounts of financial assistance to poorer monarchies also signify a new-found monarchical solidarity, although the culmination of that support was probably the intervention of the GCC Peninsula Shield Force in Bahrain.

Table II: Middle East monarchies post-Arab Spring.

	External support	Rents and cooptation	Family/elite participation	Legitimation
Jordan	Diplomatic and financial support by Western powers; recipient of inter-monarchical support (large loans)	No rents from oil and gas exports; some foreign aid available; small public salary raises	No family participation; acceleration of rotation of core elite groups in decision-making	Religious and traditional forms of legitimation; implementation of constitutional and electoral reforms (procedural legitimation)
Oman	Diplomatic support by Western powers. inter-monarchical support (GCC member, recipient of aid from Saudi Arabia)	Moderate rent revenues from oil and gas exports; public salary and social benefits raises	No extensive family participation, rotation of core elites in decision-making	Traditional forms of legitimation; new implementation of minimal constitutional reforms
Qatar	Diplomatic support by Western powers; donor of inter-monarchical support (GCC members)	High rent revenues from oil and gas; exports; large public salary hikes	Extensive family participation in decision-making remains	Traditional and religious forms of legitimation; proceduralism via <i>majlis</i>

Source: Authors’ own compilation.

⁵¹ Anon., “Qatar’s Emir Announces Transfer of Power to Son Sheikh Tamim”, *Al-Arabiya*, 25 June 2013.

Despite the massive inter-monarchical support, an additional mechanism was used by some of the monarchies to counter the waves of protest: institutional reform. After a successful institutional reform process in Morocco, Jordan chose a similar path. Albeit limited, this extent of constitutional reform is an unusual step for the Hashemite monarchy. The same goes for the Sultanate of Oman. Due to the unprecedented attacks on Sultan Qābūs' legitimacy, including a new dimension of direct criticism, the reforms, however minor in absolute terms, represent a new trend. Thus, with a mix of new and tested methods linchpins, rentiers and "linchtiers" successfully relied on their strongest suits in the face of regional crisis. Dynastic Gulf states intensified rents-fueled cooptation and family rule; the two linchpin monarchies sought additional external support and moved to strengthen procedural legitimacy through reforms; "linchtier" Oman blended cooptation and the refortification of legitimacy. [Table II](#) summarizes the changes and continuities.

4 Conclusions: on the future(s) of monarchies

The durability of Arab monarchies during the Arab Spring might seem baffling at first, but can be better understood by looking at the combination of some traditional key aspects of their rule. What the recent developments also show is how different monarchies reacted differently to the challenges presented to them. They all employed the same respective strategies that had worked successfully in their own past. The Arab Spring, however, presented a new, serious challenge that was sometimes countered with new measures, whether in quality or in extent. Whereas the oil-rich dynastic Gulf monarchies continued to rely on their extensive family rule and their established distribution strategies, they also significantly trumped up the amount of public spending which proved as efficient now as it had been in the past. In addition, they started to actively support other, poorer monarchies with diplomatic and financial assistance (Morocco, Jordan and Oman) and in one case even with direct military support (Bahrain). Non-rentier linchpins, which despite generous loans by the GCC states or Western actors do not possess the means to buy off their opposition must rely on more modest public expenditures and instead extend their efforts in changing strategies of elite cooptation as well as formalized constitutional reforms.

On the one hand, these practices and policies have insulated the eight Arab monarchies from existential threats and will in all likelihood continue to do so despite doomsday scenarios forecasting the "coming collapse" of monarchical rule in the Middle East.⁵² On the other hand, this does not mean that monarchies constitute a role model or viable alternative for other states. They may be favored by the recent "zeitgeist",⁵³ serving as a foil to the negative example of unstable Middle East republics, but there is no indication yet that their model of political rule is attractive beyond their borders.

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⁵² Davidson, *After the Sheikhs: The Coming Collapse of the Gulf Monarchies* (2012).

⁵³ Herb, "Monarchism Matters", *Foreign Policy Blogs* (2012).

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