The Case for Wataniyya: Democracy and National Identity in the Arab Middle East

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THE CASE FOR *WATANIYYA*:
STATE-BASED NATIONAL IDENTITY AND DEMOCRACY IN THE ARAB MIDDLE
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Introduction

If one looked at the Arab world in the middle of the 20th century — newly independent of the colonial empires of Europe — one would not have thought it was destined to become a swamp. In fact, many observers at the time noted that, compared with other decolonizing countries, the Arabs were doing well. Beirut, Damascus, Cairo and Baghdad were more cultured, more commercial, more progressive than most Asian and African capitals. It made sense. The Arabs, after all, belonged to a great civilization, with a long history of science, philosophy — and military success. They invented algebra, preserved Aristotle when he had been forgotten in the West — and won wars against the greatest powers of the day. Islamic art and culture were sophisticated when Europe was in the Dark Ages. In the 1940s and 1950s, there was much hope in the Arab world that it would recapture its past glory.

—Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom*, 2003

The once-proud Arab Middle East has fallen on hard times. Over the past half-century, the region has become synonymous with violence, dysfunction and oppression—or, in the preferred terminology of CNN[1], Al-Jazeera[2], *The Washington Post*[3], *The New York Times*[4], *Foreign Policy*[5] and the Middle East Policy Council,[6] simply a "mess." The current civil wars in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya are only the latest developments; the last fifty years have also seen continuous Arab-Israeli conflict, fratricidal fighting in Algeria, Sudan and Lebanon, the Iran-Iraq war, and two U.S.-led invasions. Beneath the headline-grabbing violence lies a series of more mundane but similarly disheartening realities, including chronic youth unemployment and severe environmental crises. But perhaps nothing lies more at the heart of the region's suffering than the stubbornly authoritarian nature of its politics; the Arab

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[1] Frida Ghitis, "Why the Middle East is a Mess," *CNN.com*, November 30, 2012
[2] Rami Khouri, "Regional Powers Are Making a Mess of the Middle East," *Al-Jazeera*, August 10, 2015
[3] Liz Sly, "Is it Too Late to Solve the Mess in the Middle East?" *The Washington Post*, November 15, 2015
[4] Ross Douthat, "The Method to Obama's Middle East Mess," *The New York Times*, March 28. 2015
[5] Steven A. Cook and Amr T. Leheta, "Don't Blame Sykes-Picot for the Middle East's Mess," *Foreign Policy*, May 13, 2016
[6] Chas W. Freeman Jr., "The Mess in the Middle East," *Middle East Policy* 18, no. 4 (2011): 96

Middle East is the least democratic place on the planet.[7] Since the end of the 20th century,

when the "third wave" of democracy brought liberal governance to vast swaths of Latin

America, Eastern Europe, East Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East has turned into

an anomalous island of autocratic regimes.[8]

Why? What explains the region's continued impregnability to democracy? This is a

particularly important question in the rocky aftermath of the Arab Spring, which many

observers initially hoped would usher in a democratic "fourth wave." It is also a very

complicated question—the Arab Middle East's religious, economic and political history all

contribute to its current predicament.

Dozens of scholars and commentators have attempted to explain the "Arab

democracy deficit," offering various plausible explanations for the region's continued

authoritarianism. One common interpretation, put forth by scholars including Bernard Lewis,

Samuel Huntington and Elie Kedourie, focuses the blame on religion, arguing that Islam

delegitimizes man-made legislation, leaving no room for democratic debate or representative

institutions.[9] A second school of thought contends that oil wealth explains most of the

problem, leading to public complacency, corruption and over-centralization.[10] A third, related

interpretation, blames economics more generally—maintaining that even beyond the oil-

producing states, weak private sectors and small middle classes inhibit the Arab world's

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[7] See "Populists and Autocrats: The Dual Threat to Global Democracy," *Freedom House*, 2017
[8] See Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1993)
[9] See Bernard Lewis, "Islam and Liberal Democracy," *The Atlantic Monthly*, February 1993, Elie Kedourie, *Democracy and Arab Political Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2013), and Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations," *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993
[10] See Larry Diamond, "Why Are There No Arab Democracies?" *Journal of Democracy* 21, no.1 (2010): 93-112

democratic growth.[11] In addition to these arguments, other observers have highlighted regime statecraft, foreign influences, and "neighborhood effects" as key reasons for the region's exceptional lack of democracy.[12]

Each of these proposed explanations has its strengths. But there is also something subtly unsatisfying about them. In their intense focus on circumstance and background conditions—whether religious, economic, or institutional—they leave little room for the role of human agency, for the distinct historical *choices* made by Arab elites. What if the region's woes were not preordained? What if the Arab states had what it took to move toward democracy, but were thrown off course by their own leaders?

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Tristan Mabry, a scholar of language and nationality at the Naval Postgraduate School, does not specialize either in Arab politics or democracy. But when analyzing the linguistic situation in the contemporary Arab world, he is struck by elites' stubborn adherence to Modern Standard Arabic—as opposed to unique local vernaculars.[13] To Mabry, it is quite clear that insistence on MSA has undermined the growth of ethnolinguistic identity across the region, creating "di-national" peoples who cannot fully identify with the states in which they live. This situation, he suggests, might be problematic for the growth of democracy. By reducing the extent to which states can legitimize themselves based on

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[11] See Mehran Kamrava, "The Middle East's Democracy Deficit in Comparative Perspective," *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology* 6, no. 1 (2007)

[12] See Eva Bellin, "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective," *Comparative Politics* 36, no. 2 (2004) : 139-157.
Debate around each of these explanations has largely focused on the role of Islam. As a result, scholars who blame something *other* than religion for the democracy deficit have tended to cluster together, positioning themselves relative to Lewis, Huntington and Kedourie rather than relative to one another. Indeed, it is common to see them share arguments, referring to the "oil curse," "economics," and "regime statecraft" all at the same time. Bellin, for example, focuses on coercive apparatuses but also credits oil rents with playing a major role. For his part, Diamond focuses on the oil curse, but acknowledges the importance of "authoritarian statecraft."

[13] Tristan Mabry, "Arab Di-Nationalism," *The Levantine Review* 2, no. 1 (2013).

ethnolinguistic criteria, it may encourage elites to turn elsewhere—namely force and coercion—for the basis of their authority.

State linguistic policy alone likely cannot explain the Arab world's democracy deficit or its perennially high levels of conflict. And ethnicity and language are not the only cornerstones on which a successful nation can be built. But perhaps, by honing in on state-based national identity, Mabry is on to something. Perhaps language is just the beginning of a wide-ranging failure, on behalf of Arab elites, to embrace state-based patriotism and to institutionalize unique national identities. And perhaps this failure has indeed had dire consequences for stability and democracy in the region.

Even a brief glance at the connection between national identity and Arab democracy yields striking results. Tunisia and Lebanon, the Arab states whose leaders have historically gone to the greatest lengths to embrace local nationalism, are the region's clearest "democratic exceptions." Jordan and Morocco, whose monarchs have also worked consistently to encourage state-based nationalism, are not full democracies—but their citizens enjoy a much wider array of rights than is common elsewhere in the Arab world. The remaining states in the region, however, embraced pan-Arab nationalism in the mid-20th century, deemphasizing their own unique identities. From Syria to Sudan and from Iraq to Libya, they are today case studies in instability, autocracy and oppression.

The problem is not that Arab states beyond Tunisia and Lebanon somehow lack their own identities or the potential to develop them; rather, it is that in the mid-20th century, pan-Arabist ideologues suppressed vibrant state-based nationalist movements across the region. This undermined the very foundations of most states in the Arab Middle East, disconnecting them from their own historical, cultural and linguistic roots. With a weakened sense of shared

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heritage, precious little remained to provide political cohesion or to bridge the gap between competing factions. Islamists and secularists, for example, became much more polarized than they would have been in an environment of mutual patriotism. Absent even the most basic assumptions of goodwill and fair play, the political scene became increasingly volatile and fragmented, helping authoritarian regimes to present themselves as the only hope for stability. Today, would-be liberals feel unable to trust their fellow citizens; instead, they believe they must choose between freedom and safety. The outcome is what political scientist Daniel Brumberg calls "autocracy with democrats," wherein "key groups that might choose democracy absent an Islamist threat now actively support or at least tolerate autocrats."[14] Recent events underscore this point: from Egypt to Syria, the authoritarian backlash against the Arab Spring has sustained itself thanks to the educated middle class and its fear of Islamist extremism.[15]

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The suggestion that nationalism and democracy might support one another strikes many Western ears as counterintuitive. This is especially true in Europe, where nationalism, blamed for two world wars, is widely regarded with wary skepticism. As the French theorist Pierre Manent writes, "at a time when humanity seems on the way to becoming unified, the nation, with its parochial character, its preference for itself, seems painfully archaic, vaguely ridiculous, probably immoral, in any case destined to fade away."[16] Such luminaries as Albert Einstein have called nationalism the "measles of the human race"; even well-trained

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[14] Daniel Brumberg, "Islamists and the Politics of Consensus," *Journal of Democracy* 13 no. 3 (2002): 112
[15] See Noah Feldman, "Egypt Vote is a Sign of Arab Winter," *Bloomberg View*, October 19, 2015
[16] Pierre Manent, *A World Beyond Politics? A Defense of the Nation-State* (Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 2006): 42

political scientists have gone so far as to claim that nations are "[groups] of people united by a mistaken view about the past and a hatred of their neighbors."[17]

But of all the ways to organize humanity, are nation-states really so bad? In his 1992 essay, "Jihad vs. McWorld," Benjamin Barber weighs the other options. On one hand, the globe could see a "retribalization," a renewed localism in which individual cultures and sects acquire much greater power and importance. On the other, the forces of globalization could bring ever-increasing integration and uniformity. To Barber, both outcomes are equally unappealing and equally undemocratic. The local option, which he dubs "Jihad," threatens to create a future "in which culture is pitted against culture, people against people, tribe against tribe—a Jihad in the name of a hundred narrowly conceived faiths against every kind of interdependence, every kind of artificial social cooperation and civic mutuality."[18] But the globalized option, which has to "a remarkable degree been realized," has not brought the human flourishing many might expect. Instead, "yesterday's wishful cry for one world has yielded to the reality of McWorld," an internationalism "that is commercialized, homogenized, depoliticized [and] bureaucratized."[19] While McWorld might appear on its face to be more appealing than "jihad," its "primary political values…are order and tranquility, and freedom—as in the phrases 'free trade,' 'free press,' and 'free love.' Human rights are needed to a degree, but not citizenship or participation—and no more social justice and equality than are necessary to promote efficient economic production and

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[17] Karl Deutsch, *Nationalism and its Alternatives* (New York: Knopf, 1969).
[18] Benjamin Barber, "Jihad vs McWorld," *The Atlantic*, March 1992
[19] Ibid.

consumption."[20] As a result, despots and oligarchs can thrive, "so long as they leave markets in place and refrain from making war on their neighbors."[21]

Is a future torn between "Jihad" and "McWorld" the best one available? Or is there a happier alternative, a salutary middle way between these undemocratic poles? A growing body of theoretical literature suggests that there is—that old-fashioned state-based nationalism is not such an unattractive option after all. As Israeli political scientist Yael Tamir puts it, it is true that "certain types of nationalism are…morally repugnant, but the same could be said of almost any political theory."[22] Even democracy can verge into illiberal majority tyranny when its worst tendencies are indulged. Focusing on these instances can blind observers to broader truths. For example, while "national ideas" helped fuel some of the worst episodes of the twentieth century, "they…also inspired some of its most glorious moments, when the struggle against colonialism and imperialism was waged in the name of national self-determination."[23]

Much of the alleged problem with nationalism is that it divides the world into 'us' and 'them,' irrationally exalting the former and denigrating the latter. But this is not necessarily, or even usually, the case. As Georgian political scientist Ghia Nodia observes, "a nation demands self-determination not as an exclusive privilege, but as a way of realizing the general proposition that each nation deserves a state of its own."[24] It is no accident that "the first organization to embrace almost the whole world is called the United *Nations* (not the Universal Church or the Communist International), and…is based on [nationalist principles

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[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Yael Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995): 4
[23] Ibid.
[24] Nodia 12

such as] 'respect for national sovereignty,' [and] 'inviolability of borders.'"[25] The philosopher Gregory Jusdanis agrees, arguing that "nationalism fosters an interchange among groups by promoting self-confidence among them, by encouraging them to find strength in their own cultural resources, and ultimately to fight against oppression and for independence."[26] Far from encouraging narcissism and selfishness, nationalism thus "mediates in the interaction between the self and the other, between the individual and the universal, the old and the new."[27]

Indeed, the danger with nationalism and national identity may lie not so much with recognizing and embracing it as with attempting to subvert it. As Nodia writes, "manifestations of nationalism's ugly side arise not from excessive ethnicity but from the lack of a robust political expression for national feeling. When they have no political or institutional achievements to take pride in, people may boast instead of their inherited racial, linguistic, or cultural identities."[28] According to this line of thinking, it is no coincidence that the Italians and Germans, who consolidated unified nation-states much later than their Western European neighbors, were the first to succumb to fascism in the run-up to World War II. It is also no coincidence that the European far right has thrived in an era when institutionalized outlets for nationalism have weakened.

In short, the more tangibly a national identity is manifested, the healthier it will be. As with other natural human tendencies, national feeling flourishes in the open and festers when repressed. When it is fully and properly nourished—when "individuals can share a language, memorize their past, [and] cherish their heroes," national pride can be a powerful

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[25] Ibid. Emphasis added.
[26] Gregory Jusdanis, *The Necessary Nation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001): 7
[27] Ibid.
[28] Nodia 15

tool for good.[29] Indeed, in observing the third wave of democracy, Nodia notices that "the final push toward liberal democracy…is rooted in national as well as individual dignity."[30] Nations wishing to be respected on the global stage are incentivized to pursue freedom at home. Whereas failure to create a liberal democratic polity would signal a shameful "national disgrace," success opens the door to "[joining] the prestigious international club of 'advanced' or 'modern' nations."[31]

This thesis argues that state-based nationalism had—and still has—the potential to help solve some of the Arab world's problems. Yet it has largely been suppressed, leading to weak state legitimacy, civil strife, persecution of minorities, strong Islamist movements, and above all, a regional democracy deficit. Unless states embark on concerted efforts to build popularly-supported, inclusive, and border-based identities, the region will likely remain a "mess" for decades to come.

Plan of this thesis

Chapter 1, "Democracy and the Nation," offers preliminary definitions of democracy and the nation, explores what a healthy national identity might realistically look like, and explains how such an identity can lead to and support democracy.

Chapter 2, "Narrowing Down the Suspects," argues that Islam, oil, economics and regime statecraft are all unsatisfactory explanations for the Arab democracy deficit, and suggests that investigating national identity might be a more fruitful approach.

Chapter 3, "Indicting Arabism," lays out a potential model for understanding the democracy deficit in terms of national identity. It argues that by rejecting state-based

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[29] Tamir 8
[30] Nodia 16
[31] Ibid.

nationalism and embracing messianic pan-Arabism, Arab leaders normalized authoritarian tactics, undermined their states' internal cohesion, and set the stage for a showdown with Islamists.

Chapter 4, "Arabism on Trial," compares Egypt with Tunisia and Syria with Lebanon, tracing the way different approaches to national identity have led to divergent political climates in these otherwise highly similar states.

Chapter 5, "Arabism on Trial, Part II," investigates the cases of Algeria, Libya, Sudan, Iraq, Yemen, Jordan and Morocco, tracing the role of national identity in shaping the development of Islamism and democracy in each state.

Chapter 6, "The Case for *Wataniyya*," recapitulates the key arguments made in the preceding chapters, revisits competing explanations for the Arab democracy deficit, addresses potential objections, discusses the implications for future research, and offers a few closing policy recommendations.

1 *Democracy and the Nation*

This chapter seeks to explore the theoretical rationale of the "national identity" explanation for the Arab democracy deficit. What would "healthy nationalism" look like in practice, and how would it contribute to democracy?

Defining Democracy

Before continuing, it is essential to clarify what exactly is meant by "democracy." This is a more complicated task than it seems, for it requires disentangling two often-confused concepts: "democracy" and "liberalism." The two are far from identical—indeed, theorists have warned for centuries that majority rule, associated with the former, poses a potential danger for individual rights and freedoms, connected to the latter.[1] The West has sometimes been blind to this tension and has taken liberalism for granted, but many newer, non-Western democracies do not have the same luxury. This is because, while liberal societies often preceded and paved the way for democratic polities in the West, the pattern is reversed in other regions, where popular rule tends to be instituted *before* the consolidation of liberal norms.[2] From Turkey to Russia to Venezuela, leaders supported by solid public majorities have thus been able to transform themselves into elected autocrats, using their mandates to infringe upon their opponents' basic rights.

This has encouraged some analysts to step away from "democracy" as their favored standard for evaluating political systems. Fareed Zakaria, for example, insists that "the

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[1]See for example, Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, which dwells extensively on the dangers democracy poses for liberalism—and how to mitigate them.
[2] Richard Rose and Doh Chull Shin, "Democratization Backwards: The Problem of Third Wave Democracies," *Centre for the Study of Public Policy*, University of Strathclyde, 1999.

absence of free and fair elections should be viewed as one flaw, not the definition of

tyranny"; he would rather see "governments… judged by yardsticks related to constitutional

liberalism."[3] This is certainly a valuable perspective to keep in mind when discussing the

Arab democracy deficit. But Zakaria does democracy a disservice by reducing it to mere

elections. True electoral democracy, as it is understood by most political scientists, is much

more robust than the pale imitations put forth by the world's Putins and Erdogans.

One of the most influential recent attempts to define democracy comes from the

American theorist Robert Dahl. This is somewhat ironic, given that Dahl claimed to be

defining "polyarchy" rather than "democracy," regarding the latter as an unreachable ideal.

Nevertheless, the seven "procedural minimums" he identified, listed in Table 1.1, have come

to be regarded as the baseline requirements for any democratic regime.[4]

Table 1.1: Robert Dahl's Criteria for Democracy[5]

1: Control over government decisions about policy is constitutionally vested in elected officials.
2: Elected officials are chosen in frequent and fairly conducted elections in which coercion is comparatively uncommon.
3: Practically all adults have the right to vote in the election of officials.
4: Practically all adults have the right to run for elective offices in the government.
5: Citizens have a right to express themselves without the danger of severe punishment on political matters broadly defined.
6: Citizens have a right to seek out alternative sources of information. Moreover, alternative sources of information exist and are protected by law.
7: Citizens also have the right to form relatively independent associations or organizations, including independent political parties and interest groups.

In short, to be a democracy, a state does not necessarily need to uphold every

individual freedom—but it does need to ensure basic *political* rights. This is precisely the

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[3] Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad* (New York: WW Norton, 2007): 156

[4] See, for example, the way Dahl is discussed in Philippe C. Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl, "What Democracy Is... and Is Not," *Journal of Democracy* 2, no. 3 (1991): 75-88.

[5] Robert Dahl, *Dilemmas of Pluralist Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982): 11

distinction adopted by Freedom House, the world's most influential democracy-monitoring organization. The agency measures "electoral democracies" separately from "liberal democracies," stipulating that the former do not necessarily have to protect all civil liberties. They *are* required, however, to feature a "competitive, multiparty political system," near-universal adult suffrage, regular, contested, elections that "yield results that are representative of the public will," and "significant public access of major political parties to the electorate through the media and through generally open political campaigning."[6]

As these criteria illustrate, free elections mean nothing unless norms are in place that allow voters to make educated choices between competitive candidates. Simply opening the polls every few years is not enough for a state to claim it represents the public will. Philippe Shmitter and Terry Lynn Karl expound on this theme in their influential article "What Democracy Is—and Is Not." According to Shmitter and Karl, between elections, citizens must still be able to "influence public policy through a wide variety of [extra-electoral] intermediaries: interest associations, social movements, locality groupings, clientelistic arrangements, and so forth."[7] For their part, elected leaders must be willing to listen and respond, recognizing that they are responsible to all of society, not just the coalition that brought them to office.

Clearly, then, true electoral democracy is much more participatory and pluralistic than liberal skeptics imply. While it does not necessarily protect all civil liberties, democracy does give citizens a chance to choose and influence their leaders in an environment of open dialogue and debate. This is high standard, but also an attainable one. According to Freedom

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[6] *Freedom House*, "Freedom in the World 2016, Anxious Dictators, Wavering Democracies: Global Freedom Under Pressure," 2016
[7] Schmitter and Karl 78

House, two thirds of the world's nations—123 out of 195—qualified as electoral democracies in 2016.[8]

Defining National Identity

The next definition to consider is the meaning of national identity. This is also a fairly complex task. Just as "democracy" and "liberalism" need to be differentiated, "national" and "ethnic" identities are similar but discrete entities that must be separated and distinguished. A great deal of ink has been spilled attempting to define the two concepts, and scholars disagree on the precise differences between them. For the purposes of this thesis, however, it is not necessary to engage every argument on the matter. Suffice it to say that whereas an ethnic group is primarily a *cultural* community, "formed by common descent and sharing…features [such as] language [and] religion," a nation is primarily a *political* community, dedicated above all to self-rule in a territorial homeland.[9] An ethnic group—such as Kurds, Bengalis, or Jews—may be spread across multiple nations, and a nation—such as Iran, India, or the United States—may incorporate multiple ethnic groups. This is not to say that a nation has nothing to do with culture or that ethnicity has nothing to do with politics; as British political philosopher David Miller puts it, "a group of people without Norwegian passports, with no discoverable historical connections to Norway, and speaking no Norwegian, cannot simply arrive at the Norwegian border and have any expectation of mounting a plausible claim to Norwegian identity or nationality."[10] *Some* cultural characteristics—language, ethnicity, religion, history and the like—have to be held in common for nationality to exist, though there is no formula that defines which will be more or less important in a given nation.

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[8] *Freedom House*, "Freedom in the World 2016"
[9] David Miller, *On Nationality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995): 19
[10] Ibid., 18

Rather than attempting to precisely define what constitutes a nation, it may be more useful to build an idea of what a strong, healthy national identity might realistically look like. This is not a matter of distinguishing "false" nations from "true" ones; such a line almost certainly cannot be drawn. But some forms and expressions of national identity do appear to be more constructive than others. In particular, this thesis suggests that *popular legitimacy*, *inclusivity*, and *respect for borders* are all key components of strong, healthy nationalism.

Popular Legitimacy

The first reasonable expectation for a healthy nation-state identity is that it enjoy substantial and widespread public support. This is because national identity is, at its root, the people's identity; it presupposes a population that "identifies." A would-be nationalist can attempt to *tell* his neighbors who they are, but unless they agree, there is no identity—just an ideology. True, a totalitarian dictatorship may attempt to impose its own narrative at the tip of a gun, but this strategy is unlikely to win many genuine adherents. For a sustainable, authentic identity to emerge, the people must be consulted. This is what the French intellectual Ernest Renan famously expressed when he described the nation as constituted by "present consent, the desire to live together, the desire to continue to invest in the heritage that we have jointly received."[11] A nation's existence, he argued, is essentially "a daily plebiscite, just as an individual's existence is a perpetual affirmation of life."[12]

Popular legitimacy is not always something that can be measured with scientific accuracy. This is because, as Miller points out, "the attitudes and beliefs that constitute nationality are very often hidden away in the deepest recesses of the mind, brought to full

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[11] Ernest Renan, trans. Ethan Rundell, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation*? (Paris, Presses-Pocket, 1992): 10
[12] Ibid.

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consciousness only by some dramatic event."[13] Even the best identities will thus never be "pristine." But this does not make popular legitimacy any less important or less real; regardless of measurement difficulties, "there is still a large difference between [national identities] that have evolved more or less spontaneously and those that are mainly the result of political imposition."[14] Naturally, there is some blurring over time—an identity that once had to be imposed might someday come to be naturally felt, and vice versa. But some versions of nationalism have historically relied on imposition to a far greater extent than others.

The Western-oriented nationalism promulgated in modern Turkey, for example, began as an elite-enforced identity and has generally remained as such, provoking immense struggles between secular Kemalists and traditionalist Muslims. With its emphasis on Turkish ethnic purity, this vision of identity has also prompted bloody persecution of minorities such as Kurds, Alevis and Armenians. Though Turkey's state-sanctioned, secular identity was (and still is) genuinely supported by *some,* its proponents have had to go to great lengths to impose it on everyone else.[15] Another example of top-down nationalism is the version of Chinese identity enforced by Mao and his lieutenants during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s, which involved a concerted effort to undermine Confucian values and replace them with Communist ideology.[16] As in Turkey, this imposed identity remained divisive, and by the 1980s was in full retreat in the face of more traditional expressions of Chinese nationalism.

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[13] Miller 18

[14] Ibid., 40

[15] See for example Nick Danforth, "Why Erdogan is like Ataturk," *Politico Europe*, December 29, 2015. "In time," Danforth writes, "Ataturk's regime did create its own elite, but most villagers remained conscious of their place outside it."

[16] See Lowell Dittmer, and Samuel S. Kim, eds, *China's Quest for National Identity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993): 102

On the other hand, the development of national identity in the United Kingdom "involved competition between a number of groups—tradesmen, women, the Welsh and Scots, as well as the English aristocracy—each seeking to establish themselves as citizens."[17] No single faction fully controlled or enforced British identity during its key period of development. Even today, the United Kingdom's continued existence remains an explicit product of the consent of its constituent parts, a reality aptly illustrated by the 2014 referendum on Scottish independence. Had the Scots voted to pursue nationhood on their own, they would have been allowed to do so.

Several other examples of intensely "grassroots" national movements emerged in the late 1980s in the Soviet Union. After decades of harsh repression from Communist Party authorities, Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian activists took advantage of *perestroika* reforms to push for their right to political and cultural self-determination. These efforts culminated in August 1989, when nearly two million demonstrators—more than a third of the entire Baltic population—protested Soviet rule by taking part in a human chain linking the capital cities of Talinn, Riga and Vilnius.[18] Within months, all three nations had declared independence.

Of course, many national identities fall somewhere between the grassroots spontaneity of the Baltics and the top-down imposition of Communist China. In France, for example, a relatively defined, state-sanctioned account of the secular Republic is taught to schoolchildren from an early age.[19] However, this national identity also enjoys a considerable depth of popular support; especially for children from non-immigrant families, the narrative taught in schools is likely to be quite similar to the one children have learned from their

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[17] Miller 40

[18] Jānis Škapars, ed. *The Baltic Way to Freedom: Non-Violent Struggle of the Baltic States in a Global Context* (Riga: Zelta Grauds, 2005).

[19] See Beatrice Mabilon-Bonfils, "School and the Creation of National Identity in France," *Citizenship Teaching and Learning* 8 no. 1 (2012): 41-54

parents and grandparents.[20] In other words, France's identity is both relatively imposed and relatively popularly legitimate.

Table 1.2 illustrates the diverse range of approaches a given version of nationalism can take toward the role of the public. Some national movements have clearly relied on broad-based, grassroots participation; others have been based on the power of the state. As the "Maoist," "Kemalist" and "Francoist" qualifications in the leftmost column emphasize, "imposed" national identities have generally proven to be divisive and short-lived.

Table 1.2: "Top-Down" vs. "Bottom-Up" National Identities

More "imposed" (top-down)	Major components of both	More "spontaneous" (bottom-up)
Maoist China Kemalist Turkey Francoist Spain[21]	Republican France	United Kingdom Lithuania Latvia Estonia

Inclusivity

The second reasonable expectation for a healthy nation-state identity is that it be inclusive—that is, open to ethnic, linguistic or religious minority groups who wish to participate in it.[22] Anyone ought to have a chance to feel at home in the nation-state in which they were born and raised, and they should not be forced to give up their own heritage in the process. This does not mean that every state should be expected to adopt open borders and unlimited immigration; it simply means that a national identity should be welcoming toward

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[20] A large number of immigrant families fall outside of this norm, a fact that has led to increasing polarization and controversy regarding the nation's rigid approach to identity. See Karina Piser, "Why Forced Secularism in Schools Leads to Polarization," *The Atlantic*, February 10, 2017

[21] See Paloma Aguilar Fernandez and Carsten Humlebaek, "Collective Memory and National Identity in the Spanish Democracy: The Legacies of Francoism and the Civil War," *History & Memory* 14, no. 1 (2002): 121-164. Franco imposed a unitary Spanish identity and repressed expressions of Basque, Catalan and Galician language and culture.

currently present minority groups who are willing to respect the practices and values of the rest of the community.

Is such a degree of inclusion possible to put into practice? Or is it a pleasant-sounding but unrealistic ideal? Some theorists argue for the latter position—Ernest Gellner, to take one prominent example, famously defines nationalism as "a theory of political legitimacy which requires that national boundaries should not cut across ethnic ones."[23] Nationalism, in his understanding, is a fundamentally exclusive phenomenon. And Gellner has a point: all nation-states grapple with questions of pluralism. But the reality is that some struggle much less than others. India, Belgium, Canada and Switzerland, for instance, have national identities that are open to multiple ethnic, linguistic and religious groups. In India, this plays out such that a Marathi-speaking Hindu, Bengali-speaking Muslim, or Malayalam-speaking Christian each has equal claim to Indian identity. The example of the United States is also instructive. As Miller writes, Americans have found that it is "perfectly possible for ethnicity and nationality to co-exist, neither threatening to drive out the other."[24] Ethnic groups such as Italian-Americans, Mexican-Americans and Chinese-Americans value their distinct *cultural* identities, but have the chance to participate fully in American *national* identity.[25]

Healthy nation-state identities are not only inclusive in the present—they also take a pluralistic approach toward remembering the past. This is because nothing is more fundamental to national identity than history and memory. As Renan puts it, a nation is constituted by its awareness of "a long past of efforts, sacrifices, and devotions." Race,

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[23] Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983): 1
[24] Miller 20-21
[25] The point is not that these communities are spared all nativist prejudice and are always fully welcomed; rather, it is that the vast majority of each group sees no contradiction between being a patriotic American and a proud participant in their ancestral culture.

language and ethnicity are much less important than a sense of "having suffered, rejoiced, and hoped together."[26]

When determining the health of a national identity, it is thus vital to ask: Which past is commemorated? Whose "efforts and devotions" are celebrated? Certainly, it is unreasonable to expect that everyone be remembered. Some details are inevitably lost—as Renan said, "Forgetting, I would even say historical error, is an essential factor in the creation of a nation."[27] There is nothing wrong with the fact that "no French citizen knows whether he is a Burgund, an Alain, a Taifala, or a Visigoth."[28] But forgetting details should not mean forcibly writing any group out of the historical record. If the national identity of the United States denied the historical presence of Native Americans or the enslavement of African-Americans, it would not qualify as fully inclusive—even if both groups enjoyed the same present-day political and civil rights as other Americans. As Miller writes, "Where the occurrence of certain events is explicitly denied, this is likely to signal a nation gripped by a monolithic ideology."[29]

This is a high standard, and many nation-states fail to meet it fully. The good news, however, is that national identities are not static. The example of the United States illustrates this fact—minority experiences that were once marginalized can become part of mainstream national narratives. National identities have the opportunity to become more inclusive and authentic, and are never condemned to permanent "backwardness." Benedict Anderson— arguably the most influential scholar of nationalism in the 20th century—was deeply attuned to this fact, clarifying that "communities are to be distinguished not by their

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[26] Renan 10
[27] Ibid., 3
[28] Ibid., 4
[29] Miller 38

falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined."[30] Depending on who is allowed to contribute, this "style" can change. The key divide, then, is not between "good" and "bad" national identities. Instead, as Miller suggests, it is "between national identities that emerge through open processes of debate and discussion to which everyone is potentially a contributor, and identities that are authoritatively imposed by repression and indoctrination."[31] In short, a national identity is always a work in progress, and the more it opens itself to multiple inputs, the healthier its growth will be.

Based on Borders

Beyond popular support and inclusiveness, the third reasonable expectation for nation-state identity is that it be based on and enclosed within a clearly defined territory. States ought to respect and recognize their borders and the groups living within them. This does not completely preclude a state from seeking to change its frontiers; discrete territorial claims such as those made by India, China and Pakistan over Kashmir are to be expected. Similarly, separatist groups claiming sovereignty over clearly defined regions often institute healthy, state-based national identities upon winning independence, and their efforts should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. But a problem arises when borders are seen as *predominantly* illegitimate or irrelevant to national self-conception. Deemphasizing borders reduces the importance—and unifying potential—of a shared physical homeland, shifting the foundation of nationhood to racial, ethnic or ideological criteria. As a result, the incentive for accommodating minorities or the sovereignty of other states is badly weakened.

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[30] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso Books, 1983): 6
[31] Miller 39

It can be difficult for some idealistically-minded thinkers to accept the legitimacy of borders. After all, international boundaries are almost always inelegant products of realpolitik, and on their face can seem to be arbitrary ways of delineating communities. As Miller writes, "no one wants to think of himself as roped together to a set of people merely because the ambitions of some dynastic lord in the thirteenth century ran thus far and no further."[32] Thankfully, however, history does not stop at the moment frontiers are defined; the imperfect border-drawing process is just the beginning of the story. Indeed, according to Miller, "the effect of the ruler's conquests may have been, over time, to have produced people with real cultural unity."[33] What really matters happens *after* the borders are set, not before.

Sometimes it is said that the nations of the Middle East are particularly "artificial" because their borders were drawn by European imperialists who were fixated on their own interests. Regardless of the veracity of the second claim, a cursory examination reveals that Europeans' own borders are no more "natural" than those of the Arab states. Germany, for example, was drastically and forcefully reshaped by the victorious Allied Powers after World War II, who determined its frontiers with very little regard for Germans' own preferences. Germany is not alone in its "artificiality"; as famed nationalism scholar Rupert Emerson writes, "Even for the oldest and most fixed of nations, such as France, the further back the inquiry is pressed, the less inevitable does it appear that this particular France should have emerged from the long course of history."[34] Ghia Nodia elaborates: "The development of premodern ethnic communities into modern nations has always been mediated by historical

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[32] Miller 34

[33] Miller 34

[34] Rupert Emerson, *From Empire to Nation: The Rise to Self-Assertion of Asian and African Peoples* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962): 91-92

contingencies and conscious political effort; there simply are no God-given or naturally preordained national borders."[35] The boundaries of *all* nation states were determined by political expediency, and the fact that some regions were "carved up" more recently does not necessarily mean that the resulting states' identities are illegitimate.

This is not to suggest that the placement of borders *remains* unimportant—far from it. At some point, a nation is likely to crystallize within a set of frontiers; in Emerson's words, a population that was once "malleable" acquires a "national imprint" of considerable strength, becoming profoundly resistant to further national remolding.[36] What may have begun as a somewhat arbitrary amalgamation has the potential to quickly acquire almost unbreakable solidarity. The situation is similar to that faced by an assortment of college freshmen randomly assigned to live together on the same hallway: there might be nothing inherently "authentic" about their group, but before long, they form a close bond and have made plans to continue living together the following year.

A key difference between the "college dormitory" analogy and a nation-state is, of course, that the factors working to build a common identity are much stronger in the latter environment.[37] Within the new borders, shared laws, politics, economics and education are profoundly powerful unifying tools. These forces are so strong that "the nation is in a very large number of instances a deposit which has been left behind by the state."[38] From France and England to Hungary and Bulgaria, it is generally political unity that has produced

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[35] Ghia Nodia, "Nationalism and Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 3, no. 4 (1992): 7
[36] Emerson, 113. It is hard to assert any general rule about exactly *when* a nation will crystallize; the speed of nation-formation varies from case to case. But once a nation is in place it is unlikely to disappear. Emerson notes that "Poland, Hungary, Bohemia and Bulgaria…serve as good examples of states which vanished from the historical scene for longer or shorter periods of time but left behind them firmly established national precipitates" (115).
[37] Not to mention the fact that the inhabitants of a given territory are highly likely to share some combination of language, religion, history, music and cuisine.
[38] Ibid., 115

national unity, not the other way around. Yes, there are exceptions like Italy and Germany, where political unity did not precede national consciousness. But according to Emerson, "outside of Europe the role of the state as the molder of nations is at least as great as within it and perhaps even greater."[39] In the Philippines and Indonesia, to name just two examples, "the boundaries drawn on the map by the imperial power were the determining element in establishing the boundaries within which peoples have developed national awareness."[40] In short, regardless of who draws the borders of a nation-state, the mere experience of living together in the same marked-off polity is more often than not enough to transform a people into a nation.

This process takes time, and skeptics would be right to point out that the nations of Western Europe would be far less well-defined today had they had not enjoyed centuries of sustained unity. But other states have managed to form highly developed national consciousnesses after mere decades of existence. Dutch Indonesia, for example, only took recognizable form after major colonial expansions in 1862 and 1920, yet rapidly built a cohesive national identity and has endured only relatively minor incidences of separatist conflict since independence in 1945.[41] This is all the more astounding for the fact that Indonesia includes thousands of inhabited islands and hundreds of distinct ethnic and linguistic groups. And Indonesia is far from the only instance of quick national development in a diverse setting. Similar illustrations abound, particularly in Africa, where very few nations had experienced more than a few decades of political unity before independence, but

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[39] Ibid., 117
[40] Ibid., 118
[41] A separatist insurgency in Aceh province resulted in several thousand deaths from the 1970s-2000s, though it is worth noting that Aceh was never fully brought under Dutch control and as such had little pre-independence experience in common with the rest of Indonesia. Indonesia's invasion and occupation of East Timor also caused significant bloodshed, but this was an external war rather than an example of internal separatist strife.

many—from Tanzania to Botswana to Senegal—have nonetheless overcome ethnic and tribal divisions and developed into relatively cohesive polities. To be sure, many states have not been so lucky, but it is difficult to argue that their problems were predetermined by the way their borders were drawn. Other, more insidious dynamics must be at work.

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Ultimately, a healthy national identity will be *popularly supported*, and *include all groups* historically found *within a nation's borders*. No version of nationalism meets all three criteria perfectly, but some come much closer to fulfilling them than others. It is thus quite possible to assess the health of a given identity.

How can national identity lead to democracy?

There are at least four central ways that state-based national identity supports and facilitates democracy. First, it defines the *demos*, setting the context within which democracy is to proceed. Second, it reminds citizens of their fundamental equality and their right to political self-determination. Third, it builds trust across diverse and potentially conflicting groups. Finally, it encourages active, participatory citizenship by elevating the status of popularly-spoken vernacular languages.

The need for a defined body

For democracy to work—for the people to rule—it needs to be clear who precisely "the people" are. Who will vote? In whose names will their leaders act? Whose interests will the system attempt to weigh? "Popular rule" remains a vague, unreal concept until these tangible—and often difficult—questions are answered. As political theorist Pierre Manent puts it, "democracy, in order to become a reality, needs a *body*, a population marked out by

borders and other characteristics, namely a *defined* realm."[42] In other words, it is necessary to "give flesh to the democratic abstractions of the sovereignty of the people."[43] Many other political theorists grasp this point. In Dankwart Rustow's famous theory of democratization, for example, the only precondition for democratic flourishing is "national unity." To Rustow, "democracy is a system of rule by temporary majorities. In order that rulers and policies may freely change, the boundaries must endure."[44] Democratic competition will be contentious enough on its own without controversy over who is allowed to participate, so if compromises or concessions are to be possible, "the vast majority of citizens in a democracy-to-be must have no doubt or mental reservations as to which political community they belong to."[45]

A healthy nation-state identity is clearly one way to build this consensus, serving as a powerful unifying and defining force for the democratic unit. As Rustow writes, "This implies nothing mysterious about Blood and Soil or daily pledges of allegiance, about personal identity in the psychoanalyst's sense, or about a grand political purpose pursued by the citizenry as a whole."[46] Rather, it simply means that the table is set for democracy: all citizens recognize one another as players, and the game can begin.

The nation-state as the body for democracy

Even if it is granted that democracy requires a clearly defined body, why does this body *have* to be a nation-state? Wouldn't a continental confederation like the European Union serve a similar purpose? Manent forcefully argues that it could not. While such an

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[42] Manent, A World Beyond Politics? 86
[43] Pierre Manent, *Democracy Without Nations?: The Fate of Self-Government in Europe*,(Wilmington, Del.: ISI Books, 2007): 74
[44] Dankwart Rustow, "Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model," *Comparative Politics* 2, no. 3 (1970): 351 Crucially, he notes, "This excludes situations of serious aspirations for merger as in many Arab states."
[45] Ibid., 350
[46] Ibid.

arrangement can generate prosperity and defend itself against external threats, it is simply too large to harness its citizens' democratic energy.

This is because, as Manent puts it, "only an individual can govern himself." If a society wishes to govern *itself*, "it must become as much as possible like an individual."[47] Historically, this meant that self-government was only ever viable in small communities, rarely extending beyond the confines of tiny city-states. But with the advent of the "national form" and the unity and homogeneity it wrought, it finally became possible for self-rule to "include and embrace millions"—including, crucially, in rural areas.[48] It is no accident, then, that democracy swept across Western Europe at the same time as nationalism: it was precisely "thanks [to] the national form that democracy could be embodied in large states."[49]

As a Frenchman, Manent is alarmed by the growth of the European Union and its attempt to unmoor democracy from its national roots. To do so, he argues, is a dangerous denial not only of history but also of human nature. For no matter what idealistic "post-national" thinkers claim, if "the human sentiment [is to] have force, a lasting force…it needs to be concentrated…if you extend it to the whole of humanity, it is surely more just and moral, but it is much weaker, too weak to sustain a tolerably just and happy human association."[50] According to this logic, it is entirely unsurprising that the European Union has developed into a body that is "not democratic in the sense that any neutral observer would

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[47] Manent, *A World Without Politics?* 57
[48] Ibid., 58. Ghia Nodia reminds us that "democracy…is an urban phenomenon to begin with, [and] had to spread throughout the country (meaning the countryside, where most people still lived at the dawn of democratization)" (Nodia 9).
[49] Ibid., 60
[50] Ibid., 205-206

use the word."[51] The Union is simply too large and unwieldy for its decisions to be subject to democratic accountability.

National identity unleashes the people's desire for freedom

Beyond defining the *demos*, state-based patriotism also contributes to democratic development by fostering shared expectations of rights and responsibilities. Membership in a nation *asks* a great deal, so it also must *promise* a great deal; a "national duty" implies a "national birthright." In the assessment of German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, nationalism has thus historically "played a functional role in the implementation of citizenship," empowering individuals from all backgrounds to demand equal status in society.[52] As he puts it, "general conscription [is] only the other side of the civil rights coin."[53]

This alone is a powerful argument for the connection between nationalism and political rights. But Habermas understates the case. National identity is not only *useful* to democracy: in a sense it is founded on the *same idea* as democracy—the idea of popular sovereignty. When applied in international politics, this concept is called self-determination; a nation has the right to rule itself. When applied in a domestic context, popular sovereignty means that leaders must adhere to the public's democratically-expressed will.

To be sure, nationalism can move in undemocratic directions—but whenever it does so, it is abandoning its logical foundation.[54] As Manent puts it, "it is not enough to say that

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[51] Christopher Caldwell, *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe : Immigration, Islam, and the West (*New York: Doubleday, 2009): 302
[52] Jürgen Habermas, "Citizenship and National Identity: Some Reflections on the Future of Europe," in *Citizenship: Critical Concepts* (1992): 341-358.
[53] Ibid.
[54] According to Nodia, "the idea of nationalism is impossible—indeed unthinkable—without the idea of democracy." (Nodia 4)

democracy and the nation are two [different] ways of expressing the project of self-government."[55] Rather, "the social dynamism induced by both nationalism and democracy are superimposed upon and reinforce one another…the peasants become Frenchmen at the same time as they become citizens."[56] Samuel Huntington agrees. In his assessment, the "conservative aristocratic doctrines" that dominated in premodern Europe were also fundamentally "antinational, [based on the] assumption that there was more in common between two aristocrats, one of whom was a foreigner, than between two nationals, one of whom was an aristocrat."[57] By upending this aristocratic consensus, nationalism linked together previously disparate social classes and economic strata, accomplishing a fundamental "democratization" of European political attitudes.

It should thus be no surprise that for England, France, the United States, and other old Western nations, national identity was originally often indistinguishable from democratic identity; in Manent's words, "national pride was fused with democratic pride."[58] This laid the groundwork for what many scholars claim constituted an explicitly 'civic' approach to nationalism. Rather than basing their shared identity on blood, language or religion, the argument goes, these states came to regard *liberal values themselves* as the foundation of the national community.[59]

National identity's full role as fuel for democratic growth becomes particularly evident when looking beyond the West. The fall of colonialism provides a number of especially instructive cases. Writing in the late 1950s, while much of the world was still

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[55] Manent, *A World Beyond Politics*, 58
[56] Ibid.
[57] Samuel Huntington, *American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981): 28
[58] Manent, *A World Beyond Politics*, 60.
[59] See Donald Ipperciel, "Constitutional Democracy and Civic Nationalism" *Nations and Nationalism* 13 no. 3 (2007): 395-416

under European rule, Emerson could already see that "imperialism's…most important result" had ironically been "to rouse against itself the nationalisms—and in some instances even to create the nations—which worked to make its continuance impossible."[60] The imperialist powers learned that while it is possible to rule over a disconnected, disaggregated mass of people, it is almost impossible to subjugate a nation. Accordingly, even though Emerson is a critic of nationalism, he has to grant that

> "in many of the newly rising Asian and African countries…the association between nationalism and democracy has been as intimate and the democratic character of the nationalist movements as unmistakable as in the earlier Western European models. Particularly countries with a considerable European colonial experience, such as India, Burma, Indonesia, the Philippines and Ghana, took a full scale and immediate leap into democratic institutions…the record clearly shows that the nationalist movements saw themselves also as the champions of democracy."[61]

Writing more than thirty years later, Ghia Nodia observed a similar process unfold in the USSR and the Eastern Bloc. From Czechoslovakia to Siberia, he argues that "there is no denying" that the fall of totalitarianism was driven in large part by nationalism.[62] Just as Asian and African anti-colonial activists had framed their demands in explicitly national terms, proponents of democracy in Eastern Europe protested communist subjugation of their local *identities* as much as—and often more than—they objected to the USSR's political and economic policies. As discussed above, this emphasis clearly struck a resonant chord, mobilizing such massive crowds that the authorities in Moscow had little choice but to acquiesce to their demands.

Reflecting on the course of post-colonial and anti-communist activism, Nodia concludes that "in emergent democracies, movements for democracy and movements for

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[60] Emerson 20
[61] Ibid., 223
[62] Nodia, 19

independence are often one and the same." [63] History has shown that a people conscious of its own nationhood is also conscious of its right to self-rule, and is likely to fight fiercely to secure it.

Trust

Discussion thus far has focused on the ways national identity sets the table for democracy. A healthy national identity creates and defines a *demos* capable of self-rule, and it also galvanizes the public in favor of freedom and independence. But this is just the beginning of the story. National identity is even more important in the way it supports the day-to-day democratic process.

Like all political systems, democracies unleash forceful disagreements between rival factions. But democratic disputes are unique for two reasons. First, competition is actively *encouraged* in democracies, leading to particularly drawn-out and particularly public political debates. Second, democracy requires leaders to periodically relinquish or share power. The system hinges on their willingness to peacefully step aside—even if it means handing the reins to their bitter opponents. The essence of democracy is thus its ability to manage the contradiction between deep, persistent divisions on one hand, and smooth, peaceful transfers of power on the other.

What can hold democratic states and societies together, ensuring that these divisions never grow *too* deep? To start with, rival factions will have to get into the habit of mutual compromise. Somehow, they must begin to trust one another to play by the rules, keeping

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[63] Ibid., 9

faith that when they accept costs to their own interests and agendas, their opponents will do the same.[64]

This democratic "good faith" has to come from somewhere. There has to be an extremely powerful *reason* for rival parties to accept positions of vulnerability relative to one another. As British philosopher Roger Scruton puts it, "democracies owe their existence to…the loyalties that are supposedly shared by government and opposition, by all political parties, and by the electorate as a whole."[65] In other words, democracies require that society be united by shared values powerful enough to transcend regional, linguistic, religious and racial divides. Without them, there is no foundation for compromise, and democracy will rapidly disintegrate.

Seymour Martin Lipset's trailblazing 1960 book *Political Man* addresses exactly this point. Lipset extolls "cross-cutting cleavages"—forces that transcend religion, ethnicity, and socioeconomic class—as the lifeblood of democracy.[66] These prevent factions from becoming exclusive and insular, and encourage the formation of inclusive political parties rather than of segregated blocs concerned only with their own health.

The greatest "cross-cutting cleavage" of all, of course, is shared national identity. Indeed, this might be the *only* way to instill trust across a large, diverse society. Ethnicity, religion and class are all powerful grounds for trust, and serve valuable purposes of their own. But unless a state is entirely homogenous, they are insufficient. As David Miller observes, in the absence of a national identity that transcends ethnic, religious and class divisions, "politics at best takes the form of group bargaining and compromise and at worst

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[64] See Miller 91-93
[65] Roger Scruton, *The Need for Nations* (London: Civitas, 2004), 1
[66] Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1960)

degenerates into a struggle for domination. Trust may exist within the groups, but not across them."[67] In such a situation, as soon as the opportunity to "cheat" arises, there is little to stop a given faction from ignoring—or even actively undermining—democratic processes. Politics becomes a zero-sum game, an arms race between groups seeking to out-muscle one another.

The indispensability of nationally-rooted trust is particularly striking in the experiences of postcommunist states. After decades of totalitarian rule, these societies were sorely lacking in traditional forms of human association, especially religion. In such an arid and atomized environment, renewed authoritarian takeover was a distinct possibility. In some cases, this is what occurred—but in many others, democracy managed to take root. What contributed to these divergent outcomes? Certainly not populations' innate receptiveness to liberal or democratic ideas; across the board, Nodia writes, these ideals alone had "almost no prospect of seriously influencing political discourse."[68] Instead, the true distinguishing factor may well have been whether or not advocates of democracy embraced strong, state-based national identities. When they turned to nationalism as the unifying principle for their newly independent societies, making their appeals for freedom in the name of "*our* political traditions" and "*our* identity," democrats repeatedly succeeded.[69] From Georgia to Poland to the Baltic states, the trust and goodwill created by national solidarity provided the fuel for compromise, accommodation and power-sharing, turning formerly totalitarian states into burgeoning democracies. Meanwhile, in Belarus and the Central Asian nations, where

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[67] Miller 92-93. He adds that "Belgium, Canada and Switzerland work as they do partly because they are not simply multinational, but have cultivated common national identities alongside communal ones." (96)
[68] Nodia 18-19
[69] Ibid.

significant nationalist movements never took off, leaders remained paranoid, states remained corrupt, and the people have continued to languish under authoritarian rule.[70]

"Democracy needs a vernacular": the importance of popular language

A healthy national identity's salutary role in the day-to-day democratic process is not limited to generating trust and shared loyalty. It also can facilitate democratic functioning by elevating and institutionalizing popularly-spoken languages. This is more important than it might initially seem. For if democracy is to be genuinely participatory—if the public is to discuss and decide on key political issues—citizens will have to be able to understand one another. In the words of Canadian political scientist Will Kymlicka, "Democratic politics is politics in the vernacular. The average citizen only feels comfortable debating political issues in their own tongue."[71] While educated elites might be able to maintain and develop fluency in multiple languages, members of the general public usually cannot. As a result, "the more political debate is conducted in the vernacular, the more participatory it will be."[72] This does not mean that the entire polity must share the same idiom; dozens of cases show how democracy can work in multilingual contexts. But it *does* mean that democracy is more fair and participatory when individuals can use their own dialects in formal political contexts. The most advanced multilingual democracies—Canada, Belgium, Switzerland and Spain— have increasingly grasped this reality, and have moved steadily toward the recognition and institutionalization of minority languages.[73]

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[70] See Keith Darden and Anna Grzymala-Busse, "The Great Divide: Literacy, Nationalism, and the Communist Collapse," *World Politics* 59, no. 01 (2006): 83-115.
[71] Will Kymlicka, *Politics in the Vernacular: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Citizenship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001): 213
[72] Ibid., 214
[73] Ibid., 212

Healthy national identities have historically worked to raise the status of "languages of the people." Vernaculars once regarded by educated aristocrats as impure "slang" have become respected, codified national tongues. The Czech language, for example, was once "spoken only by peasants, while the nobility and middle classes spoke German." But a with the "emergence of a distinct Czech nation" came "the elevation of Czech into a literary language, involving…the compilation of a grammar, a history of the language, and a Czech-German dictionary"[74] This empowered peasants to become full citizens for the first time, paving their way into national political life.

When popularly-spoken languages are repressed or denied, on the contrary, democracy can be severely harmed. In his 2006 book *Language, Religion and National Identity in Europe and the Middle East*, John Myhill argues that if those in power insist on maintaining a "standard language that artificially unites a large variety of [mutually unintelligible] dialects," the results are likely to be disastrous.[75] With an eye towards specific European and Middle Eastern case studies, he contends that attempts to erase linguistic diversity have been deeply inimical to peace and democracy, and have regularly contributed to oppression and war. And he may well be right. As ensuing chapters will show, the divide between standard language and dialect is particularly strong—and particularly damaging for democracy—in the Arab world.

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The sections above have identified the form a healthy national identity might realistically take, and explained how such an identity is an important factor in the emergence of democracy and in its continued survival. But how does national identity compare to the

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[74] Miller, 33

[75] John Myhill, *Language, Religion and National Identity in Europe and the Middle East* (Philadelphia: J. Benjamins, 2006): 280

other factors influencing democracy in the Arab world? The next chapter will address this question.

2 *Narrowing Down the Suspects*

Dozens of scholars have attempted to explain the Arab democracy deficit, and the scope of the current work does not allow for an exhaustive review of every argument that has been made on the subject. However, even a limited analysis of the key competing explanations is highly revealing. Such an investigation shows that while Islam, economics, oil and regime statecraft do present challenges to democratization, their effects may be much less significant than has been alleged. Moreover, the evidence suggests that these challenges are neither independent nor fundamental. As Figure 2.1 illustrates, they are in fact each symptoms of a greater, more foundational disease infecting the Arab world: the plague of weak state-based national identity.

Figure 2.1: How National Identity Underlies Other Explanations for the Democracy Deficit
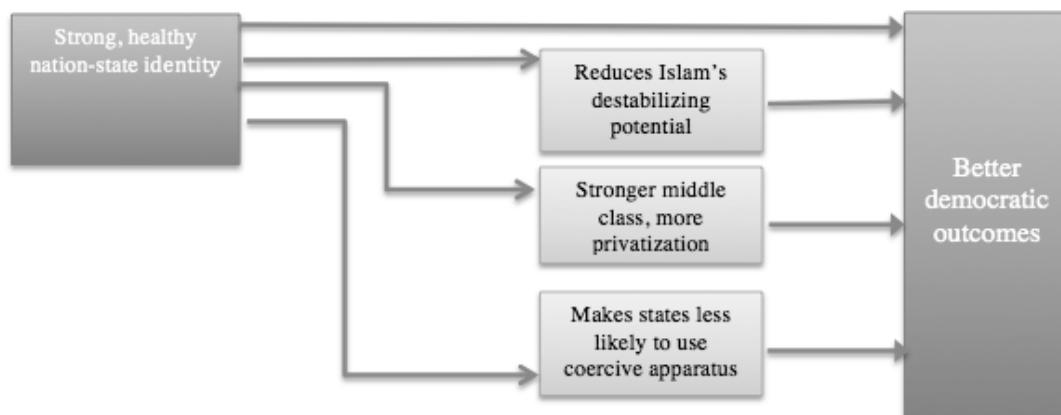
Islam

Those who blame Islam for the Arab democracy deficit would be surprised by this formulation. Yes, they would admit, Arabs have been slow to develop state-based loyalties—

but the *reason* for this delay is that Islam undermines nationalism. With the value it places on

a politically unified *umma*, they argue, the religion is simply opposed to the formation of

independent Muslim nations.[1] Further, they maintain, nations are just the tip of the iceberg:

on a fundamental level, Islam rejects the legitimacy of man-made legislation, representative

institutions, collective decision-making, and ultimately popular sovereignty itself. As

Bernard Lewis writes, "for believing Muslims, legitimate authority comes from God alone,

and the ruler derives his power not from the people, nor yet from his ancestors, but from God

and the holy law."[2] In his estimation, Islam is conceptually opposed to the core ideas of

democracy.

To be sure, Islam *is* "exceptional" in many respects. The faith does take a different

view of government than the historically Christian West. Unlike the New Testament's call to

"render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's," or its insistence that

Christ's kingdom is "not of this world," traditional Islam very much seeks to impose divine

sovereignty on the temporal realm. Moreover, because Muslims consider their holy book to

be the "direct and literal speech of God,"[3] the Qur'an's less-than-democratic prescriptions for

women and religious minorities pose unique challenges to the emergence and spread of

liberal norms.[4]

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[1] See Bernard Lewis, "Islam and Liberal Democracy," *The Atlantic Monthly*, February 1993. As Lewis writes, "almost all aspects of Muslim government have an intensely personal character. In principle, at least, there is no state, but only a ruler; no court, but only a judge. There is not even a city with defined powers, limits, and functions, but only an assemblage of neighborhoods." In other words, Islam rejects nearly every form of human association that fills the space between individuals and God, nations very much included. See also Elie Kedourie, *Democracy and Arab Political Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2013): 5

[2] Bernard Lewis, *Faith and Power: Religion and Politics in the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010): 66

[3] Shadi Hamid, *Islamic Exceptionalism: How the Struggle Over Islam Is Reshaping the World* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2016): 49

[4] Regarding the status of women, see verse 4:11, which specifies that a woman is to receive half the inheritance of a man, verse 2:282, which proclaims that her legal testimony counts for half as much, and verse 4:3, which allows Muslim men to marry up to four wives and to own an unlimited number of concubines. Regarding religious minorities, see verse 9:5, which commands Muslims to "fight and slay the pagans wherever ye find

At the same time, however, the Islamic tradition also features highly egalitarian elements. Unlike Christianity, there is no formal clerical establishment, no attempt at mediation between God and individual believers. This means that any Muslim has the authority to challenge temporal authority on religious grounds—an authority he is encouraged to use if he believes a ruler to be insufficiently Islamic. The faith thus features a sort of allergy to hierarchy, a leveling impulse that is compatible with—or even conducive to—democracy.

But the true indication that Islam is not the main driver of the Arab democracy deficit is in empirics. Whatever Islam's theoretical positions are, in actual practice, it is clear that Muslims can and do form strong national identities, and that they can and do organize democratic forms of government. For while the *Arab* world has struggled to build state-based patriotism and democracy, the broader Muslim world has experienced much more success in both regards. Concerning national identity, examples from Pakistan to Kurdistan to Central Asia vividly demonstrate that "non-Arab Muslims are in no way resistant to ethnic nationalism."[5] The Kurds, for example, are among the most world's most fiercely patriotic peoples, tenaciously fighting to maintain their language and culture in Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria. In the latter three cases, both the Kurds and their neighbors are Sunni Muslims. Yet this shared faith has done little to limit Kurds' consciousness of their own distinct ethnonational identity. Indeed, many highly active Kurdish nationalists remain devout Muslims, even in historically secular, left-wing parties such as Turkey's PKK.[6]

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them," and verse 9:29, which enjoins them to fight Christians and Jews until they pay the jizya (religious tax) with "willing submission" and "feel themselves subdued."

[5] Tristan Mabry, *Nationalism, Language, and Muslim Exceptionalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015): 4

[6] Galip Dalay, "Kurdish Nationalism Will Shape The Region's Future," *Al Jazeera*, July 12, 2015

With respect to democracy, the distinction between Arab and Muslim experiences is even sharper. This is convincingly demonstrated in a 2003 analysis by Alfred Stepan and Graeme Robertson, which examines the systems of governance in sixteen Arab and thirty-one Muslim-majority, non-Arab countries over a thirty-year period. Stepan and Robertson point out that, according to rankings by the Polity Project and Freedom House, eleven of the Muslim-majority states enjoyed at least three years of high political rights between 1972 and 2002, but only one Arab country did.[7] Approached in terms of "country-years," Arab countries were electorally competitive for only 3 out of 434 possible country-years, whereas non-Arab Muslim-majority countries met this criteria in 97 of a possible 697 years.[8] Non-Arab Muslim-majority countries were thus nearly 20 times more 'electorally competitive' than their Arab counterparts during the period of Stepan and Robertson's analysis. As a result, there can be no doubt that there is "an Arab more than Muslim democracy gap."[9]

Six years after the Arab Spring, the Arab-Muslim divide remains in place. According to Freedom House's index (see Table 2.1), Tunisia is the only electoral democracy in the Arab world. But among the non-Arab Muslim-majority states, ten are classified as "electoral democracies": Albania, Bangladesh, Bosnia, Burkina Faso, Comoros, Indonesia, Kosovo, Pakistan, Senegal, and Sierra Leone.[10] Polity's most recent ranking (Table 2.2) shows very similar results, identifying one Arab and eleven non-Arab Muslim states as "institutionalized

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[7] Alfred C. Stepan and Graeme B. Robertson, "An 'Arab' More Than a 'Muslim' Democracy Gap," *Journal of Democracy* 14, no. 3 (2003): 30-44.

[8] It is interesting to note that all three years of "Arab electoral competitiveness" were in pre-Civil War Lebanon, where Christians largely controlled politics. But since the analysis was conducted in 2002, Tunisia's strides toward democracy demonstrate that Arab Muslim states can experience democracy as well.

[9] Ibid.

[10] *Freedom House*, "Freedom in the World 2017." Arab Muslim states are defined as the members of the Arab league minus Comoros, Djibouti, Somalia, and Mauritania, while 28 "non-Arab Muslim-majority states" are determined according to figures in "The Future of the Global Muslim Population," *Pew Center*, January 2011

democracies."[11] The two rankings agree that that while barely five percent of the Arab world

can be called "democratic," at least a third of the broader Muslim world earns this

appellation.

Table 2.1: Freedom House Democracy Rankings for Arab and Muslim states (2016)

Freedom House non-Arab Muslim-majority "electoral democracies" (10)	Freedom House non-Arab Muslim-majority "other" (20)	Freedom House Arab "electoral democracies" (1)	Freedom House Arab "other" (17)
Albania, Bangladesh, Bosnia, Burkina Faso, Comoros, Indonesia, Kosovo, Pakistan, Senegal, Sierra Leone	Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Brunei, Chad, Djibouti, Gambia, Guinea, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Somalia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan	Tunisia	Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestinian Authority, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, United Arab Emirates, Yemen

Table 2.2: Polity Democracy Rankings for Arab and Muslim states (2014)

Polity non-Arab Muslim-majority "institutionalized democracies" (11)	Polity non-Arab Muslim-majority "other" (16)	Polity Arab "institutionalized democracies" (1)	Polity Arab "other" (16)
Albania, Comoros, Indonesia, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Niger, Pakistan, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Turkey	Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Chad, Djibouti, Gambia, Guinea, Iran, Kazakhstan, Mali, Mauritania, Somalia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan	Lebanon	Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen

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[11] Monty Marshall and Benjamin Cole, "Global Report 2014: Conflict, Governance, and State Stability," *Center for Systemic Peace.*

What explains the intra-Muslim divide in democratic outcomes? Could it be that *Arab* Islam is more menacing to democracy than Islam elsewhere? In his response to Stepan and Robertson, Sanford Lakoff contrasts the "intolerant triumphalism rampant in the [Arab] Islamic heartland" with the more moderate strands of the faith found on its geographic periphery.[12] But drawing such a strong internal distinction between the "heart" and "fringes" of Islam undermines the entire case for Islamic exceptionalism. Even Lakoff seems to sense this, later reversing his position and contending that "the general bias of Muslim thinking, Arab and non-Arab, is in principle against the individualism, pluralism, and secularism characteristic of modern democracies."[13] Shadi Hamid, who agrees with Lakoff that Islam is exceptional and largely illiberal, is less equivocal on the matter of the faith's regional divides. In his estimation, "Islam's distinctive relationship to politics goes well beyond the Arab world or the Middle East."[14] To Hamid, the existence of Muslim democracies such as Indonesia and Malaysia is not thanks to "some readiness to embrace liberalism or secularism."[15] Rather, these countries are fundamentally distinguished by the fact that "the passage of Islamist legislation is less controversial domestically."[16] In other words, democracy can work in countries like Indonesia and Malaysia because of unity in the electorate. These countries boast "a [strong] middle…settled around a relatively uncontroversial conservative consensus," with trust between factions so strong that even secular parties regularly promote sharia-based regulations.[17]

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[12] Sanford Lakoff, "The Reality of Muslim Exceptionalism," *Journal of Democracy* 15, no. 4 (2004): 134
[13] Ibid., 136
[14] Hamid 33
[15] Ibid., 33-34
[16] Ibid., 34
[17] Ibid., 32

Hamid calls the situation that prevails in Muslim democracies such as Malaysia and Indonesia "Islamism [without] Islamists"—a very different reality from the Arab Middle East, where he argues that proponents of political Islam are a distinct faction who often find themselves in conflict with the rest of the polity. According to Hamid's argument, Islam itself is the same everywhere, but its political footprint varies according to the unique circumstances at work in each individual society. While the faith causes few problems among the relatively unified Indonesians and Malaysians, in the fragmented and fragile environment of the Middle East, it is much more likely to cause democracy-killing conflict.

As suggested in the preceding chapter, a strong, unifying national identity is one of the most powerful forces that can be marshaled against fragmentation and fragility. If Hamid's theory is true, the existence of such an identity should thus be correlated with significantly less Islam-related conflict. And, on an empirical level, it is. In his analysis of Muslim national movements, Tristan Mabry finds that across Muslim contexts "a strong ethnonational identity correlates with a conspicuous absence of Islamism."[18] Studying the Kurds of Iraq, the Uighurs of China, the Sindhis of Pakistan, the Kashmiris of India, the Acehnese of Indonesia, the Moros of the Philippines and the Arabs of the Middle East, he concludes that "Islamism…functions as a kind of opportunistic infection: it infects citizens who are not immunized by an ethnonational bond."[19] The groups with the strongest ethnolinguistic "print cultures"—the Kurds, Uighurs and Sindhis—are also the least receptive to Islamist politics. In Arab states, by way of contrast, it is precisely "the lack of a coherent national identity" that simultaneously gives Islamists strength and makes their

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[18] Mabry 4
[19] Ibid., 5

proposals so divisive.[20] Ultimately, Mabry goes so far as to argue, "the prescribed

'treatment' for Islamism may, in effect, be nationalism."[21]

Economics

Focusing on Islam is, of course, only one possible way to explain the Arab democracy

deficit. A very different way of analyzing the problem is to hone in on the region's economic

circumstances. Scholars who take this approach argue that Arab countries have resisted

democratization not because of ancient texts or mindsets, but as a result of market forces.

Mehran Kamrava, for example, contends that the Arab countries have failed to develop

sufficiently "autonomous and powerful" private sectors or middle classes.[22] As a result, they

lack actors sufficiently independent enough to "push for state accountability and

democratization."[23] In other words, the problem is not necessarily that the Arab states are

poor; it is that their economies are too top-heavy and state-centric to produce the independent

power bases necessary to meaningfully challenge the ruling regimes. Fareed Zakaria agrees

with this assessment. "There is a dominant business class in the Middle East," he grants, "but

it owes its position to oil or connections to the ruling families. Its wealth is that of feudalism,

not capitalism, and its political effects remain feudal as well."[24] Until "a genuine

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[20] Ibid., 84. Some may question whether Islamism was simply stronger to begin with in the Arab world, and whether this initial strength prevented the growth of national identity. Later chapters will show that this was decidedly not the case: Islamism grew, flourished and became divisive only after time and only in states that failed to build cohesive national identities.

[21] Ibid., 5

[22] Mehran Kamrava, "The Middle East's Democracy Deficit in Comparative Perspective," *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology* 6, no. 1 (2007): 205

[23] Ibid.

[24] Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom : Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003): 153

entrepreneurial business class" emerges, he is doubtful that the region will be able to transition to democracy.[25]

Like the argument blaming the democracy deficit on Islam, the "economics" explanation is founded on some truth. But in many ways, it is a perfect example of what Ghia Nodia calls the "Western [tendency toward] economic determinism" in comparative politics.[26] A myopic focus on "development" misses the fact that democracy is more than a mechanical system. As Nodia puts it,

> "it is far from certain that all countries have to wait until they are "ripe" for democracy before taking the final step. Rare are the cases like those in East Asia or Chile where the socioeconomic conditions needed for democracy were met before authoritarian regimes were dismantled like so much useless scaffolding. Rather, democracy has more often been spread in a much less rational way—like a contagion or the latest fashion from Paris."[27]

By comparing the spread of democracy to a "contagion" or "fashion," Nodia is of course referencing the fall of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc, his own area of special expertise. In most of these erstwhile communist states, there was *no* private sector in the run-up to democratic revolution. There was no entrepreneurial business class agitating for freedom. But while this may have slowed transitions to democracy, it did not stop them.

Even if democratization *did* depend on the presence of a strong private sector and middle class, economic development is not an *a priori* phenomenon; it depends on a number of contributing factors. And in many regards, a strong national identity would support precisely the changes Kamrava and Zakaria call for. For the trust created by shared national bonds is not only important on a political level—it is also deeply valuable economically. As

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[25] Kamrava, Zakaria, and others who focus on economics are representatives of the general "modernization school" of democracy scholarship, which argues that democracy only emerges when certain conditions of development are present. For an overview of this position, see Ronald Englehart and Christian Welzel, "How Development Leads to Democracy," *Foreign Affairs* 88 no.2 (2009):33-48.

[26] Nodia 4

[27] Ibid., 16

David Miller writes, "Certain kinds of trust are required to support the ground rules of a market: individuals must have confidence in one another to deal fairly, to keep contracts, and to refrain from using their industrial or financial muscle to oblige the state to intervene in the market on their behalf." A society divided into exclusive factions of religion, ethnicity or class has a much smaller basis for such trust than one unified by an "encompassing [national] community."[28]

Trust is far from the only way that state-based patriotism would benefit economic development. Ernest Gellner—who, along with Benedict Anderson, is widely regarded as the nationalism scholar *par excellence*—explains that a strong national identity also has far-reaching consequences in the modernization and industrialization of agrarian economies. This is because modern economies depend on workers who are able to do more than just "plough, reap and thresh." Instead, they "must be mobile, and ready to shift from one activity to another, and must…be able to communicate by means of written, impersonal, context-free messages."[29] For such a flexible, skilled workforce to arise, "literate high cultures" must merge with "illiterate low or folk cultures," integrating all of society into one relatively homogenous composite.[30] From Western Europe to East Asia, the way this has occurred is through the "nationalist principle," which has again and again linked previously disparate aristocrats and peasants into unified economic and political communities.

Gellner's analysis is highly relevant to the situation of the modern Middle East.[31] As the previous chapter suggested, the slow growth of state-based national identity has resulted in a situation where the divide between "high" and "low" cultures is as strong as ever, and

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[28] Miller, *On Nationalism*, 91
[29] Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983): 35
[30] Ibid., 77
[31] Something that should not be surprising, given that he did his early fieldwork in the Atlas Mountains of Morocco.

where literacy is abnormally low.[32] There can be little doubt that this holds the region back economically, inhibiting the growth of a strong private sector and middle class. The continued primacy of Modern Standard Arabic is at the heart of the problem: as Mabry writes, "while there is no debate on the exquisite sophistication and eloquence of MSA, its immutability and exclusivity in the public sphere is…a liability [and] a competitive disadvantage in an age of industrialization, modernization and globalization"[33] It is a "standard impediment to literacy," and even for those who can read and write, its distance from vernacular Arabic serves as a profound barrier to efficient self-expression. A good snapshot of the problem is provided by global university rankings; according to *The Times of London's* 2017 assessment, no Arab university can be counted among the world's top 200 institutions, and two Saudi schools are the only Arab representatives in the top 500. The latest Shanghai Ranking agrees, putting no non-Saudi Arab universities among the best 500 global institutions. This paucity of educational excellence is particularly debilitating in an era where the global economy increasingly values knowledge, information and communication, and is an apt illustration of the developmental problems that emerge as a result of weak state-based national identities.

Oil

Blaming the Arab democracy deficit on an oil-driven "resource curse" is a variation of the economics-centric argument articulated by Kamrava and Zakaria. This explanation is based on rentier theory, which holds that if a state relies on "rents" from natural resources rather than on taxes, its citizens will not demand government accountability. As Larry Diamond argues, the state apparatus in a major oil-producing country will likely be "large,

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[32] Up to 100 million "Arabs" lack proficiency in Modern Standard Arabic. See Mabry 60-61
[33] Mabry 68

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centralized, and repressive, [able to] support any number of bloated bureaucracies as de facto employment programs meant to buy political peace with government paychecks."[34] These states are also generally "intensely policed, since there is plenty of money to lavish on a huge and active state-security apparatus."[35] To make matters worse, they tend to be "profoundly corrupt," because the money from oil rents is "no one's tax money," and is in a sense is "free for the taking."[36] Ultimately, Diamond fears, the effects of the oil curse are almost insurmountable, severely damaging the chances for democracy in the eleven Arab countries he deems to be "reliant on oil and gas rents…to keep their states afloat."[37]

The "oil curse" is undoubtedly important in certain countries. But it is not as fundamental to the region's woes as Diamond suggests. While it is true that eleven Arab countries are significant oil exporters, the reality is that only six qualify as full rentier states: Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. These are the only Arab countries that can afford not to tax their citizens, and, along with Lebanon, are the only ones with unemployment rates below ten percent or per capita incomes in the top 100 globally (see Table 2.3).[38] In other words, they are the only states that are "buying off" their citizens in any meaningful sense.

Even among the rentier states, there is some internal variation regarding democracy. Some nations are decidedly less "cursed" than others. Kuwait, for example, has long featured a semi-constitutional monarchy and a parliamentary system where a degree of meaningful debate and decision-making does take place. Open opposition to the ruling regime is often

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[34] Diamond 98
[35] Ibid
[36] Ibid
[37] Ibid., 97
[38] "GDP Per Capita PPP," *Trading Economics*, accessed December 21, 2016
"Unemployment Rate by Country," *Trading Economics*, accessed December 20, 2016
"List of Countries by Personal Income Tax Rate," *Trading Economics*, accessed December 20, 2016

tolerated. Accordingly, the state's Freedom House political rights rating (where 1 is the best and 7 is the worst) has fluctuated in recent years between 4 and 5, earning it a consistent designation of "partly free"—far better than any of its rentier state counterparts.[39] And, perhaps not coincidentally, Kuwait is also the Gulf monarchy with the most highly developed state-based nationalism. As Jill Crystal puts it, "Kuwait is unusual among its neighbors in that it has a well-established national identity and a long history as a nation."[40] Kuwaiti patriotism is well-defined enough that when Iraq invaded the country in 1990, it was unable to find even a few dozen native citizens willing to staff a puppet government—a pitfall it certainly could have avoided "had Kuwait's national identity been more fragile."[41] Kuwait's status as an outlier regarding both democracy and national identity is an intriguing indication that, even in an extremely difficult environment created by high oil rents, the trust and solidarity fomented by state-based patriotism can still be highly relevant.

Beyond the Gulf, the other major oil producers in the Arab world—namely Algeria, Iraq, Libya, Sudan and Yemen—do not qualify as rentier states. Their high populations (see Table 2.7) mean that they must levy substantial income taxes and must contend with high levels of poverty and unemployment—undermining the case that any of them is actually financing "political peace with government paychecks."[42] Per capita income in these five countries ranges from $2,700 (Yemen) to $15,200 (Iraq)—similar to the range in non-oil-producing Arab states, which is $5,100 (Syria) to $18,300 (Lebanon), and far below the range in the Gulf monarchies, which is $43,700 (Oman) to $132,900 (Qatar).[43]

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[39] *Freedom House*, Kuwait Country Report
[40] Jill Crystal, *Kuwait: The Transformation of an Oil State* (New York: Routledge, 1992): 3
[41] Ibid., 157
[42] Diamond 98. The idea that any of these states is "buying peace" is also belied by the fact that all of them have experienced major civil wars in the past three decades—three of which (Iraq, Libya and Yemen) are ongoing.
[43] "GDP Per Capita PPP," *Trading Economics*, accessed December 21, 2016

As Tables 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5 illustrate, the Gulf monarchies are clear outliers regarding taxation, unemployment and per-capita income. The "oil curse" is likely operative among them, and may explain a significant portion of their resistance to democracy. But these wealthy petrostates contain a very small proportion of the Arab world's population. When migrant guest workers are not counted, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait have a combined population of less than six million; adding Saudi Arabia raises the "rentier-state" population to just 25.7 million.[44] Tables 2.6, 2.7 and 2.8 highlight the fact that this is barely seven percent of the Arab world's total non-immigrant population of approximately 350 million.

The "oil curse," then, is not the driving force behind the democracy deficit in the vast majority of the Arab world. From Egypt to Iraq and from Yemen to Algeria, something else must be at work.

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[44] "The World Factbook," *United States Central Intelligence Agency*, accessed December 18, 2016

Table 2.3: Economic indicators in oil-producing rentier states[45]

	Top personal income tax rate	Unemployment rate	Per capita income (PPP)	Freedom House Political Rights
Bahrain	0%	4%	$49,600	7
Kuwait	0%	2%	$70,500	5
Oman	0%	7%	$43,700	6
Qatar	0%	0%	$132,900	6
Saudi Arabia	0%	6%	$53,800	7
UAE	0%	4%	$67,200	6

Table 2.4: Economic indicators in oil-producing but non-rentier Arab states

	Top personal income tax rate[46]	Unemployment rate	Per capita income (PPP)	Freedom House Political Rights
Algeria	35%	10%	$14,500	6
Iraq	15%	15%	$15,200	5
Libya	10%	20% (prewar)	$14,700	6
Sudan	15%	20%	$4,400	7
Yemen[47]	15%	29%	$2,700	7

Table 2.5: Economic indicators in non-oil-producing, non-rentier Arab states

	Top personal income tax rate	Unemployment rate	Per capita income (PPP)	Freedom House Political Rights
Egypt	25%	13%	$11,800	6
Jordan[48]	14%	15%	$10,900	5
Lebanon	20%	6%	$18,300	5
Morocco	38%	10%	$8,200	5
Palestine[49]	20%	27%	$5,300	6
Syria	22%	15% (prewar)	$5,100 (prewar)	7
Tunisia	35%	16%	$11,500	1

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[45] Data in all tables from previously cited *Trading Economics* databases and 2017 *Freedom House* country reports

[46] Although the rates reported here are for the highest income bracket, all of these states begin taxing citizens at relatively low income levels. For example, according to Santander Bank's Trade Portal, Algeria implements a 20% income tax on annual incomes above $1,000. Moreover, all five states levy taxes on consumption and corporations.

[47] Yemen is an extremely impoverished country, and few analysts regard it as a rentier state. However, most of its exports come from oil extraction, and for this reason Diamond treats it as one of his eleven "Arab rentier states."

[48] Some have argued that Jordan—which has no oil reserves—is a rentier state because of the high proportion of aid it receives from the Gulf and from the United States. But Jordan has a top tax rate of 14%, an unemployment rate of 15%, and a per capita income of $10,900—very comparable statistics to those found in the other non-oil producing, non-rentier Arab states.

[49] Information on Palestine comes from the World Bank "Doing Business" project, as well as from the US State Department's 2013 Investment Climate Statement for the West Bank and Gaza. The political rights data is for the West Bank.

Table 2.6: Population in non-oil producing, non-rentier states[50]

Egypt	94,700,000
Jordan	8,100,000
Lebanon	6,200,000
Morocco	33,700,000
Palestinian Territories	4,400,000
Syria	17,100,000
Tunisia	11,100,000
Total	**175,300,000**

(Data in this and following two tables from the CIA World Factbook)

Table 2.7: Population in oil-producing, non-rentier states[51]

Algeria	40,200,000
Iraq	38,100,000
Libya	5,700,000
Sudan	36,700,000
Yemen	27,400,000
Total	**148,100,000**

Table 2.8: Population in oil-producing rentier states[52]

Bahrain	700,000
Kuwait	1,200,000
Oman	2,100,000
Qatar	300,000
Saudi Arabia	20,000,000
United Arab Emirates	1,400,000
Total	**25,700,000**

Regime Statecraft

The final major explanation for the Arab democracy deficit is in some ways related to

the "oil curse" argument. Posed by Eva Bellin, this account of the region's woes holds that

Arab authoritarians have survived thanks to an exceptional combination of willingness and

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[50] Many Syrian citizens are currently living as refugees in Lebanon and Jordan, increasing those states' populations and decreasing Syria's.

[51] Libya's population is listed in the CIA World Factbook as around 6.5 million, but 12% are described as migrant workers, leaving a citizen population of 5.7 million.

[52] All six populations figures are for citizens, and do not include non-citizen migrant workers

ability "to suppress democratic initiative." [53] On one hand, she argues, Arab states' resource wealth and adeptness at capturing international aid gives them the financial capacity to build highly effective "coercive apparatuses." On the other, most of the regimes rely on sectarian and ethnic support rather than on institutional backing, making them uniquely willing to *use* these tools of oppression. As Bellin writes, the fact that elites are chosen on a personalistic and sectarian basis means that they would lose their positions—and even their lives—if faced with "political opening and popular accountability."[54] They thus have a very high incentive to maintain the authoritarian status quo.

Writing in 2004, Bellin observed that they had been very successful in this effort. Most Arab authoritarians had successfully engineered their societies such that genuine challenges to their rule did not even arise. As she writes, the truly unique fact about the Arab world was not that democracy had failed to consolidate; it was that most states had "failed to initiate transition at all."[55] In her analysis, something about the Arab world simply precluded the formation of "mammoth, cross-class coalitions [mobilizing] on the streets to push for reform."[56]

Since 2004, times have changed—as Bellin acknowledged in 2012, the uprisings of 2011 were a "jarring …empirical surprise," forcing scholars to dispense with arguments based on the supposed "complacency" of the Arab public.[57] But she argues that her core observation—that is, that a regime's survival depends on its willingness and ability to build and use a powerful coercive apparatus—has been vindicated. When a "coercive apparatus"

[53]Eva Bellin, "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective," *Comparative Politics* 36, no. 2 (2004): 152

[54] Ibid., 149

[55] Ibid., 142

[56] Ibid., 150

[57] Eva Bellin, "Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Lessons from the Arab Spring," *Comparative Politics* 44, no. 2 (2012): 127-49.

refused to fire on protestors, as in Egypt and Tunisia, regimes quickly fell; when it forcefully repressed demonstrations, as in Syria, Bahrain, Yemen and Libya, dictators proved much more resilient. To her, then, the central lesson of the Arab Spring is that coercive apparatuses drive the region's fate. If a regime's security forces are drawn from a narrow, "patrimonial" pool, they will employ violent repression and fight fiercely against forces of change. But if an authoritarian system empowers elites from across society, it will yield more quickly when challenged.

But what creates the conditions favorable to the emergence of a patrimonial elite in the first place? Long before the Arab Spring, what conspired to ensure that Tunisian security forces would be less removed from the protestors than their Egyptian counterparts—and what made the Egyptians, in turn, much "closer to the people" than the Libyans or Syrians?

Could it be that a strong, healthy national identity worked against the consolidation of narrow, oppressive interests and in favor of more open, inclusive political dynamics? The next chapters will examine the Arab nations on a case-by-case basis and test the validity of this hypothesis.

3 *Indicting Arabism*

It is almost common knowledge that, in most of the Arab world, state-based national identity is quite weak. As Israeli political scientist Benjamin Miller puts it, "the nation-building enterprise has not succeeded" in the region; especially in the Fertile Crescent, citizens identify with their states at much lower rates than is common in the rest of the world.[1] According to polling by public opinion expert Shibley Telhami, while Arabic-speakers juggle "multiple identities," they currently identify "less with their countries and…more with Islam and as Arabs."[2] As of 2010, he found that respondents in North Africa, the Levant and the Gulf expressed support for "Muslim" and "Arab" interests at more than twice the rate they advocated for their own nations (see Table 3.1). And while identities are clearly fluid, anti-state patterns shows few signs of abating soon; many analysts argue that regional satellite media and other forms of transnational electronic communication are serving to reinforce Arab identity at the expense of local nationalism.[3]

Table 3.1: Shibley Telhami's Polling on Arab Identities[4]
"Do you think your government should base its decisions mostly on what is best for:"

	2008	2009	2010
Muslims	22%	14%	39%
Arabs	29%	22%	23%
The world	11%	4%	5%
Your country	38%	50%	31%

[1] Benjamin Miller, "Balance of Power or the State-to-Nation Balance: Explaining Middle East War-Propensity," *Security Studies* 15, no. 4 (2006): 683
[2] Shibley Telhami, "Egypt's Identity Crisis," *The Washington Post*, 16 August 2013
[3] See, for example Khalil Rinnawi, *Instant Nationalism: McArabism, Al-Jazeera, and Transnational Media in the Arab World* (Lanham MD, University Press of America, 2006).
[4] Shibley Telhami, *The World Through Arab Eyes: Arab Public Opinion and the Reshaping of the Middle East.* (New York: Basic Books, 2013): 28

It is worth noting that Telhami's poll—already indicative of weak national identity—in fact *overestimates* the strength of state-based patriotism. This is because his sample of six states includes Lebanon, Jordan and Morocco, which Chapters 4 and 5 will argue have prioritized local identity to a greater extent than any other Arab state save Tunisia. The true balance of regional sentiment is thus probably even less favorable for individual nation-states than Telhami indicates.

This weakness of state-based national identity sets the Arab Middle East apart from other regions of the world. Table 3.2 highlights data from the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), which found in 2004 that across 21 European countries, 88% of respondents felt "very close" or "close" to their nations; only 2% did not feel close at all.[5] Other years of ISSP data, as well as Eurobarometer polling, yield very similar results.[6]

Table 3.2: State-based national identity in Europe (ISSP 2004)

	"Very close"	"Close"	"Not very close"	"Not close at all"
To nation	45%	43%	10%	2%
To Europe	19%	38%	29%	14%

Low identification with state-based patriotism thus appears to be a defining feature of the modern Arab world. But was the current state of affairs inevitable? Or did it arise as a result of distinct and reversible choices? Many commentators and analysts of the Middle East are quick to side with the former position. According to their argument, "the boundaries of the [Arab states] were set without any correlation to the populations therein and thus [did not

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[5] Max Haller and Regina Ressler, "National and European Identity," *Revue Française de Sociologie* 47, no. 4 (2006): 817-850

[6] Marco Antonsich, "Territory and Identity in the Age of Globalization," (doctoral thesis, University of Colorado, 2007): 124

promote] any sense of solidarity."[7] As a result, the states currently in place have little or no authentic national heritage to which they can appeal. They were doomed from the start, destined to fail as soon as border-drawers failed to take into account that Arabs "subscribed to a panregional, surprastate form of nationalism that did not accord with the reality of nation-states."[8]

History, however, tells a different story. Prior to World War I, Middle Easterners who agitated against Ottoman control generally did so through the framework of "societies promoting regional interests, such as independence for Syria, Lebanon, or Iraq," rather than from a pan-Arab standpoint.[9] This trend toward local nationalism accelerated after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. From Cairo to Damascus to Beirut, vibrant movements inspired by *wataniyya* (local, state-centered nationalism) grew and flourished, rapidly replacing tribal and sectarian identities as Middle Easterners' primary means of self-identification. As later chapters will show, by the 1930s, nearly all of the Arabic-speaking states appeared to be well on their way to articulating distinctive national identities.

What reversed this trend, weakening *wataniyya* and undermining the legitimacy and cohesiveness of Arab states? The answer, in a word, is *qawmiyya*, or pan-Arab nationalism. That *qawmiyya* would one day become a powerful, regionally defining force would have shocked most observers after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Pan-Arabism began as a small minority viewpoint, advocated by scarcely more than a hundred individuals. These proponents were outliers in their societies, "men who were kindled by the incendiary ideas of European

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[7] Joseph Kostiner, "Solidarity in the Arab State—an Historical Perspective," in *Challenges to the Cohesion of the Arab State* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2008): 21, 23
[8] Ibid., 22
[9]Adeed Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), 30.

nationalism," and believed that the Arab world should emulate the "German" vision of the nation.[10]

For decades, this small band of pan-Arabists struggled to find a foothold. Would-be leaders of an "Arab nation" were frustrated at every turn, met by groundswells of localized nationalism in each of the states they attempted to influence—even in internally divided, newly cobbled together polities such as Iraq.[11] Across the region, "many insisted they were not Arabs at all, professing an attachment to an altogether different identity." They regarded the language they spoke as an "accident of history, of little consequence, hardly warranting an association with the despised and uncouth Bedouin who to many urbanites constituted the true definition of an Arab."[12] As American-Israeli political scientist Martin Kramer writes, the Arab nationalists were "faced with masses of people who had not chosen to be Arabs," and had no way forward except to "develop a doctrine that denied them any other choice."[13]

This doctrine would be provided by pan-Arabism's foremost ideologue, Yemeni-born educator Sati' al-Husri. His concept was simple: "Every person who speaks Arabic is an Arab."[14] Even if he believes himself to be Egyptian, Lebanese or Syrian, "he is an Arab regardless of his own wishes."[15] Husri understood this premise would not originally draw much support—after all, writes renowned Arab nationalism scholar Adeed Dawisha, he knew that the "Arab dialects were so varied as to make nonsense of the notion of linguistic unity."[16] However,

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[10] This vision, advocated by the likes of Herder and Fichte, essentially held that the nation should be delineated based on exclusively ethnolinguistic criteria.

[11] Orit Bashkin, *The Other Iraq: Pluralism and Culture in Hashemite Iraq* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009), 128.

[12] Dawisha 72

[13] Martin Kramer, "Arab Nationalism: Mistaken Identity," *Daedalus* 122, no. 3 (1993), 180.

[14] Translation by Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair*, 72.

[15] Ibid., 72

[16] Ibid., 67. As Tristan Mabry writes, "Incomprehension between native speakers of different demotic Arabics is more rule than exception. A simultaneous conversation in the mother tongues of people from Rabat, Algiers, Cairo,

organic support did not matter: if Arab nationalists could manage to "teach [objectors] the truth" or "work to limit [their] selfishness," opposition would rapidly dissipate.[17] These prescriptions were euphemisms for a range of totalitarian tactics, including educational indoctrination and denigration of demotic forms of Arabic. In essence, the success of Arab nationalism would depend on cutting people off from their local roots, replacing their historical memories with a manufactured Arabist narrative. In Dawisha's analysis, "Husri and the other custodians of the nationalist narrative would go out of their way to exaggerate, obfuscate, and even invent historic fact, and then use their official power to impose their version of this 'doctored' history on successive generations of people."[18]

They had remarkable success. By the 1950s, educational indoctrination, widespread anti-Western sentiment, and increasing sympathy for Arabic-speaking Palestinians had combined to make the Middle East significantly more receptive to Husri's ideas. In Iraq, for example, where Husri served as education minister, "doctored history…was the prime agent in the socialization of Iraqi citizens to Arab nationalist culture."[19] The groundwork was thus laid for a decisive turning point, which came in 1954 with Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser's decision to reverse his country's traditional position toward Arab nationalism. Suddenly, the Middle East's most eloquent leader became a full-throated voice for Arab unity. In part due to the influential Egyptian media, and in part due to his opportune historical timing, Nasser was able to rally a generation of supporters to his cause. The ensuing acceptance of "Nasserism"—based as it was in Husri's explicitly authoritarian ideology—had immediate consequences for democracy across the region. In Syria, supporters of *wataniyya* and liberalism were cleared aside by the 1958

Sana and Tikrit is a nonstarter." See Tristan Mabry, *Nationalism, Language, and Muslim Exceptionalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015): 77
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid., 74
[19] Ibid., 78

union with Egypt, which "dealt a mortal blow to political pluralism, opening the way to decades of Ba'athist dictatorship."[20] Syria was not alone: within a decade, Arabist military dictators had also swept to power in Iraq, Yemen, Algeria, Libya and Sudan. Reflecting on this sequence of events in his book *The Second Arab Awakening*, Adeed Dawisha writes,

> "Revolutionary nationalism…operated in a sea of authoritarianism throughout its glory days not because of some unfortunate circumstance. Indeed, it was the way that Arab nationalism was defined that was to blame, if not wholly then at least partially, for the absence of democracy."[21]

Husri's definition of the nation met none of the criteria for "healthy" national identity outlined in Chapter 1. It was not based on popular support, not inclusive, and not respectful of borders. It encouraged—and even demanded—top-down, authoritarian tactics. And it thus proved to be a decisive force for the de-liberalization of politics whenever and wherever it was adopted.

The sudden rise of *qawmiyya* had an extremely deleterious effect on the Arab world's long-term democratic development. From their early stages, Arab nationalist regimes—committed to separating supporters of *wataniyya* from their own deeply-felt identities—had refused to tolerate political dissent. This became increasingly true after the failed 1967 conflict against Israel fatally undermined pan-Arabism's credibility and cost the ideology most of its revolutionary appeal. Dictators who had once enjoyed significant support no longer could count on *qawmiyya* to justify their oppressive measures.

But rather than returning to an emphasis on *wataniyya*, the region's autocrats did not retreat significantly from their adherence to the battered Arabist standard. While most *qawmiyya*-supporting regimes did assert a degree of individuality, especially in foreign relations, none of them "[went] so far as to equate the importance of their distinct territorial

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[20] William Harris, "The Crisis of Democracy in Twentieth-Century Syria and Lebanon," in *Challenges to Democracy in the Middle East* (Princeton, N.J.: Department of Near Eastern Studies, Princeton University, 1997), 6
[21] Adeed Dawisha, *The Second Arab Awakening: Revolution, Democracy, and the Islamist Challenge from Tunis to Damascus* (New York: Norton, 2013), 68

qualities with that of pan-Arab unity…and they certainly did not dare sever their ties with Arabism."[22] As a result, political scientist Joseph Kostiner argues, "the search for a distinct identity was left in a state of suspended animation," and "the level of state-specific nationalism [remained] a far cry from the European model."[23]

One key manifestation of this attitude was the regimes' insistence on maintaining the official status of Modern Standard Arabic. Even though none of their citizens spoke MSA natively, the language had been the cornerstone of Sati' al-Husri's ideology, and the region's autocrats were loath to compromise its exalted place in their societies. As discussed in Chapter 1, insisting on linguistic homogeneity and repressing popularly-spoken dialects is highly inimical to democratic governance. And sure enough, the regimes' continued emphasis on MSA has had far-reaching consequences, alienating citizens from the state and from one another. This alienation is based on the fact that—as demonstrated by researchers at the University of Haifa—speakers of Standard Arabic process it as a second language, experiencing a "cognitive disparity" between their mother tongues and the idiom they are expected to use in official settings.[24] Like second languages the world over, MSA remains the sole preserve of the well-educated—even today, upwards of 100 million "Arabs" lack adequate proficiency in Standard Arabic.[25] The regimes' insistence on MSA has thus created vast populations "in states but not of states," predicating citizenship on a language few feel comfortable using and many cannot use at all. Whereas elevating and standardizing popularly-spoken forms of Arabic would have built national solidarity and encouraged active citizenship, the continued dominance of MSA foments internal division and inhibits political participation.

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[22] Kostiner, "Solidarity in the Arab State," 33
[23] Ibid.
[24] See research from the University of Haifa: "Literary Arabic Is Expressed In Brain Of Arabic Speakers As A Second Language," *ScienceDaily,* November 5, 2009.
[25] Mabry 60-61

Absent the cohesion and dynamism that could have been provided by *wataniyya*, it is entirely unsurprising that the Arabist regimes after 1967 came to rely more and more on "centralized and authoritarian [structures] to stay in power."[26] From Saddam Hussein's Iraq to Muammar Gadhafi's Libya, *qawmiyya*-supporting leaders across the region hastened to consolidate what political scientist Daniel Brumberg calls "harmonic states."[27] Such states "attempt to create unity or its appearance through repression, oppression, cooptation, or distraction"—an originally enticing proposal that eventually becomes a trap, "creat[ing] a unipolar field that can easily become a place for deadly games of 'winner takes all' between rulers and their opponents."[28] As later chapters will show, every single one of the Arab nationalist regimes followed this pattern, doggedly attempting to eliminate ideological diversity within their societies. There was, of course, one exception: the reigning despots knew that Islam's social and cultural roots were too deep to simply be stamped out. Rather than attempting to erase the religion, they thus attempted instead to co-opt its dynamism.

From Arabism to Islamism

As the only viable alternative ideology in Arabist states, Islamism attracted a growing range of supporters, including many groups that had not traditionally aligned themselves with religion. According to political scientist Bassam Tibi, "[after] the Iranian revolution, many secularist Arab intellectuals…shifted away from Arab nationalism and in many cases even from Marxism as they have rediscovered Islam as a political ideology of opposition."[29] This influx dramatically increased the power of Islamist groups—most of which explicitly reject both the

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[26] Ibid., 51

[27] Daniel Brumberg, "Islamists and the Politics of Consensus," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 3 (2002), 113

[28] Ibid.

[29] Bassam Tibi, *Arab Nationalism: Between Islam and the Nation-State*, Third Edition (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 229

nation-state and democracy.[30] The rise of Islamism, then, has meant that across the Middle East, one powerful anti-nation-state ideology has taken the place of another.

Before it reaches its full strength, ascendant Islamism serves regimes' purposes by helping silence advocates of liberalism.[31] As Islamist movements fracture and radical factions accumulate power, however, their "absolute denial of the legitimacy of the existing regimes" inevitably sets off violent conflict with Arabist and ex-Arabist autocrats.[32] Though their enemies are fighting one another, liberals are further undermined in this stage of Islamist development. For, unable to fall back on shared *wataniyya*, they have little in common even with moderate Islamists, and are forced into reluctant alliances with police states. Fear of Islamist victories has produced what Daniel Brumberg calls "'autocracy with democrats,' as key groups that might choose democracy absent an Islamist threat now actively support or at least tolerate autocrats."[33] This narrative has largely characterized the course of the Arab Spring, preventing a democratic flowering in states where national identity is not robust enough to create trust between Islamists and democrats.[34]

Democratic Exceptions

In the sea of autocracy that has stubbornly persisted across the Middle East, the nations of Tunisia and Lebanon provide a pair of democratic bright spots. At first glance, Tunisia and

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[30] "Islamism rejects the modern order of a nation-state. It views it as an imposition on the Islamicate and envisions its replacement by the shari'a state. In the footsteps of the late Qutb, the leading Egyptian Islamist of today, the Muslim Brother Yusuf Qaradawi, regarded as Qutb's heir, addresses the issue by rejecting nation-building altogether. In his three-volume *Hatmiyyat al-Hall al-Islami/The Islamic Solution,* Qaradawi dismisses wholesale any adaptation or adoption based on cultural borrowing from Western civilization. At the top of the list of these rejections are democracy and the nation-state." Bassam Tibi, *The Shari'a State: Arab Spring and Democratization.* (New York: Routledge, 2013): 104

[31] Matti Steinberg, "Anarchical Order in the Arab World," In *Challenges to the Cohesion of the Arab State* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2008), 50

[32] Kostiner, "Solidarity in the Arab State—an Historical Perspective," 36.

[33] Brumberg, "Islamists and the Politics of Consensus,"112.

[34] Egypt and Syria are clear examples of this pattern. Algeria went through the same process in the 1990s.

Lebanon do not seem to have much in common: the former is almost uniformly Sunni Muslim, and from independence until 2011 had been persistently autocratic, whereas the latter is religiously diverse and has the longest democratic tradition in the Middle East. However, under this surface, Tunisia and Lebanon have charted similar post-independence paths, rejecting Arabism in exchange for state-based national identities. Unlike their neighbors, both states opted to cultivate multilingual, Mediterranean-oriented characters, tolerant and pluralistic foundations on which to build national politics. The two states have certainly had their difficulties, but today their regimes are the most liberal and democratic in the region, offering a salutary example to the entire Middle East.

The comparative success of the Lebanese and Tunisians is not a function of the mere fact that they *have* distinct national identities—as was discussed earlier, nearly every state in the Middle East was in the process of developing and institutionalizing an organic *wataniyya* by the 1930s. Rather, what has set Tunisia and Lebanon apart has been their ability to *nurture* their national identities despite the challenges posed by Arabism. By emphasizing their unique local roots, the two nations have increased internal cohesion, cultivating the trust necessary for democratic flourishing.

4 Arabism on Trial

The indispensible role played by *wataniyya* becomes particularly evident when the "success stories" of Tunisia and Lebanon are compared with their closest Arab counterparts. Egypt and Syria, respectively, share a great deal in common with the "democratic exceptions," but have made entirely different choices regarding national identity. As this chapter will show, this has led them down a path of dictatorship, instability, and sectarian strife.

Comparing Egypt and Tunisia

Of all the Arabic-speaking states, Tunisia's closest counterpart is Egypt. The two North African countries are both highly ethnically and religiously homogenous; while Tunisia features a small minority of ethnic Berbers and Egypt is home to millions of Coptic Christians, the vast majority of citizens in both countries are Arabic-speaking Sunni Muslims. Neither nation possesses major oil resources, and the two countries have long had similar rates of unemployment, per capita GDP, and population density (see Table 4.1). To be sure, Tunisia and Egypt had somewhat different colonial experiences; whereas Egypt was directly ruled by Great Britain for just eight years, Tunisia was under French control for a full three-quarters of a century. However, the period of close British involvement in Egyptian affairs (1882-1956) almost exactly coincided with Tunisia's years under the French (1881-1956).

Table 4.1: Comparing Egypt and Tunisia

	Tunisia	Egypt
European colonial contact	1881-1956	1882-1956
2016 Per capita GDP (PPP)[1]	$11,500	$11,800
2016 Unemployment rate[2]	16%	13%
2015 Population density[3]	72 per km^2	92 per km^2
Religious breakdown[4]	99% Sunni	90% Sunni

Egypt

In 1920, Sati' al-Husri and a group of his fellow Arab nationalists arrived in Egypt, expecting to receive "widespread support" from a population they saw as the "natural leaders" of Arab nationalism.[5] But they were quickly disappointed. As an ancient people with a strong sense of place and a history of self-rule, Egyptians were overwhelmingly, and stubbornly, aligned behind their own unique identity.[6] As Dawisha writes, "to most Egyptians, there had always been an 'Egypt' which was as ancient as the Nile, and whose sociopolitical roots could be traced all the way back to Pharonic times."[7] Husri himself was forced to acknowledge this: as he later wrote, the Egyptians "did not possess an Arab nationalist sentiment; did not accept that Egypt was part of the Arab lands, and would not acknowledge that the Egyptian people were part of the Arab nation."[8] Instead, as Arab historian Nicola Ziadeh affirms, "from the end of the nineteenth century until World War II, nationalism to the Egyptian meant essentially

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[1] Both Tunisia and Egypt experienced significant GDP growth in the 2000s. "GDP Per Capita PPP," *Trading Economics*, accessed December 21, 2016

[2] "Unemployment Rate by Country," *Trading Economics*, accessed December 20, 2016

[3] *The World Bank*, "Population Density (people per square km of land area)," accessed February 22, 2017. Among Arab states, population density varies wildly from Algeria (17 per square km) to Bahrain (1,786 per square km)

[4] The World Factbook," *United States Central Intelligence Agency*, accessed December 18, 2016

[5] Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the 20th Century*, 76, 99

[6] Ibid., 99

[7] Ibid., 98

[8] Quoted in Dawisha 99

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Egyptian nationalism and the nationalist struggle was perceived as exclusively an Egyptian struggle against foreign control."[9]

For most Egyptians, this state-based national consciousness formed an integral part of daily life. According to historian Ziad Fahmy, newspapers, magazines, theater and music from early 20th century Egypt "facilitated a sense of collective camaraderie," reflecting and reinforcing patriotism and shared identity.[10] Throughout mass culture, Egyptians were portrayed as speaking and acting distinctively, and were "clearly, though tacitly, differentiated from non-Egyptians."[11] One of the most important characteristics of this vibrant identity was its emphasis on colloquial Egyptian Arabic. Whereas speaking Modern Standard Arabic was portrayed as "haughty and incomprehensively distant from everyday Egyptian life," Cairene Arabic was lauded as the comprehensible and familiar tongue of an *ibn al-balad*, or "son of the nation."[12] Indeed, from the 1870s to 1940s, hundreds of Egyptian newspapers and magazines took the radical step of using the Arabic alphabet to publish in the local vernacular, earning the ire of conservative Muslims, but further cementing a widespread sense of *wataniyya* throughout society.[13]

State-specific nationalism was not limited to mass media and popular culture; *wataniyya* was arguably even stronger among Egypt's leading thinkers. As Adeed Dawisha writes, throughout the 1920s, 30s and 40s, "the weight of considered intellectual opinion in Egypt was in favor of a uniquely Egyptian identity at the expense of an all-encompassing Arab

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[9] Ibid.

[10] Ziad Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians: Creating the Modern Nation Through Popular Culture* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2011): 19, 170

[11] Ibid., 170

[12] Ibid., 10, 8

[13] The traditional Islamic position holds that local Arabic "dialects" are impure versions of Classical Arabic, the language of the Qur'an, and should not be dignified by being written down.

identity, which was depicted as spiritually bankrupt and intellectually backward."[14] For example, the journalist, poet and literary critic Abbas Muhamed al-'Aqqad "differentiated the 'cultured Egyptian nation' from 'bedouin' nations [and] wrote of the existence of a wide gulf between the retrogressive mentality of the Arabs and the progressive outlook of twentieth century Egyptians."[15] 'Aqqad argued that Egyptians should move beyond "[their] past Arab centuries lest [they themselves] be asphyxiated by the dust of these centuries."[16] Another intellectual, Salame Musa, opined, "we do not owe the Arabs any loyalty. Our youth should not spend too much time on Arab culture. We need to get them accustomed to writing according to modern Egyptian methods rather than to archaic Arab styles."[17] Legendary novelist and philosopher Tawfiq al-Hakim agreed, holding that "Egypt and the Arabs were diametrically opposed in spirit and intellect," a position he advanced in his most celebrated novel, *'Awdat al-Ruh* (The Return of the Soul).[18]

But the most important of the *wataniyya*-supporting Egyptian intellectuals was Taha Husayn, who was revered as Egypt's "leading man of letters,"[19] and earned a reputation as "the greatest thinker of [his] generation."[20] In Husayn's conception, the Arabs were little more than "one of the many invaders of Egypt."[21] They were only one of the tribes that had tried and failed to suppress Egyptian civilization—a civilization that had existed continuously since the age of the Pharaohs. While each incoming group had left its mark, they had *joined* the Egyptian nation rather than subsuming or eliminating it. The result was a diverse, multifaceted

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[14] Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the 20th Century*, 101
[15] Ibid.,100
[16] Quoted in Dawisha 100
[17] Ibid., 100
[18] Ibid., 101
[19] Ibid
[20] Israel Gershoni, "Liberal Democratic Legacies in Modern Egypt: The Role of the Intellectuals, 1900-1950," *The Institute for Advanced Study*, Summer 2012
[21] Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the 20th Century*, 100

population that nonetheless remained distinctly Egyptian. As James Jankowski writes, "Husayn's definition of Egyptian nationality was highly liberal and inclusive, extending to all dwellers of the Nile Valley—irrespective of their ethnic origin, language, and religion."[22] In other words, a Muslim, a Christian, a Jew, or a member of any other ethnic or religious community all had the same claim to Egyptian identity. This approach had explicit political implications: it was fundamentally democratic in that it valued all citizens equally. As a result, Husayn firmly believed that "Egyptians…should elect their representatives through the institutions and mechanisms of multiparty parliamentary government."[23]

Husayn was not alone in his liberal, democratic bent. According to Israel Gershoni, he was part of the "mainstream current within the intellectual community"—a current that "[galvanized] and [institutionalized] a strong tradition of liberal democratic thought in Egypt."[24] Backed by such significant intellectual support, parliamentary government was able to serve from 1923 to 1952 "as the basic framework within which Egyptian political, social, and cultural life evolved."[25] And with multiple competitive political parties vying for seats in periodic national elections, parliamentary rule successfully "eroded the authoritarian political culture of the late Egyptian-Ottoman oligarchy…weakened British colonial rule…encouraged ethnic pluralism and religious tolerance, reduced the presence of the police and army, and cultivated rich cultural activity with minimal state intervention."[26] During these democratic decades, Gershoni writes, the public and civil spheres were open to and involved "old and young, men and women, Christians, Jews and Muslims, and elite and non-elite strata."[27] While

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[22] Gershoni, "Liberal Democratic Legacies in Modern Egypt"
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.

the situation was not perfect, Egypt existed for years as a relatively democratic state at the heart of the Arab world.

But this liberal interlude was not to last forever—and neither was the strength of *wataniyya* in Egyptian political life. In July 1952, a military coup overthrew the elected government, deposing the monarch and dissolving political parties. By 1954, Gamal Abdel Nasser had emerged as the leader of the revolutionary government. Convinced that "Arab disunity guaranteed Arab defeat," he turned the full force of the state—and of his own considerable personal charisma—toward promulgating pan-Arab nationalism. [28] Though he was not an ideologue in the mode of Sati' al-Husri, Nasser believed that "an Egyptian campaign to galvanize the citizens of other Arab states against Western alliances had to tap the most readily acceptable bond that drew Egyptians and the other Arabs together,"[29] and that the only way to do this was "to subsume Egypt's identity within the overall Arab identity."[30]

This was a significant departure from Egypt's past, but the Egyptian people's support for the Palestinian cause, their distress over the failed Arab-Israeli war of 1948-49, and their deep-rooted anger over the British occupation all pushed them towards Nasser's pan-Arabist camp. The speed of ideological change was spurred by an overhaul and expansion of Egypt's educational system; the revolutionary government built hundreds of new schools and trained thousands of new teachers, all of whom became "a living testimony…to Nasser's policies and principles."[31] In the words of regional expert Laurie Brand, the state's educational efforts amounted to "a program to rewrite modern Egyptian history," purging it of so-called

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[28] Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the 20th Century*, 142
[29] Ibid., 142
[30] Ibid.,147
[31] Ibid., 150

"impurities" that contravened the Arabist narrative.[32] By the early 1960s, accordingly, Nasser had successfully transformed "Egyptian perceptions" of Arab nationalism.[33]

The explicitly political manifestation of pan-Arabism—that is, the demand that all Arabic-speaking peoples be united under one government—was relatively short-lived. Within a decade, Nasser's failed union with Syria and Yemen, his long, bloody war in the latter country, and his disastrous provocation of Israel combined to severely discredit calls for immediate Arab unity. However, *qawmiyya*'s effect in Egypt has lived on, badly damaging the country's prospects for democracy.

As discussed in Chapter 3, Arab nationalism was an inherently illiberal ideology, disdaining individuals' right to choose—or even have a role in choosing—their own identity. In Nasser's new order, liberal democracy and its associated institutions were seen as nothing more than Western impositions designed to divide Arabs from one another. Slogans like "Arab nationalism exterminates the Western political parties" regularly rang out in the streets and over the airwaves.[34] Since "all Arabs supposedly adhered to one unifying vision," there was no need for political parties, which would only "sow divisions in Arab ranks."[35] As a result, Egypt's once-vibrant multiparty political scene was eliminated, replaced by the unitary state. A similar change occurred in the media. Before the revolution, there had been 28 daily and 30 weekly newspapers published between Cairo and Alexandria alone, all of which were privately owned or produced by political parties.[36] After the revolution, these were replaced by a

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[32] Laurie Brand, *Official Stories: Politics and National Narratives in Egypt and Algeria* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2014): 60
[33] Dawisha, 153
[34] Ibid., 305
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid., 304

"handful of state-owned dailies…distinguished from each other only by the title on the front page."[37]

One of the most important long-term results of Nasser's years in power was a revolution in the status of colloquial Egyptian Arabic. According to Fahmy, pressure from the state meant that colloquial Egyptian had "almost entirely disappeared from print by the 1950s," ceding its once prominent status to MSA.[38] A long process began whereby the popularly-spoken dialect was "vulgarized, belittled and marginalized by the intellectual elite."[39] The Egyptian government began to insist on using MSA in all official settings, including as the medium of education. It became common for Egyptian children to hear at school that their native dialect was "weak," "corrupt," and "[without] grammar"—epithets that remain widespread today.[40] This pervasive denigration of Egyptian Arabic and its exclusion from official spheres had far-reaching consequences. With citizenship defined by "a language that is nobody's mother tongue," a psychological disconnect naturally emerged between the state and the people, especially the less-educated.[41] And on a more tangible level, sociologist Niloofar Haeri argues, since "most Egyptians find speaking and writing in classical Arabic difficult," the state's newfound insistence on MSA began to act as a profound "obstacle to their participation in the political realm."[42]

This aridly authoritarian climate remained in place long after the end of Nasser's years in power. His successor, Anwar Sadat, inherited a totalitarian state that had been built on and legitimized by the promise of Arab nationalism. While the revolutionary ideology itself had

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[37] Ibid., 304
[38] Fahmy 172
[39] Ibid., 173
[40] Niloofar Haeri, *Sacred Language, Ordinary People: Dilemmas of Culture and Politics in Egypt* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003): 37
[41] Ibid., 149
[42] Ibid., 151

lost much of its appeal, Sadat still had at his disposal the oppressive machinery it left behind. This meant that he did not have to find a new ideology to fill the "Arabist-sized hole" in Egyptian politics; it was possible to remain a hold on the country without it. While he did loosen some restrictions on civic participation and adopt a subtly more Egypt-centric stance than his charismatic predecessor, Sadat did not come close to executing a meaningful return to either democracy or *wataniyya*.[43]

Sadat's repression-centered strategy prevented most forms of potential dissent, but it was impossible to fully rein in Egyptian Islam. He thus attempted to co-opt the energy of Islamist movements, corralling them into the regime's camp and deploying them against his leftist rivals. He freed thousands of Islamists from state prisons, funded the construction of thousands of new mosques, and increased Islamic programming in state media and state universities.[44] In the words of political Islam expert Mohammed Ayoob, "an unwritten compact with the regime [allowed] the religious establishment…free rein as far as cultural and religious matters [were] concerned in return for its acquiescence into the state's near total control of the political and economic spheres."[45] While the regime succeeded in buying "political sterility," it came "at the cost of cultural and social conservatism and de facto censorship of views that [ran] counter to those of the religious establishment."[46] This

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[43] For example, while Egypt ceased to be called "The United Arab Republic," its new name—the Arab Republic of Egypt—still evoked *qawmiyya*. Sadat also continuously invoked Nasser and the 1952 Revolution as sources of legitimacy. In the words of Laurie Brand, "there was no lack of Arabism in [Sadat's public statements]"; instead of "characterizing his discourse as shifting away from Egypt's Arab identity, it would be more accurate to say that [he] reconstructed the goals of inter-Arab initiatives and changed his set of Arab allies" (see Brand, *Official Stories,* 81)
[44] John Esposito, *Islam and Politics* (Syracuse NY: Syracuse University Press, 1998), 236
[45] Mohammed Ayoob, *The Many Faces of Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Muslim World* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 85
[46] Ibid.

ultimately led to "the increasing Islamization of society," which "created fertile ground for the propagation of Islamist political views."[47]

By the time Hosni Mubarak assumed the presidency, strengthened Islamists began to openly challenge the regime, which they resented for its increasingly pro-Western stance. Even though Mubarak continued and intensified Sadat's concessions to Islamists on cultural matters, when it came to politics, his repressive approach meant that Egypt gradually found itself locked in a bipolar standoff between the secular regime and its Islamist antagonists.

Vitally, neither side of this confrontation advocated either *wataniyya* or democracy. For his part, Mubarak doubled down on Egypt's Arab identity. He regularly referred to Egypt as "the heart of Arabism," or even simply as "the Arab nation," and oversaw the publication of educational materials that "in promoting *qawmiyya* and railing against imperialism, could easily have come from the Nasser period."[48] Meanwhile, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood branded democracy and the nation-state as Western innovations and "[dismissed them] wholesale."[49] Indeed, to the extent that Arabism had lost popular legitimacy, the Muslim Brotherhood entered into the *wataniyya*-denying space it prepared, becoming the primary group undermining Egypt's state-based national identity. Economist Hafez Ghanem is one of many who have come to identify the Brotherhood as such, succinctly asserting, "political Islam could be considered the antithesis of Egyptian nationalism."[50] His stance was bluntly underscored by the Brotherhood's spiritual leader in 2006, when he said "Tuz fi Misr"—"to hell with Egypt."[51]

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[47] Ibid.
[48] Brand, "Official Stories," 104, 100
[49] Ayoob, *The Many Faces of Political Islam*, 85
[50] Hafez Ghanem, "Egypt's Difficult Transition," *The Brookings Institution*, Working Paper 66, January 2014.
[51] Shibley Telhami, "Egypt's Identity Crisis," *The Washington Post*, 16 August 2013

In an environment where neither the regime nor the Islamists embraced a unifying vision of Egyptian national identity, precious little remained to inspire trust or goodwill between the two camps. For the most part, Egyptian liberals and patriots were caught in the middle, with very little power to significantly shape the course of politics. This dynamic was on full display through the events of the Arab Spring. While liberals and Islamists ostensibly worked together to bring down the Mubarak regime, only the latter had the organizational capacity to exploit the opening and consolidate control of the country. The Brotherhood, unconstrained by any meaningful degree of *wataniyya*, proceeded to rule in an enormously polarizing fashion, pushing the liberals back into the arms of the security establishment they had originally overthrown. Today, the situation is essentially the same as it was before the 2011 revolution. As one despondent Egyptian told a *Foreign Affairs* correspondent, "it's still the military versus the Muslim Brotherhood. There's no third option."[52]

Tunisia

After a prolonged struggle led by lawyer Habib Bourguiba and his Neo-Destour Party, Tunisia won independence from France in 1956. Hailed as a national hero, Bourguiba became the country's first president, and remained in power until 1987. During his tenure, the Tunisian state adopted a dramatically more favorable approach to *wataniyya* than that pursued by Nasser in Egypt. As American journalist Georgie Anne Geyer puts it, Bourguiba's "policies were directly designed to root Tunisians in their own, real and distinguished identity."[53] His administration actively avoided overemphasizing the Arab and Islamic aspects of the nation's character, worried that such an orientation would "alienate Tunisia from its more cosmopolitan

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[52] Eric Trager, "Stuck With Sisi: Amid Egypt's Repression, Few Alternatives," *Foreign Affairs*, January 24, 2017
[53] Georgie Anne Geyer, *Tunisia: A Journey through a Country That Works* (London: Stacey International, 2003), 145. This is a richly detailed and convincingly argued work, though Geyer is perhaps too enthusiastic in her defense of the Ben-Ali regime, which grew increasingly repressive and corrupt before being overthrown in 2011.

Carthaginian past."[54]

To a far greater degree than his Egyptian Arabist counterparts—for whom the power to "rewrite history" was an indispensible political tool—Bourguiba based his ideology on a commitment to accurately representing historical fact. Indeed, as Princeton Tunisia expert L. Carl Brown emphasizes, the most essential characteristic of "Bourguibism" was to "avoid self-deception."[55] The only way to "set national sentiment on firm foundations," Bourguiba argued, was to "give the people a full picture of their past."[56] His approach to nationalism thus refused to "seek refuge in an unreal 'Golden Age' when 'we' were strong or civilized and 'they' weak or barbaric."[57]

This open approach to memory, which continued even more enthusiastically under Bourguiba's successor Zine El Abedine Ben-Ali, meant that Tunisians paid attention both to their Islamic and non-Islamic roots. As Geyer observes, Tunisia saw "a conscious and deliberate process…of reaching back into the richly layered cultural heritage of the country—Berber, Carthaginian, Roman, Arab-Muslim, Moorish, Djerban-Jewish, French, Italian and Spanish."[58] This remarkably pluralistic vision of the nation's history was integrated into everyday life through a variety of cultural and social initiatives, the most important of which were national educational policies. Geyer writes that "Tunisia…revived its education system by bringing back the country's rich, but long forgotten pre-Islamic past"; in this effort, "the key identifying words were modernity, identity and authenticity."[59] Tunisia's determination to engage with the full diversity of its national roots set it apart from its neighbors on multiple

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[54] Larissa Chomiak and John P. Entelis, "Contesting Order in Tunisia: Crafting Political Identity" In *Civil Society and Activism Under Authoritarian Rule* (New York: Routledge 2013): 82
[55] Carl L. Brown, "Bourguiba and Bourguibism Revisited: Reflections and Interpretation," *Middle East Journal*, no. 1 (2001), 53
[56] Geyer, *Tunisia: A Journey through a Country That Works,* 130
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid., 128
[59] Ibid., 131

fronts. One concrete manifestation of this spirit, argues Arabic language expert Yasir Suleiman, was that "a positive association [was] set up between the identity of Tunisia as a modern nation state and its dialect, called *tunsi* locally."[60] Unlike the Arabist policy pursued in Egypt, Tunisia pursued a nationalism that incorporated its population's natively spoken language, thus managing to avoid many of the alienating pitfalls of MSA-focused state policy.

The Tunisian divergence from the Arabist path was not limited to historical and linguistic questions alone; it also resulted in major political disagreements. Bourguiba rapidly earned the ire of his Arabist neighbors, notably Egypt's Nasser, who worked constantly to undermine both the Tunisian president and his vision for national identity. Nevertheless, Bourguiba stuck steadfastly stuck to his course, convinced that creating a "mosaic of all the early Tunisians" would be both "legitimate and legitimizing."[61]

His gamble paid off. Despite Nasser's efforts, a meaningful Arabist movement never took off in independent Tunisia. According to Israeli-American political scientist Jacob Abadi, this was fundamentally because "the Tunisian regime was far more successful than most of its counterparts in the Middle East in creating legitimacy to its rule."[62] Georgetown's Michael C. Hudson agrees, arguing that Bourguiba successfully "fashioned a penetrative, broadly-based political movement," which he maintained long into his tenure as president.[63] This trajectory stood in sharp contrast to the Arabist approach; even within Egypt, "Nasir's structure-building took place 'from the top down' and was never as successful as Bourguiba's in bridging the gap between elites and masses."[64] While part of this success was due to Bourguiba's charisma and

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[60] Yasir Suleiman, *Language and Identity in the Middle East and North Africa* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1996): 4
[61] Geyer, *Tunisia: A Journey through a Country That Works,* 77
[62] Jacob Abadi, *Tunisia Since the Arab Conquest: The Saga of a Westernized Muslim State*, 1st ed. (Reading, UK: Ithaca Press, 2012), 474
[63] Michael C Hudson, *Arab Politics: The Search for Legitimacy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977): 378
[64] Ibid.

practical leadership style, Hudson writes that his true legitimacy "derive[d] from his historical embodiment of the most cherished symbols and values of Tunisian national identity and independence."[65] In other words, Bourguiba's popularity was rooted in the resonance of the message he delivered—not reliant only on his own personal appeal.

Beyond undergirding the state's legitimacy, Tunisia's embrace of *wataniyya* resulted in a much more stable and peaceful social environment than that found in Egypt in other Arabist states. Writing in 1977, Hudson goes so far as to describe the nation as characterized by "harmony, balance, cohesion, tolerance, [and] contentment," and emphatically differentiates it from the "volatile, bitter, and tragic politics of the pan-Arab core."[66] And as Abadi explains, "under Bourguiba's guidance Tunisia emerged as a pro-Western, moderate and tolerant country lacking major ethnic or religious disputes."[67] With key questions of communal identity settled, animosity between rival factions was kept to a minimum, ensuring that violent political tactics remained well outside of the Tunisian mainstream.

To be sure, Bourguiba's tenure in power was not pristine. His aggressive attempt to modernize the country alienated many traditionally-minded Muslims. And his authoritarian leadership style—which was imitated by his successor, Zine el-Abedine Ben Ali—meant that Tunisia was, until 2011, not a democracy. This record serves as a reminder that strong, inclusive *wataniyya* is on its own not enough to ensure political rights. It should nevertheless be acknowledged that, as Abadi points out, "drastic measures such as the persecution and execution of political enemies, such as Nasser applied in Egypt, were unknown to the Tunisians."[68] In other words, even as it failed for decades to produce democracy, *wataniyya*

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[65]Ibid., 383
[66] Ibid., 377
[67] Abadi, *Tunisia Since the Arab Conquest: The Saga of a Westernized Muslim State,* 475
[68] Ibid., 476

simultaneously restrained potential excesses on the part of the Bourguiba and Ben-Ali regimes and reduced the violence with which dissident leaders were willing to oppose them.

The moderation of Tunisia's political culture can be clearly seen in the trajectory charted by the nation's Islamists. When they first gathered strength in the 1970s, Tunisian Islamists shared a great deal of their ideology with Egypt's radical Muslim Brotherhood. However, writes Tunisian journalist and human rights activist Salaheddine Jourchi, the position of radical Islamists grew increasingly untenable as "a contradiction between [their] ideology and the Tunisian cultural, social, and political reality became obvious."[69] Tunisian society, buttressed by a popularly-supported and pluralistic national identity, was simply too stable for a revolutionary ideology to gain significant traction. As a result of these realities, Jourchi writes, "the discourse of [Tunisian Islamists]…changed in form and content" between 1970 and 1990, becoming increasingly liberal and moderate—especially on "questions concerning women, the West, and society."[70] This was not enough, however, for Islamism to carve out a sustainable place in Tunisia's politics, and in 1992 an alleged takeover attempt caused them to lose "virtually all sympathy among the people."[71] Thoroughly rebuffed, the movement's leaders would go to great lengths to appear moderate and accommodating when they returned from exile in 2011.

The ability of state-based nationalism to constrain Islamists has been indispensible during Tunisia's successful democratic transition. Ennahda, the largest religious party in the country, has clearly been mindful of its past failure to challenge the nation's identity, and has been careful to present a restrained image in line with Tunisia's proud history of

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[69] Slaheddine Jourchi, "Authenticity, Modernity, and the Islamic Movement in Tunisia," in *Cosmopolitism, Identity and Authenticity in the Middle East,* Roel Meijer, ed. (London: Curzon Press, 1999), 124
[70] Ibid., 127
[71] Geyer, *Tunisia: A Journey through a Country That Works,* 109

modernization. When it won elections in 2011, Ennahda shared parliamentary control with a coalition of secular parties, and when it lost in 2013, it calmly stepped aside—the first Islamist party anywhere in the world to voluntarily give up power. The group has deliberately emphasized its Tunisian bona fides, arguing that it has followed a "very nationally grounded trajectory" and even going so far as to call Bourgiba—once its sworn enemy—a "symbol of our beloved nation."[72] By 2016, it became questionable whether the party could still even be called "Islamist" at all. In an explicit "Tunisification" of its identity, it separated its religious and political wings, "renouncing political Islam" altogether.[73]

These actions have sharply distinguished Ennahda from Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, which, as discussed above, spent its short stint in office aggressively consolidating authority and persecuting its opponents. Operating in a society where *wataniyya* had been suppressed and could not link together disparate groups, the Egyptian Islamists followed a much more divisive path than their Tunisian counterparts. This discrepancy in Islamist behavior likely explains most of the divergence between Tunisia's now-thriving democracy and Egypt's return to harsh authoritarianism. Even as key Tunisian economic indicators, such as unemployment and GDP growth, have fallen behind Egypt's,[74] *wataniyya*-rooted consensus over religion has allowed the former country to move into an unprecedented era of political openness and stability.

Comparing Syria and Lebanon

Lebanon's closest counterpart in the Arab world is Syria, its neighbor to the east. Both nations remained under Ottoman control until the end of World War I, and were ruled by

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[72] Monica Marks and Sayida Ounissi, "Ennahda From Within: Islamists or 'Muslim Democrats'?" *The Brookings Institution*, March 23, 2016

[73] Larbi Sadiki, "Why is Tunisia's Ennahda Ditching Political Islam?" *Al Jazeera*, May 24, 2016

[74] *Trading Economics*, "Egypt GDP Growth Rate" and "Tunisia GDP Growth Rate," accessed March 30, 2017.

France from 1923-1946. They both feature very high levels of sectarian diversity, including substantial contingents of Christians, Sunnis, and non-Sunni Muslims. While Lebanon has for decades enjoyed a higher per capita GDP and lower unemployment, the economic disparity between the two states was less pronounced during and immediately following the Mandate—the years in which both Syria and Lebanon chose their respective approaches toward Arabism and state-based national identity.

Table 4.2: Comparing Syria and Lebanon

	Syria	Lebanon
Years of French Mandate	1923-1946	1923-1946
Sectarian makeup[75]	74% Sunni, 13% Alawi and Shi'a, 10% Christian	27% Sunni, 27% Shi'a, 40% Christian, 6% Druze
Early GNP per capita[76]	$250 (1953)	$235 (1950)

Syria

The first leader of post-Ottoman "Greater Syria" was King Faysal I, a Mecca-born member of the Hashemite dynasty. Worried that his legitimacy "could be tarnished by his Hejazi origins," Faysal "vigorously extolled the virtues of the larger Arab identity."[77] This effort was met with stiff resistance from most native-born Syrians. According to Dawisha, "the population…[was] intellectually very distant from Faysal and his…cadres," demonstrating a clear preference for "Syrian over Arab identity."[78] A striking illustration of this orientation was the reaction of native Syrians to the proliferation of Iraqis in Faysal's army. Rather than embracing them as fellow Arabs, Syrians began to complain that they "had become strangers

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[75] CIA World Factbook
[76] See William Persen, "Lebanese Economic Development Since 1950," *Middle East Journal* 12, no. 3 (1958): 284 and Moshe Ma'oz, *Syria Under Assad* (London: Croom Helm, 1986): 76
[77] Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the 20th Century*, 44
[78] Ibid., 45

in their own country."[79] Slogans such as "Syria for the Syrians" began to appear regularly in the press, and several *wataniyya*-supporting organizations were founded, including al-Shabiba al-Suriya (the Syrian Youth) and Hizb al-Watani al-Suri (the Syrian National Party).[80]

In 1920, the French deposed Faysal and established control over the lands that would become modern-day Syria. Though most welcomed the king's departure, Syrians soon began to challenge French rule. Many, especially in rural areas, did so through a tribal or religious framework—and others, inspired by the writings of Sati' al-Husri in neighboring Iraq, grounded their arguments in pan-Arab nationalism. However, most Syrians continued to identify with "a specifically local Syrian nationalism…at the expense of the larger Arab nationalism."[81] The chief theorist of Syrian *wataniyya* was Antun Sa'ada, a philosopher, writer and political activist. Sa'ada argued that "any identification with Arab nationalism…was a surrender of Syria's uniqueness, and an acceptance by its gifted people of an inferior status."[82] This position was not founded on contempt for the Arabs—rather, argues Australian historian Adel Beshara, it was "a reflection of a deep and profound pride in Syria's antiquity."[83]

The vision of Syrian national identity put forth by Sa'ada bears many resemblances to the framework for a "strong, healthy national identity" sketched in Chapter 1. Unlike the restrictive vision of nationalism advocated by Husri and the Arabists, Sa'ada believed that "particular attributes of a nation are important, but none of them is an exclusive

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[79] Eliezer Tauber, *The Formation of Modern Syria and Iraq* (London: Frank Cass, 1995): 174. According to Dawisha, "Even…supposedly Arab nationalist societies intermittently felt the strains of regional loyalties." The organization al-'Ahd "disintegrated into a Syrian faction, al-'Ahd al-Suri, and an Iraqi faction, al-'Ahd al-'Iraqi" (Dawisha 30)

[80] Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the 20th Century*, 46

[81] Ibid., 97

[82] Ibid., 97

[83] Adel Beshara, *The Origins of Syrian Nationhood: Histories, Pioneers and Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2011): 348. Beshara continues, "In Sa'adeh's reasoning, Syria is *an* Arab nation, but not necessarily *the* Arab nation or *part* of an Arab nation" (350).

determinant."[84] No single group had sole claim to "Syrianness"—the nation was, in Sa'ada's

view, "an ethnic melting pot of diverse variety."[85] Rather than searching for national roots in

race, language, or ethnicity, Sa'ada believed that Syria's unique nationhood "was defined by

geography as well as history."[86] He placed special emphasis on territory, assigning great

importance to "the uniqueness of the Syrian national homeland."[87] In other words, Sa'ada's

vision was both inclusive and territory-based, offering a framework for Sunnis, Alawites,

Christians, Kurds and Druze all to claim rights based on a single shared Syrian identity.[88]

Sa'ada's well-articulated *wataniyya* clearly resonated with his contemporaries.

According to Dawisha, he successfully "spearheaded [a] rise in popularity of Syrian

nationalism," winning support especially among educated urbanites.[89] The Syrian Social

Nationalist Party (SSNP), which he founded in 1932, "rapidly gained adherents" and built "a

broad popular base" despite relentless persecution from the French authorities.[90] Sa'ada

himself was imprisoned multiple times, but his party enjoyed a "meteoric rise," emerging as a

key player in Syrian politics following independence in 1946.[91]

The zenith of the SSNP and of *wataniyya* coincided with Syria's first experience with

democracy; multiple parties and factions contended for power in an environment of relative

freedom and openness. Kevin Martin finds that "an astonishing number and variety of

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[84] Ibid., 345

[85] Ibid., 348. This was particularly important "at a time when the 'single origin' thesis was regaining momentum with the rise of Nazism in Germany." Despite the popularity of racial theories of nationhood, "Sa'adeh…emphasized that Syria, like any other nation, was a multiracial society." (348)

[86] Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the 20th Century*, 97

[87] Beshara, *The Origins of Syrian Nationhood*, 349. Sa'ada included Lebanon in his vision for Syria, and as such was at odds with Lebanese patriots—a highly ironic rivalry given their shared distaste for Arab nationalism.

[88] Sa'ada's position toward Jews was less inclusive. He had a deep distaste for Zionism, which he viewed as inherently sectarian and divisive, and some allege that his anti-Zionism verged into outright anti-Semitism.

[89] Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the 20th Century,* 97

[90] Ibid., 97

[91] Ibid., 98

periodicals" were published during these "democratic years,"[92] to say nothing of what Tabitha

Petran calls the "first free election in the Arab World."[93] However, the years after

independence were also marked by continuous political turmoil. By 1956, the country had

cycled between three different constitutions, and a series of military coups meant that civilian

politics were gradually stripped of meaning. At the same time, the SSNP's vision for an

inclusive Syrian nationalism was increasingly challenged by pan-Arabists, who gained energy

and support following the failed Arab-Israeli war and especially after Egypt's conversion to

the Arabist cause.

Advocates of *qawmiyya* were led by the Ba'ath party, whose founder Michel Aflaq

"candidly identified 'cruelty' as the most effective instrument to effect the desired

transformation [to Arab nationalism]."[94] In Aflaq's own words, "when we are cruel to others,

we know that our cruelty is in order to bring them back to their true selves, of which they are

ignorant."[95] The full force of this philosophy was turned against the SSNP and supporters of

wataniyya in 1955, after the mysterious assassination of Arabist Colonel 'Adnan al-Malki.

According to Martin, the murder and its aftermath "inspired numerous conspiracy theories and

provided both the impetus and the justification" for "punishing the enemies of Arabism."[96]

During the concerted campaign of persecution that followed, the SSNP and its sympathizers

were blamed for the crime, and were "depicted as subhuman, monstrous creatures displaying

repulsive and terrifying defects of thought, deed and character."[97] The party was dissolved and

its assets confiscated; its members were tortured, subjected to Soviet-style "show trials," and

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[92] Kevin Martin, *Syria's Democratic Years: Citizens, Experts, and Media in the 1950s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015): 23
[93] Tabitha Petran, *Syria, A Modern History* (London: Ernest Benn, 1972): 107
[94] Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the 20th Century*, 300
[95] Ibid.
[96] Martin, *Syria's Democratic Years*, 62
[97] Ibid., 69

executed.[98] This campaign led to a "sea change" in the nation's politics, securing the full "renunciation of Greater Syrian nationalism in favor of its pan-Arab variant."[99]

In 1958, moved by a combination of ideology and domestic political constraints, the leaders of Syria's military arranged for the nation to merge with Egypt and form the United Arab Republic, bringing a decisive end to the "democratic years." The union soon failed, but Syria's subsequent Ba'ath rulers continued to emphasize Arabism, resulting in what Israeli political scientist Eyal Zisser calls the "almost total obfuscation of any distinctive Syrian identity."[100]

This policy continued under Hafez al-Assad, who found it "difficult to put the [Arabist] genie back in the bottle" after taking power in 1970.[101] According to Levant expert Christopher Phillips, there are two key reasons why the Ba'ath regime has to this day "shown no desire to change the discourse away from supra-national Arabism."[102] First, "Arabism [proved] valuable to the regime" in pre-civil war Syria because it built citizens' affinity for turmoil-stricken Palestinians, Lebanese and Iraqis. This greatly increased Syrians' own sense of "threat and fear," encouraging them to "see their own communities in the blood-lined streets of Baghdad and Beirut" and convincing them that only the regime in Damascus could protect them from the same fate.[103] Second, given that some Syrians—including members of the regime itself—were genuinely convinced by Arabist ideology, "de-Arabizing" the discourse ran the risk of provoking divisive opposition.[104]

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[98] Ibid., 72

[99] Ibid., 80

[100] Eyal Zisser, "Who's Afraid of Syrian Nationalism? National and State Identity in Syria," *Middle Eastern Studies* 42, no. 2 (2006): 185

[101] Christopher Phillips, *Everyday Arab Identity: the Daily Reproduction of the Arab World*. (New York: Routledge, 2012): 29

[102] Ibid., 29

[103] Ibid., 30

[104] Ibid.

Indeed, far from scaling back its support for Arabist ideology, the Assad regime began its tenure by "beating the drums of Arab nationalism at every opportunity."[105] Using Ba'ath party machinery and the military as tools for indoctrinating a "'new generation of Syrian Arab Patriots,'" it portrayed Hafez al-Assad as the heir to Gamal Abdel Nasser and the leader of the Arab nationalist movement.[106] Operating under a much more exclusive vision of the nation than that advocated by Sa'ada and the SSNP, it went so far as to target Syria's Kurdish minority as non-Arabs, prohibiting them from operating schools in their own language and even banning them from speaking Kurdish in government schools.[107] But this rigidity was not consistent; by the 1980s, as pan-Arabism lost its luster, the regime began to employ some Syria-specific national symbols. It shifted to a more ambiguous approach to identity, ensuring that the only symbol that remained constant was "the image of Hafez al-Assad himself."[108]

After taking power in 2000, Hafez's son Bashar continued this ambiguous approach to national identity. According to Zisser, he "frequently stressed his loyalty to the Arab nation in public statements and depicted Syria as a fortress of Arabism."[109] His regime often referred to the state as "the Syrian Arab region"—not a self-contained entity but "a region that is part of the whole—the Arab homeland."[110] When Bashar did emphasize Syria's uniqueness, it was often to advance the argument that Syrians were "*more* Arabist than other Arabs."[111] Indeed, Phillips contends, "what makes Syrians special" in Bashar al-Assad's discourse is precisely the state's status as the "'beating heart of Arabism.'"[112]

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[105] Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the 20th Century* 290
[106] Phillips, *Everyday Arab Identity*, 44, 52
[107] Ibid., 44
[108] Ibid., 54.
[109] Eyal Zisser, *Commanding Syria: Bashar Al-Asad and the First Years in Power* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006): 56
[110] Zisser, Who's Afraid of Syrian Nationalism?" 185-186
[111] Philipps 60
[112] Ibid.

In other words, under both father and son, the highly personalized Assad regime did not appeal to any consistent national ideal. It simultaneously avoided Syrian *wataniyya* and sensed it could not fully rely on pan-Arab *qawmiyya*, and instead turned to stifling dissent and portraying itself as the only guarantor of Syria's security. This left little room for any sort of unifying identity that could bridge the divides between the country's many ethnic and sectarian groups. While this forced the smaller, less powerful factions—especially the Christian communities— to accept the regime's hegemony, it all but invited Islamists from the Sunni Muslim majority to step into the ideological void.

The Assads went much further than their Egyptian counterparts in their effort to suppress the Islamist challenge. In 1982, the regime brutally crushed an armed uprising by the Muslim Brotherhood, killing thousands and leveling large parts of the city of Hama. However, as in Egypt, the regime was unable to bring Islam fully under its control, and thus worked to "co-opt" Islamist narratives. In order to "[enhance] his own Islamic credentials," Hafez al-Assad increased his own public observation of prayers, funded mosques and provided state support for Qur'anic and Sharia study institutes.[113] This ultimately led to an "Islamization from above," which intensified under the rule of Bashar al-Assad.[114] The younger Assad released hundreds of Islamist prisoners and began to actively accommodate political parties that "[advocated] the creation of an Islamic state in Syria."[115]

Despite its increasing tolerance toward Islamists, the Assad regime maintained tight control over other potential forms of dissent.[116] As a result, Islamists dominated opposition in pre-war Syria. After the uprising of 2011, their superior organizational strength and extensive

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[113] Ibid., 44
[114] Khatib 113
[115] Khatib 119
[116] *Human Rights Watch*, "A Wasted Decade: Human Rights in Syria During Bashar al-Asad's First Ten Years in Power," July 16, 2010

support networks meant that they rapidly came to command the rebel landscape. While many liberals and religious minorities initially participated in anti-regime activism, the primacy of Islamists in the opposition meant that these would-be supporters of democracy were pushed back into the regime's camp. To an even greater extent than in Egypt, the weakness of *wataniyya* means that nothing but military force can constrain these Islamists or their vision for Syria. The Assad regime's reluctant supporters understand this reality. They are trapped in the grip of their totalitarian protector, and will likely remain there for the foreseeable future.

Lebanon

Syria's western neighbor has charted a very different approach to national identity. Divided into 18 discrete sectarian communities, the tiny state would seem to be difficult ground for cohesive nationalism to take root; *wataniyya* in Lebanon certainly has a more challenging task than in relatively homogeneous Tunisia. [117] Nevertheless, Lebanon has succeeded in overcoming these steep odds, developing an overarching national ideology that accommodates each of its individual communal identities. This ideology—alternately called "Phoenicianism," or "Chihism"—was originally articulated in the early to mid-20th century by the Christian Lebanese thinkers Charles Corm and Michel Chiha.[118] Corm, a businessman and poet, took a literary approach to the nation, ultimately cementing himself as a key architect of "Phoenician" Lebanese identity. His writings, as analyzed by political scientist Asher

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[117] The connection between Lebanese and Tunisian nationalisms is an interesting point that offers rich opportunities for further study. Both nations have Phoenician roots, deeply Francophone tendencies, and strong pro-Western orientations. The kinship between the two nations was expressed by Habib Bourguiba during his visit to Lebanon in 1965, when he gushed, "Lebanon is a land where civilizations have interacted, and born of their meeting is an openness of mind and of heart, the likes of which is rare in any other countries"—a description strikingly similar to the ones he used for Tunisia (See Habib Bourguiba, "Al-Bourgibiyya" (Bourguibism), *Les Conférences du Cénacle Libanais* XIX, 1965, page 64). In addition to the spiritual connection they share, the political bond between Lebanon and Tunisia is also noteworthy. Jacob Abadi reports that "during his visit to Lebanon in March 1965, Bourguiba met the Lebanese president, Charles Hilu, and both agreed to widen the scope of their friendship. Implicit in their statement was criticism of Nasser's policy in the region." (Abadi 434)

[118] See Asher Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia : The Search for Identity in Lebanon* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004)

Kaufman, portray "the Lebanese as one people unified in their [Phoenician] ancestral past";
Corm "begs this past…to be a bridge for all Lebanese and to teach them—Muslims and
Christians—their place of glory in human history."[119] In a body of work that both reflected and
shaped Lebanese thought, Corm was especially vehement that while Lebanon incorporated
Arab influences, it was not fundamentally Arab. As with its Tunisian counterpart, then,
rejection of authoritarian Arabism was of paramount importance to the Lebanese national
movement. However, "Phoenicianism" was more than a negative reaction to Arab nationalism.
According to Kaufmann, "The preoccupation with the Phoenician past in Lebanon and the
identification of intellectuals from Beirut as "Phoenicians" commenced decades before 'anti-
Arab' sentiments were even a possibility, simply because Arabism was not yet a dominant
identity that had to be reckoned with."[120]

Corm's inclusivist ideal was put into political practice by lawyer Michel Chiha, the
chief framer of Lebanon's 1926 constitution. Kaufman relates that Chiha prescribed a fluid
national identity constructed "in the image of the cosmopolitan, [multilingual] atmosphere of
Beirut."[121] For all of its cultural inclusivity, however, Chiha's vision for the nation was no less
Lebanese than Corm's. In his conception, tolerance and shared understanding were not merely
virtues; they were also irreducible building blocks of a distinct national personality. To him,
Lebanon's very identity derived from its commitment to pluralism, to being a meeting-ground
of peoples "living together in a spirit of co-operation and mutual respect."[122]

Built on this proudly unique and liberal foundation, Lebanon held regular, free and fair
elections for its first thirty years of independence; according to Adeed Dawisha, "Lebanese

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[119]Ibid., 145.
[120] Ibid., 8
[121] Ibid., 166
[122] Kamal Salibi, "The Lebanese Identity," *Journal of Contemporary History* 6, no.1 (1971)

politics, while imperfect, were liberal enough to make the country the most politically tolerant in the Arab world."[123] Kaufman concurs—in his analysis, the 1950s and 60s were the "high noon" of Lebanese national identity, years during which "the vision of Michel Chiha appeared to be fulfilled."[124] Muslims and Christians shared power and prosperity, both bound together and distinguished by their Lebanese identity. Until 1975, "Phoenicianism was a symbol of Lebanon's pluralism, of its liberal propensity and its triumph."[125]

What helped Phoenicianism succeed where Antun Sa'ada's Syrian nationalism failed? The primary answer is that Lebanese nationalists were spared the brutal crackdown endured by their counterparts to the east. Contrary to the Syrian experience, key levers of power were continuously controlled by committed supporters of *wataniyya*. A striking illustration of this dynamic came in 1958, when President Camille Chamoun felt that his democratically-elected government was at risk of an armed insurrection on the part of Lebanese Arabists. Rather than taking his chances with these increasingly powerful rivals and their Egyptian and Syrian backers, Chamoun requested military assistance from the United States. President Eisenhower gladly obliged, sending a contingent of Marines to defend Chamoun and the pro-*wataniyya* system he represented. With force on their side, Phoenicianists weathered the pan-Arab storm, protecting the Lebanese state and its distinctive identity from the forces of *qawmiyya* sweeping through the rest of the region.

Despite its strongly-rooted national identity, Lebanon has suffered severe setbacks on the route to democratization. The nation's 1975-90 civil war, though instigated by Palestinian refugees and sustained by intense Syrian and Israeli involvement, is a dark stain on the country's political history. The war thoroughly radicalized the previously tolerant bastions of

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[123] Dawisha, *The Second Arab Awakening*, 30
[124] Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia : The Search for Identity in Lebanon*, 233
[125] Ibid., 234

Lebanese society, and the 1989 Ta'if accord "marginalized the socio-political forces within Lebanese society that advocated for a distinct, non-Arab identity."[126] Until 2005, the country's identity remained spiritually and politically under the control of Arabist, autocratic Syria. But while some observers were quick to pronounce the death of Lebanese identity and democracy, *wataniyya* survived, and eventually sparked a democratic revival.

It is difficult to overstate the degree to which the resurgence of Lebanese democracy was inspired by local, state-based nationalism. The 2005 "Cedar Revolution," which expelled the occupying Syrians, was driven by popular protests attended in equal measure by Christians, Muslims and Druze—all of whom conspicuously waved Lebanese flags and demanded a return to what they saw as Lebanon's democratic birthright.[127] Since then, while the polity has remained divided between pro- and anti-Syrian elements, both sides have respected the integrity of the electoral process, refraining from attempts to impose their will via violence.[128] This commitment to peaceful resolution of political disagreements has been due in large part to the continued strength of state-based national identity. Unlike Syria, where both the ruling regime and its Islamist opponents believe they can seize the state by force, no Lebanese faction has any realistic hope of dominating the others.

This reality is particularly important when analyzing the development of Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed Shiite militia that is Lebanon's largest Islamist organization. As Daniel Brumberg puts it, while "Hezbollah is not, philosophically speaking, a champion of pluralism, in practice its leaders do not and *cannot* favor the imposition of an Islamic state"; such a proposal would simply be too drastic a departure from Lebanon's pluralist ethos.[129] Far from

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[126] Ibid., 239
[127] Ibid., 233
[128] Ibid., 236-7; see the account of the 2009 elections
[129] Brumberg, "Islamists and the Politics of Consensus," 112.

pursuing an Islamic revolution, Hezbollah acts within the confines of the nation's political

system, sending deputies to Parliament, participating in the Cabinet, and engaging in day-to-

day coalition-building with other parties and sects. Indeed, the group's Lebanese credentials

are so strong that a significant portion of the country's Christians, including current president

Michel Aoun, have felt comfortable collaborating with the "party of God." The difference

from Syria, where fear of Islamists pushes Christians and other minorities into the service of

the authoritarian regime, could not be more pronounced.

Today, while Lebanon remains unstable and divided, the pluralist national identity

articulated by Chiha continues to be enshrined in the national imagination. According to

Shibley Telhami's polling, in a region fixated on Arab and Islamic identity, more than 60% of

respondents in Lebanon consistently rank "Lebanese" as their most important identity, and

more than 90% rank it as one of their top two identities.[130] This result holds for every one of

Lebanon's sects. In Telhami's analysis, the Lebanese people have a sense that they "are in it

together"; despite their deep sectarian differences, they are united by their shared loyalty to the

state.[131] This loyalty has proved indispensable over the turbulent years since the Arab

uprisings, during which Lebanon has been buffeted by the war in neighboring Syria, inundated

by refugees, and even forced to function without a president from 2014-2016. In the face of

such towering difficulties, the nation has remained remarkably calm, with major political

disturbances limited to protests over garbage collection and electricity outages. In other words,

Lebanese democracy continues to survive, serving as a stubborn testament to the power and

democratic potential of *wataniyya* in the Arab world.

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[130] Telhami's data is presented in graphical form, and thus cannot be reproduced in a table here.
[131] Shibley Telhami, *The World Through Arab Eyes: Arab Public Opinion and the Reshaping of the Middle East*. (New York: Basic Books, 2013): 31-32

5 *Arabism on Trial, Part II*

The previous two chapters have identified a framework for understanding the absence of democracy in the non-rentier states of the Arab Middle East. Until the mid-20th century, the narrative goes, ascendant *wataniyya* helped to lay the groundwork for political rights across the region. However, in the 1950s and 60s, state-based nationalism was suppressed and ultimately overwhelmed by pan-Arabism—a much more authoritarian and exclusive ideology. By the 1970s, Arabist regimes had lost most of their own legitimacy, but they did not enact a meaningful return to *wataniyya*. Instead, they offered little more than lip service to the uniqueness of their states, and mixed this lukewarm patriotism with a continued commitment to many of the same old Arabist principles. This resulted in a discordant, confused approach to national identity, which worked in regimes' favor by helping them justify increasingly repressive techniques.

Though regimes were mostly successful in their effort to create "harmonic states" and eliminate credible challenges to their rule, Islam had a deep enough social basis to prevent secular autocrats from confronting it directly. Many regimes thus attempted to co-opt the faith as a tool against leftist domestic rivals. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this strategy soon backfired, resulting in extremely strong Islamist movements that began to challenge regimes for control over their states. Without a unifying national identity, regime vs. Islamist battles have been entirely "winner-take-all"; in societies sorely lacking in internal cohesion, there is little to no room for power-sharing. Today, liberals and would-be democratic reformers are trapped between Islamists and secular autocrats, drastically curtailing their potential influence.

This model clearly describes the experiences of Egypt and Syria, the two non-democracies discussed in the previous chapter. But how well does it apply to the rest of the region? This chapter provides an overview of the political and national development of the other non-rentier, non-democracies: Algeria, Libya, Sudan, Iraq, Yemen, Jordan and Morocco, exploring how well each case fits the model.

As Table 5.1 indicates, the chapter proceeds by addressing four key problems. First, what was the status of state-based national identity before and immediately after independence? Second, how did each state interact with pan-Arabist ideology? Third, how strong are Islamists in each state? Finally, what is the history of democracy in each state?

Table 5.1: National identity, Islamism and democracy in non-rentier Arab states

State:	Strength of post-independence *wataniyya*	Strength of Arabism	Current strength of Islamism	Mean Freedom House Political Rights Rating (1973-2017)
Egypt	High	High	High	5.44
Tunisia	High	Very low	Low	5.26[1]
Syria	Medium	High	Very high	6.42
Lebanon	High	Low	High	4.93
Algeria	High	High	High	5.98
Libya	Very low	High	Very high	6.60
Sudan	Medium	Very high	Very high	6.40
Iraq	High	High	Very high	6.55
Yemen	Medium	Medium	High	5.54 (unified); 5.41 (North); 6.47 (South)
Jordan	High	Low	Low	5.22
Morocco	High	Low	Low	4.69

Algeria

France invaded and occupied Algeria in 1830, and formally incorporated it into the French Republic in 1848. French authorities justified this annexation by consistently denying that Algeria had "ever been a real nation"—instead, they argued, it had experienced "only

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[1] Tunisia has been rated a "1" for the past 3 years, the only Arab state ever to achieve this designation.

chaos and deterioration" since the end of Roman rule.[2] Local Algerian nationalists forcefully

contested this narrative, contending that "Algeria had been a nation since ancient times, with

its population and borders well established before the arrival of the Arabs."[3] The pioneering

theorists of Algerian nationalism, Tawfiq al-Madani and Mubarak al-Mili, regarded Algeria's

Berber heritage as central to its unique identity. Mili, for example, claimed that a distinct

Algerian nation could be traced back to the classical kingdoms of Masinissa and Jugurtha,

Berber leaders who resisted Rome in the second century B.C.

The French seized on the Berber-Arab divide, attempting to drive a wedge between the

two linguistic groups and "Frenchify" Berber-speakers.[4] But while Berbers accepted a

"difference or dichotomy between an indigenous people and Arab invaders who had sought to

repress or replace indigenous culture," they did not generally accept the French divide-and-rule

strategy.[5] Instead, they "subverted" it, painting the French as little more than the next in a long

line of foreign occupiers. When open insurrection began in 1954, the Berbers offered

substantial support to the anti-French cause.

The Declaration of 1 November 1954—which Laurie Brand calls "*the* foundational

document" of the Algerian national movement—spoke on behalf of Arabs and Berbers alike.[6]

It addressed itself to "all the Algerian people," and to "all purely Algerian parties and

movements," regardless of religion or ethnicity.[7] The document explicitly extended an

invitation to "all Algerian patriots, from all social backgrounds…to join in the liberation

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[2] Laurie Brand, *Official Stories: Politics and National Narratives in Egypt and Algeria* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2014): 120
[3] Ibid.
[4] Most Algerians are descended from Berbers, and up to a third of the population is "non-Arabized," meaning that they hold onto Berber cultural traditions and speak the Berber language.
[5] Ibid.,121
[6] Ibid., 122
[7] Ibid., 123. The document called for the "*re*establishment of an Algerian state," conspicuously harkening back to the existence of a pre-colonial Algeria.

struggle, without any other consideration."[8] The brand of nationalism it expressed was thus

profoundly state-based, and was also decidedly "open and inclusive."[9]

But this orientation would not last long. Algeria's post-independence leaders decided to

drive their nation down a much more "Arabist" path than it had previously followed. In 1964,

the ruling Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) declared an approach to national identity that

"[refused] to include a recognition of Berber identity," instead emphasizing Algeria's essential

"Arabo-Muslim" character. This change reflected a broader shift in regional politics; in the ten

years since the inclusive, *wataniyya*-focused proclamation of 1954, pan-Arabism had become a

much more prominent narrative, especially in the Middle East's anti-Western circles.

What ensued was an unprecedented campaign to "Arabize" the country, both culturally

and linguistically—an effort so dramatic that Ernest Gellner cites Algeria as a paradigmatic

example of a nation attempting "the ardours of cultural self-transformation."[10] In his analysis,

Arabization was "extremely painful," as it meant "imposing a distant literary language on local

Arab and Berber dialects."[11] Other observers agree. The Algerian revolutionary activist

Mohammed Harbi, for example, calls the leaders of the Arabization campaign "apostles of

linguistic Jacobinism," criticizing them for attempting to obscure "the diversity of the roots

and cultures at the base of Algerian society."[12] Brand, likewise, argues that Arabization "by

definition involved the suppression of aspects of Berber identity," and that it "tried to impose

unity by denying diversity."[13]

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[8] Ibid., 125
[9] Ibid., 123
[10] Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983): 81
[11] Ibid.
[12] Quoted in Brand, 138
[13] Ibid., 140

The Arabization campaign also included an explicit "program of 'Writing and Rewriting History.'"[14] This effort was designed to "give weight or value to an Algerian identity…generally reduced to its Arabo-Islamic character"; other narratives were excluded from school textbooks. This was deeply ironic, because in the decades immediately following the revolution, many Algerian students were not fluent enough in Modern Standard Arabic to read the official history being presented to them.[15] Textbook authors were thus forced to include simplified summaries at the end of every chapter.[16] Not all Algerians approved of these measures—many citizens "preferred an Algerian Algeria that, without denying its Arab or Islamic heritage, sought to preserve other elements of the country's identity, whether ethnic, non-Islamist, secularist or French-language-related."[17] Yet Arabists were undeterred, and continued through the 1980s to vigorously suppress alternative expressions of Algerian identity.

Indeed, Algeria increasingly came to resemble a classic Arab "harmonic state," in which alternatives to officially-sanctioned identity were strictly forbidden. According to Maghreb specialist Jonathan Hill, the ruling FLN regime "attempted to control public discourse on…national identity by systematically extending its authority over the country's media, political system, and social space."[18] A key illustration of the regime's willingness to crush competing narratives came in 1980, when Berber activists pressing for linguistic rights

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[14] Ibid., 142
[15] Ibid., 143. Algeria's top-down Arabization policies continue to cause problems today. A leaked US diplomatic cable from 2008 lamented that "the 20-40 age group now competing for jobs speaks a confusing mixture of French, Arabic and Berber that [is] 'useless'" for business purposes. ("Trilingual Illiterates: Algeria's Language Crisis," October 16, 2008).
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., 140
[18] Jonathan Hill, *Identity in Algerian Politics: The Legacy of Colonial Rule* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2009): 5

and improved recognition were violently suppressed—hundreds were killed and many more were injured or arrested.

Like dictatorships elsewhere in the region, however, the FLN government hesitated from using the same forceful tactics against growing Islamist opposition. Instead, it attempted to co-opt and outflank its religious critics.[19] To this end, the regime offered "dramatic increases in support for funding for religious education at all levels," implemented an Islamist-influenced family code, opened dozens of Islamic cultural centers, and built an immense mosque-university complex in the city of Constantine.[20]

In the late 1980s—in a situation not altogether different from the wave of protests that would sweep the Arab world 20 years later—increasing economic difficulties led to a nationwide wave of riots and demonstrations. The FLN responded to the upsurge in discontent by removing its ban on political parties, and in 1991 allowed for general parliamentary elections. But the decades in which Islamists had held a monopoly over the non-governmental sphere meant that they were the sole faction prepared to compete in a national campaign. In December, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) won massive electoral victory, and appeared poised to enact dramatic changes in Algerian life.

In an environment where the state had imposed a unitary identity of secular Arabism rather than nurturing a sense of inclusive *wataniyya*, there was very little to allow for trust between the FIS with the other factions competing for power. The Islamist party referred to its secular opponents not as fellow citizens but as "those whom France has nursed with her poisoned milk," promising that Algeria would soon "be done [with them] for once and for

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[19] Brand 156
[20] Ibid.

all."[21] The FIS' co-leader, Ali Benhadj, suggested that those who voted for another party were "nonbelievers" and thus deserving of death.[22] Observers agreed that once the FIS took power, it would likely never relinquish it peacefully: Algeria's elections would thus reflect the principle of "one man, one vote, one time."

Rather than hand over control of the state, the military responded to the FIS' electoral success by dissolving parliament and cancelling future elections. This triggered a spiral of assassinations, arrests, and eventually a brutal civil war between the army and radical Islamists. After a decade of fighting and up to 100,000 deaths, the government emerged as the clear victor, and reestablished the prewar military dictatorship. As in Egypt and Syria, it was the urban middle class that helped swing the conflict in favor of the regime. Though they had never prospered under the FLN's corrupt rule, secular and liberal Algerians were nonetheless profoundly afraid that they would be persecuted by an Islamist government, and reluctantly chose the familiar status quo over an uncertain, potentially disastrous radical takeover.[23]

Since the end of the civil war in the early 2000s, Algeria has remained under military control, with Abdelaziz Bouteflika serving as president. The regime has adopted a more open approach to national identity than the one that prevailed before the war; in 2002 it recognized Berber as a state language and in 2016 named it Algeria's second official language. Democracy, however, remains a long way off, with political freedoms substantially curtailed and elections marred by massive fraud.[24] In 2014, President Bouteflika won election to a fourth term, garnering 82% of the officially-counted vote despite making only one campaign appearance. These conspicuously skewed results sparked little in the way of large-scale

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[21] Giles Kepel, *Jihad* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002): 171
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.
[24] *Freedom House*, Algeria Country Report 2016

protests or other forms of democratic activism. For the time being, it appears, most Algerians

are simply too exhausted by war and too wary of Islamists to risk fighting for major political

change.

Libya

Of all the nations considered in this thesis, Libya may very well have experienced the

weakest early development of *wataniyya*. Italy occupied the Ottoman provinces of Tripolitania

and Cyrenaica in 1911, but only administered them jointly under the name of "Libya" between

1934 and 1943. These sparsely-populated provinces had been relatively tightly controlled by

the Ottoman Empire, and thus had little prior history of self-rule. Accordingly, locals under

Italian rule generally emphasized their status as members of the Islamic *umma* and were

hesitant to discuss a local *watan*.[25] Indeed, according to North Africa expert Lisa Anderson,

Islamic identity was "inestimably more important [for Libya] than…for the Ottoman successor

states of the Arab East, whereas the traditions of both Arab and Libyan nationalism [were]

considerably weaker."[26] This is not to say that national thinking was completely absent: after

the Allies seized Italy's African holdings and Libyan independence became a possibility, some

organizations, notably the *Jamiyyat al-Wataniyya al-Libiyya* (Libyan National Association),

did attempt to assert a form of state-based nationalism, and others advocated for pan-

Arabism.[27]

The development of nationalism was slowed by the post-independence rule of King

Idris, who did not emphasize either Libyan or Arab identity. The king "made no secret of his

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[25] Anna Baldinetti, *The Origins of the Libyan Nation: Colonial Legacy, Exile and the Emergence of a New Nation-State* (New York: Routledge, 2014): 82

[26] Lisa Anderson, "Religion and State in Libya: The Politics of Identity," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 483, no. 1 (1986): 65

[27] Baldinetti 108

primary loyalty to Cyrenaica and of his distrust of political ideologies of all sorts."[28] He

outlawed political parties shortly after independence, suppressing the development of civil

society and instead emphasizing clan-centric patronage networks. Despite Idris' hostility and

indifference, however, both Arab and Libyan nationalist movements continued to grow

independently of the regime. According to Ronald Bruce St. John, "a degree of Libyan

nationalism began to develop," especially as oil revenues expanded and the state began to

prosper.[29] This group gained a significant number of followers, focusing its energies primarily

on "the need to develop and modernize the country."[30] However, local nationalists were

generally outmatched and overwhelmed by their Arabist counterparts. This was mostly due to

Egyptian influence. As St. John relates, "short of trained Libyan teachers, the monarchy looked

to Egypt to provide both teachers and textbooks, and the [Arabist] curriculum the Egyptians

brought to Libya amounted to a form of pedagogical imperialism."[31] Egypt's Arabist

orientation also seeped into public consciousness via widespread circulation of Egyptian

newspapers and via Radio Cairo's popular *Voice of the Arabs* program. By the 1960s,

Egyptian dominance was so thorough that "Nasser's portrait was almost as widely displayed as

that of the king."[32]

The stage was thus set for an Arabist coup, which occurred in 1969 under the

leadership of the 27-year old Muammar al-Gadhafi. Gadhafi mimicked much of the identity

discourse favored by Nasser, arguing that the entire Arabic-speaking world constituted a single

nation, and that the divisions within it were artificial results of imperialism. Perhaps more fully

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[28] Anderson "Religion and State in Libya: The Politics of Identity," 68
[29] Ronald Bruce St. John, *Libya: Continuity and Change* (New York: Routledge, 2015): 45
[30] Ibid., 46.
[31] Ibid., 45
[32] Ibid.

than any 20th century Arab leader, Gadhafi positioned himself as an opponent of *wataniyya*, flatly "[rejecting] Libyan state patriotism" and persecuting its supporters.[33]

While there was no doubt that "Arab nationalism was the core element of Gadhafi's ideology," he also portrayed himself as a protector and enforcer of Islam.[34] Unlike the much more secular Arabists in power elsewhere in the region, Gadhafi restored traditional criminal codes, appointed religious scholars to major governmental positions, banned the sale and consumption of alcohol, and shut down Christian places of worship.[35] Indeed, until the Iranian Revolution of 1979, it was Gadhafi who "held [global] pride of place as the principal ruling spokesman of Islam as a political force."[36] By the mid-1970s, however, it became increasingly clear that Gadhafi's interpretation of Islam was not an orthodox one. He announced that his own "Green Book," was "the new gospel," and initiated a campaign to "seize the mosques" from those who did not share his ideology.[37]

As Gadhafi's rule wore on, he thus "alienated all the potential constituencies to whom he originally directed his appeal," and found himself forced to "rely increasingly on simple repression."[38] Meanwhile, according to Lisa Anderson, his idiosyncratic and personalistic approach "left the questions of identity and legitimacy in Libya unanswered."[39] The dictator's conflation of himself with the state was so complete that from 1977 onward, he replaced the national flag with a plain green banner, the color he had chosen to symbolize his personal ideology. Given that he oversaw bloody repression of any attempt to initiate or explore a

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[33] Anderson 71. By no means was this orientation universally popular. Anderson notes that "many Libyan patriots" were "profoundly alienated" by Gadhafi's ideology.
[34] St. John 51.
[35] Anderson, "Religion and State in Libya: The Politics of Identity," 70
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid. This "simple repression" was in fact extremely extensive. Gadhafi killed, imprisoned or exiled thousands of his political opponents, ensuring that Libya was perennially ranked among the "least free" countries in the world.
[39] Ibid., 71

different approach to identity, everyday Libyans had few grounds for cohesion or solidarity beyond shared opposition to the regime.

When Gadhafi was finally deposed in 2011, Libyan rebels managed to hold just one successful election before devolving into a chaotic mosaic of warring militias. This occurred even though the country boasts a higher degree of ethnic and religious homogeneity than almost any other Middle Eastern state; close to 97% of the population adheres to Sunni Islam, and the only ethnic minority is the miniscule Berber population.[40] In the absence of a widely accepted national identity, however, Libya's short-lived democratic government quickly found that there was very little to hold together the country's various regions and tribes.

Unencumbered by serious competing identities, and in the fertile ground prepared by Gadhafi-era Islamization, radical jihadist groups have enjoyed substantial success in contemporary Libya. In addition to the Islamists operating in and around Tripoli, the Islamic State is active throughout the country, and held the major city of Sirte for almost two years. Their opponents have gravitated toward militarized secularism, which is championed most prominently by General Khalifa Haftar. Haftar controls much of eastern Libya, and "promises to purge Libya of Islamists"—a term he applies to his moderate political opponents and violent jihadists alike.[41] Libyan liberals thus increasingly find themselves in the same position as their counterparts in Syria, Egypt and Algeria, trapped between Islamist revolutionaries and repressive security forces.

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[40] "Libya," *CIA World Factbook.*
[41] "Libya Country Report," Freedom House 2016

Sudan

Even after its 2011 partition, Sudan continues to be a tremendously diverse country, with dozens of ethnic and linguistic groups and significant animist and Christian populations. Despite such heterogeneity, and despite the territory's lack of prior political unity, Sudanese state-based nationalism began to grow and develop shortly after the beginning of British rule in 1898. This nationalism incorporated both Arabs and non-Arabs. The first prominent nationalist leader, Ali 'Abd al-Latif, came from Sudan's "black" population; he led a 1924 revolt calling for independence and power-sharing among the country's various groups. By the 1930s, he was followed by a wave of educated Arabs, who rapidly began "not only to identify themselves as Sudanese, but to write and speak openly of Sudanese nationalism."[42] They "[sought] out and praised indigenous folk customs," arguing, for example, that Sudan's Bedouins had "preserved cultural legacies that other parts of the Arab world had lost."[43] The Sudanese dialect of Arabic was a particular point of pride for local nationalists, who contended that it was especially "pristine."[44]

Like expressions of *wataniyya* elsewhere in the Arab world, Sudanese nationalism was relatively inclusive toward ethnic and religious minorities. As leading nationalist and future Prime Minister Muhammad Ahmad Mahjub expressed it, Sudan was a result of "the fusion of indigenous blacks with immigrant Arabs, as well as Turks…Abyssinians, Egyptians, Nubians, and Maghribis."[45] This ideology had tremendous staying power. Even as the post-independence government veered sharply toward pan-Arabism, patriotic intellectuals

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[42] Heather Sharkley, "Arab Identity and Ideology in Sudan: The Politics of Language, Ethnicity and Race," *African Affairs* 107, no. 426 (2008): 31
[43] Ibid., 32
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid., 33

continued for decades to "[stress] Sudan's unique Afro-Arab hybridity, cultural tolerance, and capacity for internal coexistence" as the foundation of national identity.[46]

True to the pattern followed by most Arab states, however, Sudan's political elite gradually shifted away from inclusive, state-based patriotism. There were many reasons for this change of heart, but the most important, according to Sudan specialist B.G.V. Nyombe, was an "obsession…with the political need to project the Sudan to the outside world as a homogeneous Arab nation; a nation with one language (Arabic), one religion (Islam), one culture (Arab-Moslem culture), and most importantly, one race (Arab)."[47] Sudan's Arab elites, this argument goes, became increasingly convinced that the rest of the Arab world "[did] not really consider them as Arabs, but rather as *'abid*, slaves."[48] The extreme zeal with which they ultimately pursued a national policy of top-down Arabization was thus, at least in part, rooted in a growing sense of racial and ethnic self-consciousness.

Regardless of their rationale, there is little denying that successive Sudanese regimes harshly enforced top-down policies of Arabization and Islamization. Like Gadhafi in Libya, they generally pursued both goals at once. In state-run schools, for example, they insisted on Arabic language instruction and mandated Qur'anic study, regardless of the ethnic and religious makeup of the students. These policies were not only directed toward children: the government in Khartoum made no secret of its desire to "convert southerners into Moslems and Arabic language speakers in the shortest time possible," resorting to violence whenever

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[46] Ibid., 27

[47] B.G.V Nyombe, 'The politics of language, culture, religion and race in the Sudan,' *Frankfurter Afrikanistische Blatter* 6 (1994): 10.

[48] Al-Baqir al-Afif Mukhtar, 'The Crisis of Identity in Northern Sudan: the Dilemma of a Black People With a White Culture' in Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban and Kharyssa Rhodes (eds), *Race and Identity in the Nile Valley* (Trenton, NJ: Red Sea Press, 2004): 213-24

necessary.[49] This approach quickly garnered strong resistance, especially in South Sudan,

which battled the north in near-perpetual civil war from 1956 until 2005.

For a brief time in the mid-1980s, Sudan's political elite responded to this resistance by

loosening political restrictions and allowing for a semblance of democracy. However, in 1989,

after the elected government moved toward a "campaign for national reconciliation" and

walked back Islamization and Arabization efforts, Islamist military officers seized control of

the state.[50] Under the leadership of Omar al-Bashir, they returned to earlier regimes' identity

policies, exhibiting what Sahel expert Yehudit Ronen calls a "relentless drive to impose [their]

hegemonic vision on the state despite the polycentric character of Sudanese society."[51] Despite

lacking significant public support, the new regime eliminated potential opposition by turning

to a range of brutally repressive measures.[52] Bashir and his followers immediately carried out a

wave of purges and executions, targeting intellectuals and members of the non-Islamist middle

class in order to "prevent them from constructing any sort of alternative" to the official pan-

Islamic and pan-Arabist identity discourse.[53] Beyond persecuting its opponents, the regime

enforced its own ideology by operating a religious "morality police" similar to that active in

Iran, and by overhauling the education system to focus on Qur'anic memorization and "the

glories of Arab and Islamic culture."[54]

The most disturbing expressions of the Bashir regime's intolerance for alternative

identities are the genocidal campaigns it has overseen in Darfur. Though the tribes native to the

region are predominantly Muslim, they have historically resisted Arabization. Since the 1990s,

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[49] B. G. V. Nyombe, 'Survival or extinction: the fate of the local languages of the southern Sudan', *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 125 (1997): 109
[50] Kepel 182
[51] Yehudit Ronen, "Sudan on the Slippery Slope of Violence: A State's Struggle for Identity," in *Challenges to the Cohesion of the Arab State* (Tel Aviv: The Moshe Dayan Center, 2008): 226
[52] Kepel 183
[53] Ibid.
[54] George Packer, "The Moderate Martyr," *The New Yorker*, Septermber 11, 2006

Khartoum thus armed and funded various Arab militias, including the Tajammu' al-'Arabi, a

Libyan-sponsored group that openly aspired to "change the demography of Darfur and empty

it of its African tribes."[55] Aided by government airstrikes, these militias began a "scorched

earth" campaign in 2003, burning villages, poisoning wells and slaughtering upwards of

400,000 ethnic Africans.[56]

Like Gadhafi, Bashir has gradually stepped back from his initial affiliation with

Islamists. But this has not meant a move towards *wataniyya*, inclusion or democracy—far from

it. Instead, the dictator has simply strengthened his own power, apparently unbothered by what

the International Crisis Group calls the growing "ideological vacuum at the heart of [his

regime]."[57] Sudan's fractured national identity thus shows few signs of imminent recovery. As

Ronen puts it, there is a deeply entrenched "lack of trust and a deep hostility between the state

and its various communities."[58] Heather Sharkley agrees, observing that "non-Arab Sudanese

today…look upon Northern riverine Arab elites as outsiders, enemies, colonizers, and usurpers

– certainly not as compatriots."[59] In other words, scars run so deep that even after Bashir's

long rule comes to an end, democracy will likely remain elusive.

Iraq

Iraq is sometimes regarded as among the most "artificial" of the Arab states, a

haphazard attempt by British authorities to cobble together three disparate Ottoman provinces.

But this narrative is not, strictly speaking, true. Even Said Aburish—a Palestinian journalist

who is elsewhere more than ready to criticize Britain's colonial blunders—has acknowledged

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[55] Sharkley 39
[56] "Genocide in the Darfur Region of Sudan" *Houston Holocaust Museum*, accessed February 24, 2017
[57] "Sudan's Islamists: From Salvation to Survival," *International Crisis Group*, March 21, 2016
[58] Ronin 226
[59] Sharkley 42

that Iraq "as a geographic unit was always united by the [Tigris and Euphrates] rivers, and except for a relatively brief period towards the end of Ottoman Turkish rule, authority in them was centered in Baghdad."[60] Indeed, the territory that would become Iraq was often administered by Ottoman authorities as a single province.[61]

Iraqi intellectuals began to advance a fairly well-developed version of *wataniyya* by the 1920s and 1930s. Iraq expert Eric Davis argues that, "despite the newness of the nation-state," 'Iraqist' nationalists were able to mobilize support by drawing upon "a historical memory linked to Iraq's ancient civilizations, Iraq's central role in the rise of Islam and Arab culture, and Iraqi efforts to oppose British colonialism during the 1920 revolution."[62] Like local nationalists elsewhere in the Arab world, Iraqists tended to adopt a liberal approach to politics and emphasize the inclusion of minorities. For example, the Ahali Group, the most prominent local nationalist organization, consistently "focused on expanding civil society through enhancing democratic rights."[63]

The Iraqists' inclusive orientation allowed them to draw on a "larger and more diverse" coalition than their pan-Arabist rivals. [64] However, their "more complex and nuanced vision of the future was less easy to package politically" than simple appeals for Arab unity.[65] A further disadvantage was the fact that pan-Arabists held a number of key administrative positions. Sati' al-Husri himself was the education minister during the 1920s and the director of the national teacher's college in the 1930s, and used his perch to inculcate a generation of educated Iraqis with Arabist ideology. To make matters worse, the British-supported monarchy

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[60] Said Aburish, *Saddam Hussein: The Politics of Revenge* (London: Bloomsbury, 2001): 5
[61] Michael Eppel, "The Elite, the Effendiyya, and the Growth of Nationalism and Pan-Arabism in Hashemite Iraq, 1921–1958," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 30, no. 02 (1998): 227-250.
[62] Eric Davis, *Memories of the State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005): 72
[63] Ibid., 59
[64] Ibid., 66
[65] Ibid.

was itself Arabist in orientation, viewing *qawmiyya* as a convenient way to make its own non-Iraqi roots more palatable to the local population.

Indeed, given the advantages enjoyed by Iraq's Arabists, it is striking that they did not achieve more success. But they were limited by the exclusiveness of their ideology. Like opponents of *wataniyya* across the region, their refusal to accept borders as a valid basis for the nation meant that their "imagined political community" depended on other, more sinister criteria. As Davis relates, pan-Arabists "substituted ethnic purity for a more precise territorial definition of space," and displayed a disturbing penchant toward "vilification of the Other."[66] In 1944, for example, members of the Arab nationalist Muthanna Club led a bloody pogrom against Baghdad's Jewish community, sending a message that Jews—once "fully integrated into Iraqi society"—were no longer welcome in the country.[67] Jews were far from the only alienated group: Shiites, Kurds and Christians were also targeted, ensuring that "pan-Arabism became for many Iraqis a metaphor for the political, economic and cultural exclusion of the bulk of the populace from national life."[68]

In 1958, the monarchy was overthrown in a military coup, and the ensuing events illustrated the extent to which "Pan-Arabism…was not somehow 'destined' to dominate conceptions of political community in Iraq."[69] At a moment when Nasser and his followers were ascendant throughout the region, the new government conspicuously "eschewed the symbols of Pan-Arabism," choosing instead to highlight Iraq's pre-Arab and pre-Islamic heritage on the new national flag and coat of arms.[70] This heralded a full-scale embrace of explicitly Iraqi nationalism, which the new leadership, headed by General Abd al-Karim

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[66] Ibid., 77
[67] Ibid., 70
[68] Ibid., 55
[69] Ibid., 77
[70] Ibid., 111

Qasim, hoped would "bridge the ethnic gap between Sunni and Shi'i Arabs and Kurds, [emphasizing] cultural commonalities…rather than differences."[71] And to a large extent, their efforts succeeded. For five years Qasim "demonstrated that a nonsectarian state could be formed in Iraq," extending rights and privileges to Shiites, Kurds, women and other minorities on a scale unmatched before or since.[72] Though Qasim's *wataniyya*-supporting regime was not by any means a democracy, Davis argues that it was decidedly less repressive than any other government in the history of 20th century Iraq, allowing for essentially unrestricted intellectual ferment and rapid growth in civil society.[73]

But Qasim's inclusive approach would not last. Pressured by communists on one side and pan-Arabists on the other, he increasingly struggled to walk the political tightrope, and in February 1963 was overthrown by an Arabist military coup. After several years of infighting between factions aligned with the Ba'ath Party and those aligned with Nasser's Egypt, the former group prevailed. Like the Bashir regime in Sudan, the party "enjoyed little support when it seized power," but it made up for its lack of popularity by using new and unprecedented forms of violence to suppress its opponents.[74] Using the potent combination of "terror and co-optation," it rapidly "eliminated all overt opposition and destroyed much of civil society."[75]

With its political position secure, the Ba'ath regime set about enforcing its hallmark pan-Arabist identity discourse. It immediately launched a "Project for Rewriting History," seeking to "negate Iraqist nationalism's inclusive legacy" by eliminating positive memories of

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[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid., 143
[73] Ibid., 118
[74] Ibid., 148
[75] Ibid., 26

Qasim's tenure in power.[76] Rather than acknowledging the diversity of Iraqi society, the

Ba'ath Party ignored and repressed it, recognizing only Sunni Arabs as legitimate members of

the nation. From the moment it took power, the regime "used sectarian criteria to fill all

important posts," allowing non-Sunnis to fill only token roles in its administrative apparatus.[77]

Throughout the 1970s, the Arabist regime parlayed a sudden influx of oil wealth and

widespread popular desire for stability into increased popular support.[78] Especially after

Saddam Hussein consolidated power in 1979, the state also strategically deployed Iraqist

symbols and motifs as parts of its official discourse, giving its Arab nationalism a distinctively

"Mesopotamian" flavor. But resemblance with Qasim-era *wataniyya* was at best skin-deep: the

regime's true goal was to benefit from Iraqi nationalism without accepting its inclusivist

content. In Davis' analysis, the purpose of appropriating "Mesopotamian" imagery was "to

argue that Iraq was uniquely suited to assume the role of *primus inter pares* among Arab states

in creating a Pan-Arab nation."[79] This argument was increasingly couched in terms of Saddam

Hussein himself. The dictator was portrayed as the heir of ancient kings from Hammurabi to

Nebuchadnezzar, a fearsome demigod not to be questioned or crossed. As Dutch political

scientist Gertjan Dijink argues, "the effect of all the symbolism was not that the Iraqi people

became proud of their common past. Rather, it made the person of the leader even more

threatening and intangible…Saddam Hussein [became] the personification of all national

norms."[80]

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[76] Ibid., 148
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid., 149
[79] Ibid., 150
[80] Gertjan Dijink, *National Identity and Geopolitical Visions: Maps of Pride and Pain* (New York: Routledge, 2002):122

In other words, the regime never recognized the existence of an Iraqi people or Iraqi nation—it simply argued that Iraq was a particularly illustrious part of the Arab world, ruled by a particularly illustrious Arab leader. As Iraqi journalist Dina al-Shibeeb puts it, there can be no doubt that "Baathists undermined Iraqi nationalism," and that its "rhetoric of 'Unity, Arabism, Socialism'" was ultimately severely damaging to state-based identity.[81] Ghazi al-Yawar, Iraq's first post-Saddam president, agrees, contending that the Ba'ath regime "worked systematically to erase" Iraqi identity during its decades in power.[82]

Beyond slogans and symbolism, the regime took tangible—and violent—steps to ensure that Sunni Arabs maintained hegemonic status within the state. Its cruelest excesses were directed against the restive Kurds in the country's north. From 1986 to 1989, Hussein deployed chemical weapons, airstrikes and mass executions as part of the genocidal al-Anfal campaign, ultimately killing over 100,000 unarmed Kurdish civilians and driving millions out of the country. Shiites, Christians, Yezidis and Turkmen were also targeted by the regime, enduring exclusion from positions of power, the destruction of religious shrines, forced Arabization, and utter intolerance for political expressions of group identity.

After a long, bloody campaign against Iran and ignominious defeat in the Gulf War, Hussein's regime became increasingly unpopular, even among the Sunni Arabs that constituted its base. The dictator thus "found it increasingly necessary to rely on torture and violence" during his last decade in power.[83] In an attempt to shore up his standing, he also closely aligned himself with Iraqi Islamists. Though the Ba'ath regime had once been almost militantly secular, it undertook an overt "return to faith," empowering Sunni clerics, turning

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[81] Dina al-Shibeeb, "Iraqi Nationalism Then and Now," *Al-Arabiya*, March 16 2013
[82] Jim Hoagland, "Restoring Iraqi Identity," *The Washington Post*, December 12, 2004
[83] Davis., 273

Qur'anic study into a national focus, and opening the Saddam Center for Islamic Studies.[84] By the late 1990s, it had integrated religion into its rule so extensively that many observers began to refer to its ideology as "Ba'athi-Salafism." Its approach to national identity became nearly indistinguishable from that of the Muslim Brotherhood, replete with calls for a "pan-Islamic state" built on an Arab foundation.[85]

The legacy of Saddam Hussein's sectarian assault on *wataniyya* has haunted Iraq since the dictator was deposed in 2003. As Western policymakers know only too well, the near-total absence of trust between Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds has severely damaged efforts to build an inclusive, democratic state. And while the sheer level of commitment from the United States has gradually made the government in Baghdad more liberal than most others in the region, sectarian conflict—and not elections—continues to dictate the fabric of life for most Iraqis. Yet there is room for hope: history shows that Iraqi national identity has the potential to unify disparate groups and lay the groundwork for more democratic modes of politics. If current efforts to cultivate a renewed sense of *wataniyya* succeed, the nation's decades-long cycle of sectarian violence and repression might finally be broken.

Yemen

Yemen's experiences with national identity and democracy defy easy categorization. This is, at least in part, a function of the country's complex past. Yemen is a highly tribal society, and its constantly-shifting political borders have historically mattered less than the powerful clans operating within them. Yemen only acquired its present form after the 1990

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[84] Kyle Orton, "The Last 15 Years of Saddam Hussein's Regime Are Crucial to Understanding ISIS," *Business Insider*, September 28, 2015. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi attended the Saddam center in the mid-1990s, just one illustration of the degree to which "the ideological and material foundations for ISIS were in place long before the Saddam regime was deposed."
[85] Ibid.

merger of the northern Yemen Arab Republic with the southern People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, making it difficult to speak in any uniform way about "Yemeni history" or "modern Yemen."

Nevertheless, the fierce independence of Yemeni tribesmen and the country's relative isolation have historically kept Yemen out of foreign hands, endowing the territory with a distinctive cultural character. In both the north and south, a definite form of local nationalism thus emerged by the middle of the 20th century, and developed along similar lines to *wataniyya* elsewhere in the Arab world. As portrayed by Irish political scientist Fred Halliday, Yemeni nationalism adopted a "characteristically inclusive" attitude, embracing Himyaritic, Sabatean, Arabic, Amharic, Hebrew and Greek influences.[86] It also insisted on its own uniqueness: Yemeni nationalists defined their identity at least partially "in opposition to that of the Arab world outside."[87] Saudi Arabia was viewed as a particularly important rival, to the point that, as Halliday argues, "the main 'national' enemy of Yemen is a neighboring Arab state."[88] Nationalist antipathy was also directed against Nasser's Egypt, which in the 1960s occupied North Yemen in an attempt to overthrow its monarchy and install a republican, Arabist government.[89] Though this effort ultimately succeeded, even the Egyptian-backed rebels tended to feel "a strong sense of antipathy toward the supposed liberators, one amply reciprocated…by the Egyptians themselves."[90]

Despite Yemenis' deeply independent streak, neither the Yemen Arab Republic nor the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen successfully advanced a clear vision of state-

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[86] Fred Halliday, "The Formation of Yemeni Nationalism: Initial Reflections," in James Jankowski and Israel Gershoni, Eds., *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997): 30

[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid., 34

[89] Ibid., 35

[90] Ibid.

based nationalism. Instead, the identity discourse in both settings was confused and unsettled, making regular use of both pan-Arabist and state-specific rhetoric. In South Yemen, for example, the 1970 constitution referred to Yemen as a mere district (*iqlim*) of the Arab world, but the 1978 constitution called Yemen a *watan*, or homeland.[91] The north called itself the "Yemen Arab Republic," but continued to celebrate major aspects of Yemen's non-Arab heritage.[92]

According to Halliday, there are two explanations for this apparently contradictory position. First, Yemen's own internal division meant that calls for "Arab unity" were at their heart also calls for "Yemeni unity"; slogans that on their face supported *qawmiyya* thus doubled as statements of *wataniyya*. Second, public support of pan-Arabist goals could help Yemen attract badly-needed "military, political and financial help" from other Arab countries. To a major degree, then, support for Arab nationalism was a "[reflection of] Yemen's relative isolation and poverty."[93]

This lack of ideological fervor may help to explain why North Yemen—on its face the more "Arabist" of the two Yemens—was in fact somewhat more democratic than the south.[94] Because North Yemen's Arab nationalism was adopted for mostly cosmetic reasons, it did not include the same Husri-esque ideological fire as Arabism under Nasser, Assad, Ghadhafi, Bashir or Hussein, and was thus less oppressive. Of course, the difference between the two Yemens also illustrates that Arabism is not always worse than its alternatives—the "austere

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[91] Ibid.
[92] For example, the museum display cited by Halliday as an example of "inclusive Yemeni nationalism" was exhibited in the Yemen Arab Republic in 1984.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Freedom House rankings show that between 1973 and 1990, political rights in North Yemen were twice ranked a "4" and seven times ranked a "5"; South Yemen never did better than a "6". Despite the former's better rankings, it did not have "an established history of electoral or democratic politics." See Sarah Phillips, *Yemen's Democracy Experiment in Regional Perspective* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008): 48

Marxism" of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen was more tyrannical than the ruling ideology of the north, even though it was slightly more *wataniyya*-oriented.

Though Yemen was never passionately committed to Arabism, and thus avoided some of the ideology's most negative excesses, its flirtation with *qawmiyya* did undermine the degree to which it could continue articulating its own unique national identity. The Yemeni states' confusing and contradictory definitions of nationalism provided little of substance for their populations to hold on to, allowing regional and tribal loyalties to remain as strong—and divisive—as ever.

When the two states merged in 1990, they promised to base their shared political system on democratic principles. And throughout the 1990s, Yemen was indeed often cited as an "Arab success story," holding periodic elections and allowing for the development of a wide range of political parties.[95] The regime of president Ali Abdullah Saleh was not nearly as authoritarian as most others in the region, allowing opposition groups significant latitude and repeatedly making concessions when pressured.[96]

However, weak national identity and persistent tribal tensions limited the extent to which democracy could become a reality. For all of its liberal trappings, the Saleh regime deliberately exploited this situation. In the words of Yemeni journalist Afrah Nasser, "Saleh's approach to leadership…was based on divide and rule," and his tactics deliberately "deepened the rift between disparate groups and [undermined] the idea of a Yemeni national identity."[97] By creating a climate of communal mistrust and uncertainty, the regime filled opposition

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[95] Phillips 113

[96] Freedom House, Yemen Country Report, 2016

[97] Afrah Nasser, "Realignment of Yemen's Identity Politics," *Al Jazeera*, August 26, 2015

groups with a "fear of the alternatives," convincing them that without Saleh, Yemen would descend into chaos.[98]

As in Libya, Egypt and Syria, the state's unwillingness to institutionalize a well-defined nationalism created an environment in which Islamist groups could grow and thrive. With much clearer and better-developed ideologies than any of their competitors—and with enough strength to ensure that they were rarely challenged by the regime—hard-liners and extremists became increasingly powerful political players.[99] Between 1993 and 2003, the Islamist Islah party nearly quadrupled its support, and by the late 2000s it was unquestionably the dominant force in the Yemeni opposition.[100]

When Saleh was finally deposed in 2012, the country sunk into precisely the unrest democratic activists had long feared. With little to bridge the divides between north and south, Islamists and non-Islamists, Shiites and Sunnis, and above all between warring tribes, Yemen is now embroiled in a multi-factional civil war. Because of the weakness of state-based national identity, the country that was the "poster child of Arab democracy" just a decade ago has become synonymous with violence, sectarianism and humanitarian disaster.

Jordan

Jordan is among the most transparently "artificial" of the states of the Arab Middle East. British colonial authorities carved it out of their Mandate for Palestine in 1921 and designated it as a kingdom for Hashemite prince Abdullah, intending both to reward him for his service against the Ottomans and to prevent him from invading French-controlled Syria.

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[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid., 145
[100] Ibid.

Winston Churchill, who was colonial secretary at the time, famously boasted that he had created Jordan "with a stroke of a pen, one Sunday afternoon in Cairo."[101]

However, the new kingdom quickly began to develop a degree of legitimacy. Strong British support allowed for significant economic and infrastructural development, and the population's reliance on the state meant that by World War II, Abdullah had successfully "[convinced] his new subjects that Transjordan had a legitimate right to exist within its borders."[102] Unlike Idris in Libya, the Jordanian monarchy devoted focused attention to instilling loyalty to the state, and had the resources to do so. For example, Betty Anderson argues that in schools, the nationally-sanctioned curriculum successfully "began to generate a feeling of 'Transjordanianness," based largely on pride in the monarchy's leadership of the 1916 anti-Ottoman Arab revolt.[103] By the time students graduated and attended university in other Arab countries, they were patriotic enough to "[form] and [join] specifically Jordanian political clubs," shying away from pan-Arabist alternatives.[104]

Jordan's burgeoning national identity faced twin challenges following independence in 1946. First, the kingdom annexed the West Bank and with it a massive population of Palestinians, who by most accounts outnumbered Jordan's initial inhabitants. Second, pan-Arab nationalism became an increasingly potent regional force, orienting itself against precisely the "European-drawn" borders responsible for Jordan's existence. In many regards, the two challenges were intertwined; newly-incorporated Palestinians were more likely than native Jordanians to support Arab nationalism.

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[101] Alexander Diener and Joshua Hagen, *Borderlines and Borderlands: Political Oddities at the Edge of the Nation State* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010): 189
[102] Betty Anderson, *Nationalist Voices in Jordan: The Street and the State* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005): 34
[103] Ibid., 67
[104] Ibid.

The Hashemites' Arabist and Palestinian rivals landed several important blows against the monarchy. King Abdullah was assassinated by a Palestinian militant in 1951, and in 1956 massive street protests forced his son Hussein to appoint the Arab nationalist Sulayman al-Nablusi as Prime Minister. But Nablusi, who openly aspired to incorporate Jordan into a broader Arab state, overplayed his hand by threatening the status of the Hashemites' core supporters. These "king's men"—identified by Anderson as "Bedouin tribesmen, urban merchants, and peasants"—backed the monarchy's successful effort to oust Nablusi and regain control over the country.[105] King Hussein proceeded to rebuild his legitimacy by simultaneously co-opting Arabist claims,[106] asserting his Islamic credentials as a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, and reinvigorating state-specific Jordanian identity with an emphasis on the nation's "unique 'tribal' character."[107]

In some ways, this multifaceted approach to national identity resembled the "fuzzy nationalism" used by Syria's Assad, Iraq's Hussein and others to ensure that the regime—and not any identity—remained the basis of the state.[108] But there were also profound differences. Most importantly, the monarchy's "Hashemite Arabism" had little in common with the authoritarian, exclusivist ideologies of Sati' al-Husri and Michel Aflaq. Even at the height of Arabist fervor in the 1950s, the Hashemites never called for the elimination of the nation-state and never turned against non-Arab minorities. Theirs was an openly pragmatic rather than "messianic" vision, and thus had much less need than revolutionary Arabism to hide its failures and shortcomings. The Jordanian monarchy never attempted to build a "harmonic state," but rather accepted the essential multipolarity of national society.

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[105] Ibid., 188
[106] Ibid., 39
[107] Christopher Phillips, *Everyday Arab Identity: the Daily Reproduction of the Arab World*. (New York: Routledge, 2012): 47
[108] Ibid.

This meant that, as the appeal of Arabism subsided, the state-sponsored identity discourse could easily pivot to a full-throated endorsement of *wataniyya*. By the 1970s, there could be no doubt that the state was making a "deliberate and conscious attempt to cultivate a particular Jordanian identity."[109] With a flurry of national events, festivals, and press attention, the monarchy emphasized Jordan's wealth of pre-Islamic historic sites, its ancient Nabatean inhabitants, and its pivotal position in the Umayyad caliphate. In 1991, the Jordanian National Charter further clarified and articulated the monarchy's stance, emphasizing the role of an "already extant Jordanian nation" in the state's early history. In Asher Susser's analysis, these moves are irrefutable proof that by the 1990s, "an authentic, territorial Jordanian identity" had come into existence, making the Hashemite monarchy an archetypal example of "a state [creating] a nation."[110]

Under Hussein's son, Abdullah II, the monarchy has continued to throw its weight behind *wataniyya*. The state trumpeted the slogan "Jordan first" in the early 2000s, and by the end of the decade had adopted "We are all Jordan" as its motto.[111] King Abdullah regularly refers to the population as "one Jordanian family" and the nation as "the homeland."[112] As Christopher Phillips notes, when he does discuss Arab identity, his tone is "[noticeably] different" from Assad's in Syria. Whereas Abdullah's "emphasis is on Arab identity shaping Jordan's international relations," Assad goes much farther, "[suggesting that] Syria's Arab identity affects its national character."[113]

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[109] Asher Susser, "Jordan—in the Maze of Tribalism, Jordanianism, Palestinianism, and Islam," in *Challenges to the Cohesion of the Arab State* (Tel Aviv: The Moshe Dayan Center, 2008): 109
[110] Ibid., 103
[111] Phillips 66
[112] Ibid., 68
[113] Ibid.

Like *wataniyya* across the region, Jordan's state-based national identity has proved to be fundamentally inclusive in character, incorporating Bedouins, Palestinians, and Christians in equal measure. Its approach to Palestinians is particularly noteworthy. Despite the newcomers' early attempts to challenge the authority of the state, the Hashemites' approach "was and remains to try to integrate the Palestinians of the East Bank. The monarchy seeks to instill in them a sense of belonging to Jordan…so that all of Jordan's citizens will feel they are an integral part of Jordanian society."[114] While Palestinians, who dominate Jordan's private sector, have historically been poorly represented in the state bureaucracy, the monarchy has made a point of appointing them to important advisory positions and consistently encouraging them to participate in national politics.[115] This attitude extends to Christians and other minorities. King Hussein deliberately "stressed the fact that, in his view, all Jordanians 'from every origin and of any descent' were full-fledged citizens," and today, Abdullah habitually refers to the people as "Jordanians of their various origins."[116]

The most important result of Jordan's inclusive national identity is the position and orientation of the nation's Islamists. As in Tunisia and Lebanon, national identity is flexible enough to extend to conservative Muslims, and strong enough to ensure that Islamists cannot hope to impose their beliefs on the rest of society. The monarchy has thus readily invited representatives of Islamist parties into the political process. In the early 1990s, for example, it handed over control of several ministries to officials from the Muslim Brotherhood. As a result, Phillips points out, "Jordan's branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamic Action Front (IAF), tacitly supports the regime, and, although the Hashemites would probably prefer it to be less popular, any poll victories it has do not fundamentally challenge the official

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[114] Susser, "Jordan in the Maze of Tribalism," 109
[115] Ibid., 112
[116] Ibid., 110

identity discourse."[117] The difference from Algeria, Egypt and Syria could not be more pronounced.

Indeed, the IAF has become such a "mainstream" political force that in 2016, it included four Christians on its list of parliamentary candidates. According to the party's deputy leader, "We are no longer a religious movement, but a wider, national movement to provide a voice for all Jordanians."[118] Another official expressed himself similarly: "We are Jordanians going after the vote of the Jordanian people."[119] Whereas in the 1980s the IAF campaigned under the slogan 'Islam is the solution," in 2016 its banners proclaimed "Renaissance for the homeland, dignity for the citizens," "Jordan for all segments of society" and "No to sectarianism."[120] Christians have been receptive to this message and tone. As one voter put it, "we are raised as Jordanians who put our Jordanian identity first."[121] So long as a party publicly shares in this identity, any citizen can feel comfortable supporting it.

Yet for all of its cohesive, inclusive *wataniyya*, Jordan still cannot be considered a true democracy. To be sure, it is vastly more free than most of the other Arab states; Freedom House has ranked its political rights a "5" fourteen times, a "4" nine times, and a "3" once since the mid-1980s. And even before liberalization began, Christopher Phillips argues that Jordan did not experience nearly the same "police state society" as nations like Syria, Iraq and Libya. Hafez al-Assad, for example, "relied far more on coercion than Hussein did," illustrating the fact that the Jordanian people were to a large degree "[accepting] of Hussein

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[117] Phillips 48
[118] Taylor Luck, "In a First for Middle East Politics, Christians and Islamists Stump Together," *The Christian Science Monitor*, September 16, 2016
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid.

and, by extension, his interpretation of Jordanian identity."[122] However, this lack of heavy-handedness does not change the fact that the monarchy has remained effectively in charge of the country since independence. As Freedom House's 2016 report noted, "King Abdullah II holds broad executive powers, appoints and dismisses the prime minister and cabinet, and may dissolve the bicameral National Assembly at his discretion."[123] Almost every decision of import is ultimately in his hands. Accordingly, Jordan is simultaneously an illustration of the power of *wataniyya* and of its limits. While a strong, state-based national identity has helped to build stability, internal cohesion, and a relatively high level of political rights, it has not yet been sufficient to turn Jordan into a democracy.

Morocco

Morocco's genesis could scarcely be more different from that of Jordan. According to Israeli political scientist Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, "a political and societal center has existed in Morocco's core area," since the eighth century, constituting a distinct geographic and cultural entity that has tenaciously resisted outside attempts at domination.[124] Save the remote inner core of the Arabian Peninsula, Morocco was the only part of the Arabic-speaking world to avoid falling under Ottoman rule, and except for a 40-year French interlude, has remained autonomous and independent for over a millennium. For its part, the current royal family has reigned in an unbroken chain since the mid-17th century. As a result, Maddy-Weitzman argues, "among the Arab countries, only Egypt can be said to have a greater, and historically more enduring, degree of 'stateness.'"[125]

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[122] Phillips 48
[123] *Freedom House*, "Jordan Country Report" 2016
[124] Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, "Collective Identity in Morocco, in Light of Political Islam and Globalization," in *Challenges to the Cohesion of the Arab State* (Tel Aviv: The Moshe Dayan Center, 2008): 237
[125] Ibid.

This is certainly not to say that Morocco is somehow "charmed" with a perfectly homogenous, cohesive population. While close to 99% of the population adheres to the Maliki school of Sunni Islam, the religious practices of rural Moroccans, which emphasize saints, shrines and rituals, differ significantly from the more austere customs dominant in the cities. The country is also divided on ethnic and linguistic lines; close to 40% of the population continues to speak Berber rather than a dialect of Arabic.

Like Lebanon—and very unlike Syria, Sudan and Iraq—Morocco has responded to its internal diversity by developing an inclusive, state-based nationalism that binds together disparate groups without attempting to erase their differences. After independence from France in 1956, the monarchy steered clear of *qawmiyya*, instead working intently to "nurture patriotic sentiments among the Moroccan populace" and regularly criticizing the pitfalls of neighboring Algeria's "competing socio-political model."[126] This approach resonated throughout society. While "pan-Arabism may have had some emotive appeal in the 1950s and 1960s to the rising urban classes," even its most devoted Moroccan proponents regarded it "only as a factor which complemented Moroccan nationalism, not as an alternative to it."[127]

As in Jordan, the Moroccan monarchy's rejection of revolutionary Arabism meant that it had no need to construct a "harmonic state" when the ideology lost its luster. Instead, it has continued to define a "Moroccan national identity [that is] loose and flexible."[128] The first facet of this flexibility applies to the country's Berber population. While Berbers experienced some discrimination in the post-independence decades, this was largely due to individual Arabists in the civil service and Arabist-minded teachers imported from Egypt.[129] The

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[126] Ibid., 239
[127] Ibid.
[128] Senem Aslan, *Nation Building in Turkey and Morocco* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014): 111
[129] Ibid., 110

monarchy itself did not encourage anti-Berber activities, and in fact built deep ties with Berber tribal leaders and repeatedly placed Berber officers in charge of the military. By 1990s, King Hasan ordered that "the Berber 'dialects' should be taught in all Moroccan schools as part of the country's national heritage."[130] He also created "a well-funded public academic institute charged with promoting all facets of Berber culture as an important feature of collective Moroccan identity."[131] Indeed, official efforts at inclusion have ensured that Berbers feel comfortable enough to split their support between various political and ideological factions. Unlike the beleaguered Kurds of Iraq or the Africans of Sudan, their "participation in discussions over national identity [are] far from monolithic."[132]

The second area of flexibility within Moroccan *wataniyya* applies to the role of Islam. According to Turkish scholar Senem Aslan, "although the monarchy [has] appropriated Islam as the state religion and resorted to Islamic symbols to build its legitimacy, it [has been] careful not to promote only one interpretation of Islam and ask the society to conform to it."[133] In other words, while the king is dubbed "Commander of the Faithful" and constantly touts his ancestral ties to the Prophet Muhammad, the state does not favor either rural or urban traditions of Islam. And while it has repeatedly shut down more radical Islamist groups, it has gone "to great lengths to nurture a moderate Islamic Party, the PJD (Justice and Development Party)."[134] Like the Jordanian IAF, the PJD thus seeks to work within the system, advocating gradual change rather than revolution. It has proved adept at finding partners among non-Islamist political parties, and currently leads a coalition government dedicated to "a limited reformist path of political action that…[operates] within the regime's constitutional rules of the

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[130] Maddy-Weitzman 247
[131] Ibid.
[132] Aslan 111
[133] Ibid., 105
[134] Ibid., 133

game."[135] As a result, neither the monarchy nor secularly-oriented Moroccans view the PJD as an existential threat.

Morocco's inclusive, state-based approach to national identity has created a cohesive polity, and the kingdom's disparate groups have repeatedly proven that they are capable of working together. This collaborative environment has been conducive to one of the Arab world's better democratic records; since 1973, Freedom House has ranked Moroccan political rights a "5" thirty times, a "4" eleven times, and a "3" twice. Yet, as is the case with Jordan, most observers hesitate to call Morocco a genuine democracy. The unelected monarchy remains the center of power in the country, retaining the authority to dissolve parliament (albeit in consultation with the prime minister), rule by decree, dismiss or appoint cabinet members, set national and foreign policy, command the security services, and preside over the judicial system.[136] As a result, Aslan notes, the democratic field "has primarily acted as an arena for patronage distribution" rather than serving as the locus of national decision-making.[137] Moroccan *wataniyya* exerts an undeniable stabilizing effect, but it has not yet turned the nation into a consolidated democracy.

Connecting the Dots

The states examined in the past two chapters can be sorted into three general classes: those defined by pro-*wataniyya* regimes (Tunisia, Lebanon, Jordan, and Morocco), secular Arabist regimes (Egypt, Syria, Algeria, and Yemen), and Islamo-Arabist regimes (Libya, Sudan, and Iraq). The latter two categories have a great deal in common. In both, state-based national identity has been actively undermined by the ruling elites, and violent and exclusivist

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[135] Mohamed Daadaoui, "Islamism and the State in Morocco," *The Hudson Institute*, April 29, 2016
[136] *Freedom House*, Morocco Country Report 2016
[137] Aslan 99

interpretations of Islam loom large on the political scene. Alignment with the state does little to reduce Islamists' undemocratic impact: they either overwhelm liberals in the crossfire of their battles with secular Arabists, or crush them directly in partnership with sympathetic dictators.

Supporters of political rights are not the only group in danger when state-based nationalism is cast aside. Ethnic and religious minorities have also often found they have no place in *qawmiyya*-based regimes. This chapter has detailed the harsh repression employed against Berbers in Algeria, Jews and Kurds in Iraq, and ethnic Africans in Sudan; persecution in the latter two cases reached genocidal proportions.

But these chapters are more than a list of atrocities. They are filled with bright spots as well—and not just in the "exceptional" pro-*wataniyya* cases. Even in nations that eventually succumbed to Arabism, state-based nationalism generally enjoyed prominence first, serving as the dominant ideology for a short interlude of relative tolerance and coexistence. As hard as it is to imagine today, major political movements in Egypt, Syria, Algeria, Sudan, Yemen and Iraq once celebrated diversity and state-based nationalism in equal measure, placing these twin values at the forefront of their ideologies.

The extent of the correlation between *wataniyya* and pluralism makes deep conceptual sense. As Chapter 1 argued, a border-based identity is inherently more likely than other forms of nationalism to prioritize inclusivity. This natural partnership arises because *wataniyya* celebrates a homeland rather than a given race, religion or ethnicity. Christians, Muslims, Kurds, Berbers, "Africans" and Arabs can all love their nation in the same way; but they cannot all be full citizens in a state based exclusively on Islam and the Arabic language.

Beyond simply inspiring tolerance, strong *wataniyya* is also a powerful identity of its own, able to forge active bonds of solidarity between segments of society that would otherwise

have very little in common. In particular, *wataniyya* enables Islamic traditionalists and their more secular, liberal counterparts to respect one another and even work together in the service of shared national goals. Chapter 4 illustrated this dynamic at work in Tunisia and Lebanon, and Chapter 5 has revealed how state-based nationalism fulfills the same unifying role in Jordan and Morocco. No mainstream Islamist party in any of these four "pro-*wataniyya*" countries advocates taking over the state, imposing sharia law, or persecuting minorities.

It would be foolish, of course, to presume that state-based identity is always a perfectly viable option. In one case, that of Libya, *wataniyya* was hamstrung by abnormally late state formation, powerful Arabists in neighboring Egypt, and above all by indifference from King Idris. Contrary to the region-wide pattern, a credible Libyan nationalist movement never developed. In a way, however, this failure puts *wataniyya*'s true strength in clearer perspective. Across an entire region where states are regularly branded as "artificial," it is striking that only Libya has failed to articulate a clear national identity.

Just as Libya serves as an exception to the rule regarding the strength of *wataniyya*, Yemen presents a departure from the norm on its comparative desirability. In the Yemen Arab Republic, a mild strain of Arabism allowed for a somewhat freer polity than in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, which adopted a slightly more pro-*wataniyya* stance. It would thus be incorrect to argue that Arabism was "all bad," an ideology that is always worse than every alternative.

Indeed, the past two chapters have referred to several instances in which Arabism enjoyed strong levels of popular support. For brief periods, large groups in most of the region's states *did* genuinely rally around *qawmiyya*. But what won them over? Certainly, anti-imperialism and regional pride played a role. The personal charisma of Gamal Abdel Nasser

and the cultural power of Egypt under his rule were also highly important. But the case studies above have explained how explicit indoctrination campaigns were critical ingredients in almost every situation where Arabism rose to prominence. The paradigmatic instance of this strategy was Sati' al-Husri's own tenure as Iraq's education minister, imitated by similar school-focused crusades in Egypt, Algeria, Libya, Sudan and beyond. Influenced by Husri's command to "teach [objectors] the truth," Arabists were often very open about their intent to indoctrinate.[138] Algeria's campaign of "Writing and Rewriting History," Iraq's "Project for Rewriting History," and Syria's effort to create a "new generation of Syrian Arab Patriots" all exemplified this unambiguous willingness to use state power to manipulate historical fact.

Supporters of *qawmiyya* did not limit themselves to classrooms and textbooks. When propaganda campaigns were not enough to sweep them into power, they distinguished themselves from their opponents by their readiness to use violence. In Syria in 1956, Iraq in 1963 and Sudan in 1989, small pan-Arabist factions successfully banished *wataniyya* from the scene, murdering their key opponents and frightening everyone else into submission. In Libya, Muammar Gadhafi had little need for violence at first, but eventually became a fearsome killer, eliminating thousands of real or perceived rivals. In Egypt, Algeria, and Yemen, the bloodshed was less intense, but the role of "coercive apparatuses" and security services remained much greater than in the states where pro-*wataniyya* governments remained in power.

Despite the long list of abuses Arabists perpetrated, their tactics alone did not guarantee that they would sweep to regional dominance. The past two chapters have illustrated how each state's political fate was ultimately determined by the choices made by its own leaders. Tunisia and Egypt would have charted very different courses had Bourguiba and Nasser reversed their

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[138] Translation by Adeed Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003): 72.

stances on national identity, and the same can be said for Idris in Libya, Hasan in Morocco, Hussein in Jordan, Assad in Syria, and Saleh in Yemen. Even in situations where Arabists forcefully overthrew pro-*wataniyya* governments, events could have still have unfolded differently had local nationalists followed the example of Lebanon's Camille Chamoun and appealed for outside assistance.

In states Arabists did manage to capture, their propensity for violence, widespread use of indoctrination, and links to strong Islamist movements devastated the prospects for democracy. Table 5.2 shows the extent to which political rights suffered in nations where Arabism defined the political environment.

Table 5.2: Mean Freedom House political rights rating (1973-2017)

"Wataniyya-supporters" (Tunisia, Lebanon, Jordan, Morocco)	"Secular Arabists" (Egypt, Syria, Algeria, Yemen)	"Islamo-Arabists" (Libya, Sudan, Iraq)
5.03	5.95	6.52

And the table understates the case: from 1973-2017, a pro-*wataniyya* nation earned a Freedom House political rights rating of 4 or better on 38 occasions, amounting to 21% of the "country-years" in which they were evaluated. In contrast, "secular Arabist" and "Islamo-Arabist" nations only produced 11 ratings of 4 or better, reaching this benchmark just 3.5% of the time. In other words, Arabist countries were almost *seven times* less likely than their *wataniyya*-supporting counterparts to receive a favorable democratic evaluation.

This disparity is clear evidence that the states of the Arab Middle East would be well-served by working to reinforce state-based national identity. Though the legacy of Arabism is to some extent irreversible, and has produced definite obstacles, *wataniyya* is not permanently doomed. As the case of Jordan proves, no state—even the most "artificial"—need despair of building a strong, inclusive national identity. With the right leadership, a popularly supported, inclusive and border-based nationalism can always be developed

6 *The Case for* **Wataniyya**

The preceding chapters have sought to decipher the famed "Arab democracy deficit," endeavoring to explain why, with just two exceptions, the Arabic-speaking states present the world's largest single bloc of authoritarian governments. This is a large and complex problem—especially given the near-impossibility of making sweeping generalizations about the vast region bounded by the Atlantic Ocean in the west and the Persian Gulf in the east. Despite the intricacy of the issues involved, however, this thesis makes an audaciously simple claim: beyond the small "rentier states" of the Gulf, most of the democracy deficit can be explained by the relative weakness of state-based patriotism. Moreover, anemic state-based national identity was never an inevitable fate for any of the Arab states. Rather, it was the result of distinct choices made by individual leaders, nearly all of whom were inspired by the ideal of *qawmiyya*, or pan-Arab nationalism. In other words, there is a fairly well-defined "villain" of the story of democracy in the Arab world.

Could pan-Arabism, an ideology that enjoyed its real heyday only between the mid-1950s and 1967, really be the prime culprit behind the Arab Middle East's contemporary woes? Is it really possible to blame so much on such a short-lived—and such a long-dead—movement?

For four reasons, the answer is yes. First, this thesis has clearly shown the ways in which an "Arabist" approach to national identity lived on long after explicit calls for Arab political unity faded. In Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Sudan, Syria, Iraq and Yemen, leaders continued to find it to their advantage to restrict the growth of state-based patriotism,

preferring to emphasize Arab and Islamic identity instead. In general, they allotted local nationalism only enough space to "muddy the waters," creating confused and conflicting official identity discourses. By encouraging such a discordant environment, leaders sought, with considerable success, to present their own cults of personality as the only viable grounds for peace and stability.

Second, pan-Arabism always entailed more than just a particular approach to nationalism. It represented a fundamentally authoritarian way of viewing the world. By denying the legitimacy of borders, it shifted the foundation of nationhood and identity to other criteria. The most important of these was language—specifically Modern Standard Arabic, a formal dialect so distant from natively spoken versions of Arabic that its speakers process it as a foreign language.[1] By basing the nation on a language that was nobody's mother tongue, pan-Arabism relied on separating people from their own roots—to say nothing of the fact that it justified outright persecution of Kurds, Berbers and ethnic Africans. Its founders were fully aware of this reality, and openly defended authoritarian political tactics, arguing that "cruelty" and indoctrination were fully necessary if their plans were to be realized. This was not just empty ideology: from the brutal suppression of Syrian nationalists in 1956 to the 1989 Sudanese coup, Arabists demonstrated time and time again that they were more willing than their rivals to make use of fear and coercion. They thus introduced a set of violent norms to political life across the Middle East, establishing repressive practices and expectations that have lingered on long after their original proponents have left the scene.

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[1] See "Literary Arabic Is Expressed In Brain Of Arabic Speakers As A Second Language," *ScienceDaily,* November 5, 2009.

The third reason why pan-Arabism can be blamed for the region's present woes is the ideology's causal role in the rise of Islamist extremism. This is on its face a surprising connection to draw, given that the first Arabists were highly secular and are to this day despised by Muslim traditionalists. But pan-Arabism in fact naturally led into Islamism, laying the groundwork for religious radicalism in both indirect and direct ways. The indirect support was provided, in large part, because pan-Arabism was a revolutionary ideology that made a series of wildly ambitious political, economic and social promises. Especially after the 1967 defeat against Israel, alternatives to official narratives could not be permitted, lest regimes' exaggerated claims be exposed as false. As a result, Arabist dictatorships devastated civil society, creating arid, empty public spaces in which Islamist groups could easily grow and thrive. This dynamic was intensified by the fact that many regimes attempted to use Islamists to combat their liberal critics, not realizing until it was too late that they had empowered groups far more threatening to their rule than the liberals had ever been.

Arabism also fed into Islamism in a more direct and organic way: despite their sometime rivalry, the two ideologies actually agree on multiple core issues. For example, the Arabist emphasis on regional identity and denigration of individual nation-states is very similar to the way radical Islamists refuse to recognize any divisions within the monolithic global *umma.* Both groups also share a devotion to classical Arabic and to the "golden age" of Arab culture under the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates. Focused on this ideological overlap, Arabists and Islamists have openly joined forces in Sudan, Iraq, and Libya, and Arabist principles have led naturally to an Islamization of society elsewhere. Accordingly,

for states across the Middle East, a strong history of pan-Arabism is correlated very closely with the presence of strong and disruptive Islamist movements.[2]

The fourth and most important reason Arabism can be blamed for the region's democracy deficit is that its alternative—*wataniyya*—was at every stage a tremendously more promising option for sociopolitical flourishing. Even more than Arabism's direct consequences, it was thus ultimately the ideology's "opportunity cost" that made it so destructive. For the opportunity offered by state-based nationalism was real. In Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, Lebanon, Algeria, Sudan, Iraq, Yemen, Jordan and Morocco, state-based national identity developed strong followings in the decades immediately before and after independence. With very few exceptions, local nationalists emphasized inclusion of minority groups, adopted a pluralistic approach to history, and stressed a democratic political mindset.[3] Unfortunately, *wataniyya* was in most cases violently suppressed by its Arabist rivals. But the states where *wataniyya* has survived most completely—Tunisia and Lebanon—are today the only democracies in the region. Similarly, the kingdoms of Jordan and Morocco also rejected Arabism and emphasized their own unique identities, and while they are not fully democratic, the two states boast significantly more stable, inclusive, and open societies than their neighbors.

Indeed, at its core, this thesis is much less a case against Arabism than it is a comprehensive case *for wataniyya*. The case receives its theoretical basis in Chapter 1, which lays out a clear argument for the way state-based nationalism has been closely tied, throughout history and around the world, to democracy. Unlike transnational aristocracies and monarchies, democracy requires a definite body, a clearly-demarcated *demos* that

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[2] See Table 5.1
[3] See Chapters 4 and 5.

determines who will vote and in whose name leaders will act. It also requires that disparate interest groups peacefully coexist within this *demos*, trusting one another to obey the rules of the political game and to respect one other's rights. As it turns out, a strong national identity is the only way to meet both of these requirements. Only a nation can simultaneously clearly define the polity and create high levels of shared goodwill and solidarity within it.

The parallel rises of nationalism and democracy in the 19th century were thus no coincidence; the two movements were fundamentally intertwined. As Pierre Manent notes, peasants became citizens at the same time as they became Frenchmen, forging bonds of trust and respect with leaders whom they could now regard as countrymen rather than distant overlords. The connection between nationalism and democracy is even more striking beyond Europe. Indeed, the success of anti-imperialist independence movements was based on the reality that, while it is relatively easy to rule over a disconnected mass of people, it is nearly impossible to subjugate a nation. Even critics of nationalism have thus acknowledged that in the context of newly independent Asian and African states, the association between nationalism and democracy was "intimate" and "unmistakable."[4]

The "case for *wataniyya*" continues in Chapter 2, which argues that state-based patriotism is good for minimizing religious radicalism, constructing strong economies, and minimizing the extent to which a state is willing to use violence against its own people. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 apply these ideas in eleven concrete case studies, demonstrating in great detail that *wataniyya* has been a force for inclusion, stability and democracy across the Arab Middle East.

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[4] Rupert Emerson, *From Empire to Nation: The Rise to Self-Assertion of Asian and African Peoples* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962): 223.

Competing arguments

As discussed at the start of this thesis, most debate over democracy in the Arab world has focused on the role of Islam. Scholars who argue against blaming religion for the democracy deficit are more than willing to mix and match the "oil," "economics," and "regime statecraft" explanations, but generally dismiss Islam-centric arguments altogether. Rather than attempting to incorporate Islam into their own lines of reasoning, they contend that it has almost *nothing* to do with the Arab world's unique problems. This thesis does something different. It integrates both sides of the debate, fully accounting for the role of Islam without blaming it entirely for the democracy deficit.

According to the logic laid out in the preceding chapters, Islam itself does not automatically kill a nation's chance for democratic development. Many scholars have rightly observed that outside of the Arab Middle East, many Muslim-majority countries are in fact functioning democracies. The problem, accordingly, is not Islam *per se*: the problem is the role Islam can sometimes play in society and politics. In settings like Malaysia and Indonesia, where the polity is unified around a "conservative consensus," Islam enjoys a relatively uncontroversial place in the public sphere. In these states, even secular parties are open to explicitly Islam-based legislation, and no viable "Islamist" party seeks to fundamentally revolutionize society. However, the situation is very different in most Arab state. In these settings, the weakness of state-based nationalism makes it extremely difficult to build trust and respect between rival political and sectarian groups. Instead of compromising or finding common ground, factions are inclined to attempt to impose their will on the rest of the population, resorting to force whenever necessary. And in the identity vacuum that results from weak *wataniyya*, the clear narrative offered by radical Islamists

allows them to quickly become the strongest and most disruptive faction in the system. Even if they are not dominant enough to seize power altogether, they divide populations and sink into bitter conflict with their competitors. In such a polarized, conflicted setting, democracy—with its connotations of power-sharing and peaceful transitions between administrations—is all but impossible. In other words: Islamism is the superficial reason why democracy is out of the question, but weak national identity is the underlying reason why religious extremism is itself so strong.

Just as with the "Islam explanation," this thesis incorporates the "economics" and "regime statecraft" arguments into its own narrative rather than dismissing them altogether. Economic factors alone, it contends, are not enough to explain the lack of Arab democracy. The region is neither too rich nor too poor; dozens of democracies around the world resemble the Arab states on measures of per-capita GDP, poverty, and income inequality. Indeed, within the Arab world itself, Egypt and Tunisia have almost identical economies but very different democratic situations. But to the extent that the Arab world's specific economic conditions—for example, its weak private sectors—*do* impact the prospects for democracy in the region, the status of national identity is key to understanding *why*. First, weak intercommunal solidarity limits the strength and flexibility of markets, which rely on shared trust to survive. Second, the primacy of Modern Standard Arabic—as opposed to popularly-spoken national dialects—severely undermines education, literacy, and social mobility across the region.

For its part, regime statecraft is clearly an important part of the puzzle, allowing for the consolidation of "coup-proof" dictatorships that can be shaken only by massive popular uprisings. Protests can be prevented and contained; dissent can be monitored and punished.

And when major challenges do arise, regimes from Syria to Sudan have weathered the storms thanks to their willingness to fire on their own people. But once again, authoritarian tactics are symptoms of a deeper ailment. Why are the security services in Syria willing to kill their fellow citizens, while their Tunisian counterparts are not? The answer is, once again, national identity. In Syria, *wataniyya* has been cast aside by decades of Arabist rule; in Tunisia, state-based patriotism has since independence formed the very basis of the political community. The Tunisian security services share a strong national bond with the protestors on the other side of their bayonets, which dramatically reduces the chance that protestors will enact reprisals if they ultimately take power. The Syrian security services, on the other hand, share no such bond, and are thus embroiled in an existential struggle for their own survival, convinced that only death awaits if their grip on the state slips.

With regard to three competing explanations, then, this thesis makes room for rival arguments to have a role, but finds that *wataniyya* offers a deeper, more fundamental explanation of the dynamics blocking democratic growth.

Oil, the fourth competing explanation, receives slightly different treatment. Rather than arguing that *wataniyya* also underlies rentier-state dynamics, this thesis gives the "oil curse" theory significant credit, accepting that it likely explains the persistence of autocracy and the weakness of democratic advocacy in the six Gulf States. However, because these states contain barely seven percent of the total Arab population, it is clear that oil alone cannot come close to solving the overall puzzle of Arab democratic exceptionalism. Outside of the Gulf, oil is sparse enough—and populations are high enough—that no regime can realistically be described as "buying off" its people. Even when counting major producers such as Iraq, Libya and Algeria, a side-by-side comparison of oil-exporting and non-oil-

exporting nations reveals that they have very similar GDPs, unemployment rates and taxation policies. In these states, something other than oil is making the difference between democracy and dictatorship.

While this thesis admits that oil is probably the prime culprit for the absence of democracy in the Gulf, even there, national identity is far from irrelevant. Kuwait, for example, boasts the strongest *wataniyya* of any of the rich "petrostates." And, as discussed in Chapter 2, this has helped it to become by far the most democratic country in the Gulf, demonstrating once again that state-based nationalism can support a positive political culture in even the most difficult contexts.

Addressing Potential Objections

This thesis makes a whole-hearted "case for *wataniyya*." But it does not pretend to have all the answers or to make a completely watertight argument. There are undeniably several weak spots in its narrative, and there is room for legitimate objections to be made against it.

The first of these objections is clearly that, while nationalism might lead to inclusion and democracy internally, its international application is less obviously constructive. The same ideology that creates an 'us' does imply a 'them.' Yemeni nationalism, for example, is defined in partial opposition to Saudi nationalism. Lebanese identity is at least in part a rejection of Syrian identity. And all state-based identities in the region are in fundamental tension with transnational Arab identity.

But the fact is, Yemeni, Saudi, Lebanese and Syrian nations and identities, no matter how weak or beleaguered, are here to stay. The region's leaders have already tried to pretend

otherwise, and they failed mightily in their effort to impose a one-size-fits-all Arabism on the diverse populations in question. Even when *wataniyya* had barely developed, as in early 20th century Iraq and Syria, locals quickly protested against Arabist regimes, demanding a "Syria for Syrians" and an "Iraq for Iraqis." Indeed, efforts at regional merger have ultimately backfired so completely that today's discussion of borders in the Middle East centers on the possibility of further *partition,* not increased unity. It has become common to hear proposals for multiple Iraqs, Syrias, Libyas and Yemens. But "going back to the drawing board" would solve few of the region's problems. As argued extensively above, there are no perfect borders, no perfect Arab states that will finally strike the "right" demographic balance and end sectarian conflict once and for all. Tinkering with frontiers will never eliminate competition between groups. Rather than pursuing further attempts to reach utopic *solutions*, the states of the Arab Middle East must reach equitable *settlements* that actively seek to balance the competing religious, ethnic and ideological identities at play.[5] This thesis argues that the best way to reach such settlements is to enshrine *wataniyya* and encourage it to be as inclusive as possible. If followed properly, this path will promote international stability just as much as it contributes to domestic reconciliation. For as Chapter 1 pointed out, respect for borders inherently means acknowledging the sovereignty of other states. Nationalism can and does provide a constructive outlet for group sentiment, channeling it into mutually acceptable and peaceful forms.

The second potential objection to this thesis' argument is a mirror image of the first. Just as state-based nationalism can be accused of fomenting a level of division, it can certainly be argued that pan-Arab sentiment, at least in a non-revolutionary and apolitical form, creates salutary unity. To an extent, the ties forged by Modern Standard Arabic *do* link

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[5] The continued bloodshed and suffering following the long-awaited partition of Sudan illustrates this point.

together otherwise disparate regions, encouraging economic growth and cultural dynamism. An educated Iraqi can travel to Morocco, read street signs, and make himself understood to an educated Moroccan. A student from Egypt can study in a Qatari university with little need for linguistic adjustment. And so on and so forth.

But while MSA does create a type of unity, it is a top-heavy unity, a unity made up disproportionately of elites. The wealthiest and most educated Arabs can jet from one capital to another, existing in a kind of super-national bubble.[6] But like the European aristocrats of the 18th century, these Arab elites live in a sort of illusion. Their salons mask the deep and real distinctions between different Arab peoples, most of whom are either not comfortable with MSA, not wealthy enough to travel widely, or both. Indeed, rather than serving these average citizens, Arabism is often used to manipulate them. In prewar Syria, for example, the Assad regime consciously benefited from its subjects' identification with suffering Lebanese, Iraqis and Palestinians, fully aware that the closer they felt to chaos in neighboring states, the more they would accept their own government's oppressive security measures.[7]

To be sure, Modern Standard Arabic and pan-Arab solidarity do have some benefits that trickle down to ordinary citizens. The rapid spread of anti-authoritarian protests in 2011, for example, was enabled by an unmistakably "Arab" common consciousness. And regional peace and security is aided by a sense of shared culture. Accordingly, this thesis does not suggest abandoning MSA entirely or dispensing with all forms of regional fellowship. It simply suggests that the interests of Arab peoples are best served by combining transnational solidarity with much more explicit attempts to build state-based identity and community. It is possible, to an extent, for the region's states to have their cake and eat it too, embracing

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[6] See Martin Kramer, "Arab Nationalism: Mistaken Identity," *Daedalus* 122, no. 3 (1993): 171-206.
[7] Christopher Phillips, *Everyday Arab Identity: the Daily Reproduction of the Arab World*. (New York: Routledge, 2012): 30

friendly pan-Arab relations while enjoying their own distinctiveness with much more pride and purpose than they have thus far.

A third possible objection to this thesis' argument is that the "exceptions" it celebrates are not, by any means, pristine success stories. Apotheosizing Tunisia and Lebanon too much—overly glorifying either their past performance or their present-day situations—is unwise. For its part, Tunisia languished under authoritarian control for the first 55 years of independence. Until the Arab Spring, it would have been nonsense to refer to it as a "democratic exception." Today, the nation is battling deepening economic malaise, and has developed a severe problem with the radicalization of its youth. Although it has dealt remarkably well with integrating Islamists into its political system, it has struggled to prevent individual radicals from traveling abroad in the pursuit of violent jihad. In fact, the Islamic State has received more recruits from Tunisia than any other country.[8] For Lebanon's part, the problems are even more obvious. The nation was riven by a 15-year-long civil war that made it synonymous with chaos and dysfunction, and today remains a divided society with a deeply flawed, patronage-based political system.

But while *wataniyya* cannot solve every problem in every country, it does undeniably work to *mitigate* these problems. State-based nationalism is not a silver bullet, but states are plainly better off with it than without it. Consider Lebanon: with well over a million Syrian refugees straining its system and no elected president from 2014 to 2016, the nation nonetheless steered almost completely clear of political violence. Indeed, the degree to which "business as usual" continued is almost shocking. Few other nations could even imagine accommodating a refugee influx of the same relative size, or functioning without a head of

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[8] Carlotta Gall, "Tunisia Fears the Return of Thousands of Young Jihadists," *The New York Times*, February 25, 2017.

state, let alone managing both crises at the same time.[9] Lebanon's national identity—simultaneously strong enough to bind together its disparate groups and flexible enough to allow them to maintain their own customs and traditions—was a key reason it weathered this storm. Communal self-government kept the country from slipping into anarchy, and a shared patriotism and loyalty to Lebanon kept these communities from attacking one another.

A closer look at Tunisia also reveals that state-based national identity mitigates problems that would otherwise have been much worse. For example, part of the reason why so many young radicals *leave* the country is that there are so few opportunities for domestic jihad. Unlike their counterparts in Libya, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and beyond, radical Islamists in Tunisia have extremely limited options for pursuing their goals at home. Islamism simply lacks the popular support to sustain a violent campaign against the state.[10] In other words, the high number of foreign fighters produced by Tunisia is, at least in part, a testament to the success with which the nation has sidelined violent extremism in its own internal political culture.

As a final point regarding flaws in the "democratic exceptions," it is worth noting that *wataniyya* still has room to grow in both Lebanon and Tunisia. To the extent that the two states continue to face democratic shortcomings, it is possible that a *stronger* alignment with state-based nationalism could help remedy them. For example, neither Lebanon nor Tunisia has institutionalized its local dialect of Arabic as an official idiom. While each gives its dialect more public respect than is common elsewhere in the region, neither has taken the

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[9] The refugees number at least 1.5 million, or roughly a quarter of Lebanon's population. In the United States, an influx of the same relative size would amount to over 80 million refugees.

[10] See Geoffrey Macdonald and Luke Waggoner, "Why Are So Many Tunisians Joining the Islamic State?" *The Washington Post*, January 27, 2017. In interviews conducted by Macdonald and Waggoner, even "family and friends of foreign fighters… uniformly condemned their actions," using "forceful and emotionally-charged language when rejecting violent extremism."

final step toward formal recognition. For the time being, both states insist, like their Arabist neighbors, on legally favoring MSA over the native languages of their own populations.

A fourth plausible objection to the "case for *wataniyya*" is that in the past half-decade, the Sisi regime in Egypt, and to a lesser extent the Assad regime in Syria, have in fact made distinct pivots toward state-based nationalism.[11] But this has done little to reduce oppression in either state. Both Syria and Egypt are as un-democratic as they have been at any point since independence, and neither Sisi nor Assad appear to be going anywhere soon.

Once again, however, while this objection shows that *wataniyya* is not a fast-acting, catch-all solution, it does little to fundamentally invalidate the core argument of this thesis. State-based nationalism takes time to work, especially in contexts where it has been actively undermined for decades. A space of just three or four years is too short to see dramatic results. In Tunisia, of course, it took a full 55 years for strong, inclusive national identity to yield democratic fruit. But the long incubation period meant that when the time finally came, the nation was ready to make the most of its democratic opportunity.

It would thus be false to interpret dictators' current turn toward state-based nationalism as inescapable proof of *wataniyya*'s moral and democratic bankruptcy. Rather than focusing on *who* is promoting it or *why*, it is more useful to judge a nation's identity discourse on *what* is being said and *how*. Instead of sullying state-based nationalism by association, the dictators' "patriotic turns" should thus be regarded with cautious approval, as potential first steps toward future liberalization. Perhaps Egypt is the next Tunisia; given the state's historically high levels of national consciousness, such an outcome is certainly within the realm of possibility.

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[11] See Eric Trager, "Stuck With Sisi: Amid Egypt's Repression, Few Alternatives," *Foreign Affairs*, January 24, 2017 and Dave McAvoy, "In Isolated Syria, Assad Shifts Away From Pan-Arabism," *The National*, October 23, 2013.

Implications for future scholarship

This thesis presents an altogether new way of understanding the Arab democracy deficit, making a full-fledged addition to a field that has intrigued scholars since the 1990s. While most previous attempts to explain the region's democratic exceptionalism have been limited to article-length contributions, this thesis expands on its argument over the course of multiple chapters and eleven detailed case studies. It does not claim to fully repudiate previous explanations; instead, it incorporates many of their key observations into its own logic. At the same time, its approach is not simply to combine every potential explanation and answer "all of the above." Instead, it decisively contends that the region's democratic fate hinges on state-based nationalism—and not Islam, economics, oil, regime statecraft or some other factor.

For all of its focus on the Arab Middle East, this thesis also has exciting implications for scholars of democracy and national identity elsewhere in the world. It makes a clear argument that strong, healthy state-based national identity is good—and perhaps even indispensable—for democratic flourishing. While multiple scholars have either hinted at the patriotism-democracy nexus or discussed it explicitly, this thesis provides the first sustained, region-specific defense of the theory. The next step, of course, is to apply its rationale beyond the Arab World.

Central Asia, in particular, is a prime candidate for further study. After the Arab Middle East, this region is the world's next largest and most clearly defined "island of autocracy." It is also overwhelmingly Muslim, has struggled significantly with questions of national identity, and must contend with ascendant Islamist movements.[12] It does diverge

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[12] See Kathleen Collins, "Clans, Pacts and Politics in Central Asia," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 3 (2002), 137-152.

from the Middle East in significant ways; there is no Arab parallel, for example, to the powerful legacy of Soviet communism. But communism—a messianic, dictatorial ideology that attempted, in the Soviet context, to paper over deep national differences—also contains uncanny echoes of revolutionary pan-Arabism. Extending this thesis' method of analysis to Central Asia, and comparing the results to those from the Arab world, would thus be a fascinating and rewarding enterprise.

The connection between democracy and national identity should not only be of interest to scholars of undemocratic regions. This thesis' findings also have profound implications for the global heartland of democracy—the West. After decades of decreased emphasis on state-based identity, Europe and the North America are experiencing a remarkable upsurge of populism, xenophobia, and political polarization, leading to what many commentators allege is a broad-based weakening of democratic norms. What if a reason for this increase in fragmentation and radicalism is that, in the decades leading up to the present situation, there was a paucity of legitimate outlets for constructive national sentiment? How different would today's political climate be if robust, healthy patriotism had been given more of a role, and borderless regionalism had been pursued more carefully? For now, these are only questions—but the answers, which can be investigated via comparative case studies, are extremely important, and should be pursued by future researchers.

Implications for policy

This chapter has dwelt at considerable length on the limits of *wataniyya* and on the ways it is not a catch-all, instant solution to all of the Arab Middle East's problems. Such an emphasis, however, should not detract from the argument made by the thesis as a whole.

There can be little doubt that healthy, state-based national identity has the potential to undergird increased stability, inclusion and democracy across the Arab Middle East. Policymakers concerned with minority rights, civil liberties, counterterrorism and conflict resolution all should look to *wataniyya* as a force for good, a friend in the battle for a happier and more peaceful Arab World.

For actors who are themselves citizens of Arab states, the policy implications are obvious; *wataniyya* should be emphasized, nurtured, taught and practiced. Local dialects of Arabic should be elevated to official languages, taught in schools and used in the media. Of course, Arab identity will remain important, but extreme care should be taken to avoid confusing it with *wataniyya* or referring to it in ways that should be reserved for individual states.

For stakeholders in the United States, simply recognizing state-based nationalism as a source of democracy and pluralism will add important nuance to policy and increase the general likelihood that initiatives will succeed. And some direct action can also be taken to support the growth of healthy *wataniyya*. The United States can fund the creation of educational materials in local dialects, emphasize state-based patriotism in the various training programs it provides, and direct particular aid and support to the national governments of Lebanon and Tunisia.

Most importantly, all policymakers, whether Arab or foreign, would do well to remember that national identities are constantly in states of growth and change. They continuously have the opportunity to become more inclusive and authentic, and are never condemned to permanent "backwardness." Building a national identity takes time. But transforming national attitudes is much more easily accomplished than reforming a religion,

fundamentally changing economic structures, or coaxing autocratic regimes to "play nice."

More than any of the other competing recommendations for remedying the Arab democracy

deficit, the "case for *wataniyya*" thus encourages optimism and engagement. It is an

argument convinced that well-conceived policies can, and ultimately will, secure a peaceful,

prosperous and democratic future for the Arab Middle East.

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