

# **How Durable is “Durable Authoritarianism”? A Comparative Study of the Kingdoms of Bahrain and Jordan during the Arab Spring**

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Bahrain and Jordan are Arab authoritarian monarchies that have experienced demonstrations and protests in the period following the Arab Spring of 2011. In these regimes, the royal family enjoys a monopoly on power and distribution of political influence, with only superficial avenues for political participation. Initially, protesters in both countries demanded only change within the existing regime, leaving the monarchy and royal family unchallenged. However, as the tensions and demonstrations progressed, opposition in Bahrain began to call for substantial changes to the existing structure of governance. In this paper, I seek to understand how these two governments established durable authoritarian monarchies, and further explore how durable they truly are. Furthermore, I will compare the demonstrations and regime reactions to the Arab Spring protests to identify differences in government responses in order to explain why the opposition in Bahrain has begun to demand extensive structural change, while Jordanians are still supportive of the monarchy, though critical of the government. That is to say, I seek to answer how these governments consolidated power in their authoritarian regimes, how durable these regimes are in the face of protesters, and why the protesters’ demands differ within the two countries.

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I hypothesize that these monarchies have firmly established their governance through a hybrid system of laws. Both regimes allow a margin of social pluralism and foster a relatively tolerant environment (for the region), appoint a loyal politically relevant elite that is fairly responsive to the demands of the population, and allocate welfare and benefits to the population, financed through the collection of rents. However, as rents have decreased, both governments have had to enact steps towards political liberalization and reform, but have done so in a top-down manner that preserves the status quo. Building some flexibility into their authoritarian rule, these regimes have increased avenues of political participation without any substantial power shift. I suggest, however, that they will only sustain their rule if they maintain their flexibility and responsiveness. I further hypothesize that protesters in Bahrain have made greater demands and shown less respect for the existing regime in calling for more comprehensive change due to the regime's lower level of flexibility and higher level of repressive violence.

To explore my hypotheses, I will begin with a brief summary of the characteristics of Middle Eastern authoritarian monarchies. Then, I will discuss the existing literature explaining "durable authoritarianism" in Middle East regimes, specifically within monarchies. I will also note hypotheses proposed by scholars to identify why certain Arab monarchies have fallen, while others remain stable. Then, I will begin applying these theories to Bahrain and Jordan. I will start with a brief history of how each kingdom was established, legitimated, and consolidated. Next, I will compare the survival strategies and policies that these governments have implemented and how they have dealt with demands from their populations. I will focus on whether each regime utilized legal channels to implement coping strategies, to what extent they satisfied the opposition, and whether they shifted the distribution of power. Moreover, I will note the allowances that these two regimes have made in terms of tolerance and openness that are considerable for the region.

### **Literature Review**

Contemporary Middle Eastern states were defined in the aftermath of World War I and the fall of the Ottoman Empire. In these new Arab states, a monarchy was a common choice in political structure (Amaylon

2000). Amalyon suggests that many states opted for monarchies due to regional traditions and the international prestige of kingdoms. She distinguishes between two forms of monarchical regimes established in the region at this time: the traditional monarchy influenced only minutely by foreign models, and modern kingdoms that followed a Western template and included constitutional elements. Transjordan and Bahrain relied on traditional legitimacy such as Islamic rules and cultural values, instead of founding a constitutional monarchy based on imported constitutional values from the West. Ultimately, kingdoms set up in the latter manner, like Egypt and Syria, fell by the mid-1900s largely due to the foreign nature of the constitutional government. However, Kostiner (2000) notes the lack of true and official Islamic foundation of post-WWI regimes. In fact, these new regimes were led and instructed not by Islam or religious leaders, but by a “royal” family with the power and resources to organize a coalition and co-opt opposition to consolidate unified states.

Lucas (2004) defines the characteristics of Middle Eastern monarchies, classifying this regime type as a subtype of authoritarian rule. He notes that these Arab monarchies were characterized by their charismatic rulers at the center of regime coalitions, politically quiescent populations, constitutional organization, dominant executive power, ambiguous source of power, and constructed mentality, often based on religion or tradition (Lucas 2004). Lucas’s analysis largely supports Kostiner’s claim (2000) about how royal families consolidated power and dominated their political realms.

Until very recently, scholars devoted much effort to explain the democracy deficit in these realms. However, more modern scholars, disenchanted by the failure of democratic initiatives in many of the Middle Eastern regimes, began to accept durable authoritarianism as a reality (Albrecht and Schlumberger 2004; Brumberg 2002; Crystal 1994; Ottaway 2003; Schlumberger 2000a). Instead of questioning what the Middle East was lacking, many started exploring explanations for the resilience of authoritarian governments (Schlumberger 2007). For the most part, scholars committed to answering this question broke into two separate schools of thought: the “prerequisite” school and the “transition” school (Posusney 2005). According to the “prerequisite” school, democratization had stalled in the Middle East

due to the absence of a number of economic, cultural, or institutional conditions required to undergo political transitions. Followers of this school of thought hypothesized that characteristics such as tribal mentalities, ethnic divisions, Islam, or rentierism prevented democratization in the Middle East. (In rentier economies, external sources of revenue, such as foreign aid or oil, finance government expenditures, such as subsidies, welfare programs, and large public sectors.) For example, Herb notes that sectarian divides in both Jordan and Bahrain affect election laws and, therefore, representation in parliament, ensuring that a single sect retains influence in elected bodies (in Posusney 4). Moreover, some scholars argue that the rentier economy serves as an obstacle to democratization through the “no taxation, no representation” social contract. Rents enable governments to secure popular support through the distribution of welfare, jobs, and education, circumventing regime accountability through political participation (Posusney, Schlumberger). Rents are also used to develop and sustain comprehensive and expansive security apparatuses used to repress or intimidate opposition (Schlumberger). Other scholars of this precept propose that the lack of appropriate institutions accounts for the failure of Middle Eastern states to democratize. For example, the barring of political parties combines with the ineffectiveness of elections and elected bodies to facilitate electoral engineering, enabling the regime to manipulate the outcomes of elections and prevent a change in the status quo (Angrist and Posusney in Posusney).

On the other hand, the “transition” school acknowledges the role of socioeconomic and cultural conditions, but stresses the importance of regime type and the role of actors, including elites, incumbent rulers, and opposition members, in explaining the resilience of authoritarian regimes. Scholars working from this perspective focus on human agency and the relationships within regimes, between regimes and their constituencies, and between regimes and the opposition. The choices and actions of incumbent rulers, loyal elites, and opposition members are regarded in understanding the negotiations that promote or prevent political change (Posusney). Perthes (2004) stresses the importance of elites in the decision making process concerning both politics and socioeconomics in authoritarian regimes. He notes that in most Arab countries, leaders enjoy a monopoly on the distribution

of political relevance and power and it is carefully and strategically allocated to chosen elites in order to preserve the status quo (Perthes). Furthermore, Gregory Gause emphasizes the role of international actors, noting that the geostrategic location of many Arab countries attracted powerful foreign allies that ensured stability and, oftentimes, economic security (in Lucas 2004).

Moreover, the relationships considered in the “transition” school often reveal the significance of a social pact, which Heydemann (2007) suggests plays a large role in political stability. For example, Heydemann notes how many governments in the region developed a national-populist social pact after independence as a manifestation of the popular nationalism and anti-colonialism movements. Heydemann explains how this form of social pact increases government flexibility, as it does not adhere to any single, unified rule of law. Therefore, the regime is able to utilize both formal institutions and informal networks to incorporate and co-opt competitors and opposition. Tactics such as informal bargaining, co-optation and violence prevent the development of a true opposition or stable coalitions to press for political liberalization (Heydemann).

Furthermore, Herb (in Lucas 2004) and Lucas (2004) explore the role of regime type in political transition. Lucas notes how monarchies are more likely to enact and facilitate political liberalization to encourage social pluralism and deepen cleavages and divisions within civil society. In this environment, social and opposition groups compete with one another without challenging the regime. Because monarchs are not directly threatened by elections and political participation, they often use democratic bargains to alleviate tensions, while still ensuring their control over the reform process (Lucas 2004). In the specific context of Jordan, Lucas explores regime survival strategies that are implemented defensively from the top-down, specifically focusing on the regime’s reactions to stresses from 1988-2001. He suggests that the monarchy successfully avoided instability and threats by changing the system’s relationships with political parties, the Parliament and the press according to three factors: the use of constitutional rules, the reinforcement of divisions within the opposition in the face of a collective regime, and the prevention of fractures within regime loyal populations (Lucas 2005). In Lucas’ opinion (2005), the regime

has shifted these institutions within constitutional laws in order to preserve the regime without altering the status quo. Numerous experts on Jordanian politics concur with Lucas' theory, defining the actions of the regime as temporary survival tactics (Choucair-Vizoso 2006) and "defensive democratization" (Robinson 1998: 1).

Herb considers differences in regime type within Arab monarchies, identifying various degrees of durability between dynastic and linchpin monarchical regimes. In a dynastic monarchy, the royal family dominates high level offices within the government, bureaucracy, and armed forces, while, in a linchpin monarchy, the royal family may participate in politics, but is absent from the bureaucracy (in Lucas 2004). According to Herb (in Lucas, 2004), dynastic monarchies are more likely to survive due to the solidarity produced by family disputes, which produces constructive competition within the ruling family. However, Lucas (2004) does stress that the "democratic" bargains introduced and manipulated by Arab monarchies may promote some degree of liberalization, but fall short of truly democratic process.

Lastly, Lawson (2007) considers the role of the armed forces in the prevention of political liberalization. He explains that the military's unwillingness to risk priority status prevents the armed forces from initiating transition, while fears of military intervention and the establishment of similarly authoritarian regimes discourage the population from promoting substantial political change. Because of these conditions, he argues, transition only occurs under extenuating circumstances (Lawson).

In understanding durable authoritarian monarchies, it is important to consider why similar monarchies have fallen in the past. Maddy-Weitzman (2000) contemplates why the Egyptian, Iraqi, Libyan and Yemeni monarchies failed, exploring perceived regime legitimacy, foreign policy, state, class and leadership values and the inevitability of collapse due to structure. In terms of legitimacy, he notes that differences between "artificial" or "indigenous" leadership histories are not causal factors. However, he does regard the absence of legitimate parliamentary institutions and channels of political participation as relevant, explaining that failed monarchies often had an elite parliament committed to the status quo and disconnected from the majority of the population. Furthermore, he observes that foreign policy can either

challenge or secure the legitimacy of a regime, as the Baghdad Pact in Iraq cost the Hashemite monarchy significant popular support. Also, he emphasizes the inability of the failed regimes to accommodate the new middle classes produced by modernization within the political sphere. Because oil rents had allowed these governments to disregard social and political forces, the states were not responsive to the growing middle class and did not expand political participation or promote economic growth to support new and educated populations (Maddy-Weitzman).

Lucas (2004) nearly echoes these explanations, noting that the absence of legitimacy due to the lack of parliamentary institutions, tensions from “modernization,” and the rise of the middle class was responsible for the collapse of certain authoritarian regimes. Similarly, Gause (2000) expands on the role of oil money and other rents as explanations for fallen Arab monarchies. He argues that countries with oil and geostrategic locations attract external patrons and superpower allies that bolster monarchies, providing a margin of error for them (Gause) and acting as a social lubricant to ensure survival (Lucas 2004). The fallen monarchies failed to achieve foreign support, and suffered more intensely from similar political mistakes (Gause).

Overall, much of the literature supports the claims that Arab monarchies, as authoritarian regimes, allowed limited political liberalization in order to legitimate rule. Though successful monarchies oftentimes had channels for political participation and constitutional agreements, the royal family exercised a monopoly on political power and influence and maintained control over political transitions. The ability to do so and preserve stability was facilitated largely by a rentier economy and strong foreign allies. Moreover, flexibility and inclusiveness of these regimes enabled them to utilize formal institutions and informal networks to incorporate informal bargaining techniques and to buy off or co-opt opposition or competitors. This enabled monarchies to enact successful survival strategies in accordance with their respective constitutions that deepened fractures within the opposition. In this vein, while many scholars agree that the survival of Arab monarchies will require a comprehensive transition towards a true constitutional monarchy (Hamid 2011, Salem 2011, The International Crisis Group), others note that Arab sovereignty can be preserved through substantial concessions (Muasher and Ottaway 2011).

**Consolidation of Power**

Bahrain has been under the rule of the Al Khalifah family since 1783. It is significant to note that the royal family has been contested through the country's history due to sectarian tensions. While the Al Khalifah are Sunni, nearly 70 percent of the Bahraini population identify as Shi'a and are subject to discrimination by the regime and Sunni elite throughout the country's history. The Sunni dominate politically relevant government positions while the Shi'a suffer from high unemployment rates due to cheap ex-patriate labor and have experienced severe repression from the regime (Crystal 2011).

The country was ruled from 1961- 1999 by Amir Shaykh Isa bin Salman and his brother, Shaykh Khalifah bin Salman, who served as Prime Minister. Upon independence from Great Britain in 1971, the regime drafted and promulgated a constitution to establish legitimacy, in part by creating the National Assembly as a unicameral legislative body. However, constitutionalism was short lived; in response to protests by labor organizations, the government passed a State Security Law in 1975 to legalize the repression of dissidence and to dismiss the assembly and suspend the constitution (Crystal 2011).

Previous to World War I, Jordan was a disorganized series of tribes with only distant connections to its Ottoman rulers (Alon 2007). In 1922, the area was designated as a British mandate and became the British Emirate of Transjordan. The British, reluctant to commit completely to a new and uncertain territory, practiced indirect colonial control through recognition of Abdullah bin Hussein as ruler and allowing high levels of local political participation and autonomy (Alon). The British worked with Emir Abdullah to establish framework and infrastructure necessary for independence and greatly expanded the emir powers in 1928. Furthermore, in 1928 the government passed the Organic Law, which introduced representative politics through the establishment of a legislative council. Finally, in 1946, the Emir was granted kingship and the Emirate of Transjordan became the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

King Abdullah's successor and eldest son, Talal, drafted a constitution in 1952 which introduced parliamentarianism; recognized significant civil liberties such as the right to expression, freedom of assembly and freedom of opinion; and expanded the power of the



legislature. Talal's rule lasted only a year; his son, King Hussein, was committed to broaden the rights and political participation established in the constitution. He made a number of amendments to the 1953 constitution, including the annulment of restrictions on the press, the legalization of political parties, and extensions of the powers of the parliament. These reforms fostered a political climate that enabled and encouraged free, fair, and competitive elections in 1956, which resulted in a victory for the opposition of the monarchy (Rath 1994). However, like Bahrain, this liberal political environment was brief, as the King soon understood liberalization to be a threat to regime and countered the liberal challenges with oppressive policies, suspension of civil and political liberties, and a declaration of martial law (Lucas 2004).

### **Political Reform**

In the early 1990's, however, a wave of unrest throughout the Gulf prompted the Al Khalifah family to reconsider their repressive tactics. Bahraini citizens were disconcerted by the favoritism in the regime exercised towards the royal family and certain private entrepreneurs (Lawson) and Shi'a began to protest high unemployment and their lack of political participation (Crystal 2011). Through the 1990's Bahrain operated as a dynastic monarchy, where numerous high level government positions and military offices were occupied by members of the royal family. Moreover, the state tended to allocate licenses exclusively to private entrepreneurs to ensure loyalty, resulting in a number of monopolies. In response to demonstrations and tensions, the royal family secured additional cabinet positions by appointing family members (Lawson). Moreover, Shaykh Isa developed the consultative council in 1992 to propose legislation and increase political participation. However, the Amir reserved the right to appoint members to the council, which was ultimately comprised of loyal elite.

The royal family's exclusion of small businesses in government investments and contracts disenfranchised small business and resulted in increasing unemployment throughout the second half of the 1990's. Poor economic conditions incited riots and unrest from 1994-1998 (Lawson). Riots continued despite Shaykh Isa's expansion of the power and size of the consultative council, and the government responded harshly with detentions and arrests. In 1999, Shaykh Isa died and his son, Shaykh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa assumed the

leadership of Bahrain and immediately expressed his commitment to political reform. He released political prisoners, began negotiations with Shi'a, promised the development of a National Charter, abolished the State Security Law, and replaced the security and police forces with the National Security Agency (Crystal 2011).

Additionally, increased oil revenues encouraged government investments in public and private enterprises, resulting in a recovery of the economy. However, the regime simultaneously made political changes that ensured its control over political reform. Shaykh Hamad increased the powers of the appointed upper house to challenge the influence of the elected lower house, and amended electoral laws to benefit regime loyal contestants (Lawson). The Shaykh further increased control over press and censorship, limited the role of the National Assembly, and promoted himself to king (Crystal 2011). These conditions induced the opposition to boycott parliamentary election in 2002 and have encouraged demonstrations, which received little attention from the government and security forces. The 2002 boycott resulted in low Shi'a representation in the council, and was coupled with tensions between the upper and lower houses within the council, severely limiting formal avenues of political participation (Niethammer 2008).

In Jordan, political liberalization was introduced as a regime coping strategy to alleviate tensions that accompanied the failure of the rentier social contract. These material benefits secure regime support and popularity as the taxation process is circumvented (Brynen 1992). Because rentier states receive large portions of their expenditure budgets from foreign sources, their ability to maintain the social contract is extremely sensitive to the economic situation of its donor nations (Ryan 2002). Unfortunately, a number of events in the mid-1980's such as spiking oil prices, regional conflict, and inflation severely cut rents to Jordan (Robins 2004). The monarchy responded to the loss of revenue by implementing austerity measures, which decreased welfare and investment expenditures and required the contraction of the role of the state as an economic actor (Lucas 2005).

These measures increased the prices on commodity goods, inciting riots in even the most traditionally loyal areas of Jordan (Rath). Communities organized to enumerate demands from the government,

calling for the resignation of the prime minister, a decrease in corruption, and the holding of democratic and representative parliamentary elections among other things (Robinson). This demonstrated the “erosion of legitimacy” of the Hashemite regime (Rath) and jeopardized the status quo relationship previously secured in the rentier social contract. To preserve the regime, Hussein chose to pre-emptively liberalize the Jordanian government as a means of surviving the economic crisis. In this manner, he was able to dictate and monitor changes in domestic Jordanian politics while temporarily satisfying the demands of his constituents (Robinson). King Hussein replaced the prime minister, suggested the creation of a National Charter and announced the preparation for November parliamentary elections, which most scholars regard as free and fair elections. At this crossroads, King Hussein made the conscious decision to refrain from using force, as he had during the civil war, and instead, for the first time, utilized political participation as a survival strategy (Lucas 2005).

After King Hussein passed away in 1999, King Abdullah, like Shaykh Hamad, began his reign with commitments to liberalization. The new king was active in engaging in discourse with opposition party officials and professional associates, constantly interested in developing a “national dialogue” (Ryan). Within months of Abdullah’s succession, municipal elections were held in Jordan. While the opposition participated in the 2000 elections, the subsequent election laws aggravated the population. The new laws maintained the “one-person, one-vote” format that prohibited fair and equal representation and favored the areas traditionally loyal to the monarchy (Lucas 2005, Ryan). In previous elections, Jordanians had been able to cast votes for the number of seats in their electoral district, enabling voters to satisfy familial and ideological ties. However, in the “one-person, one-vote” system, each Jordanian received only one vote, curbing the ability to support tribal and ideological affiliations and cutting the weight of a voter in a district with more parliamentary seats (Robinson). King Abdullah postponed elections to be held with the new election laws in November 2001, and the parliament was dissolved shortly after. During the suspension of Parliament, the King ruled by decree, a Constitutional political mechanism he employed to its fullest extent (Lucas 2005).

In both countries, rulers have enacted political liberalization policies as a response to economic crises, increasing opposition, or the succession of a new ruler. Moreover, in each case, the reform process has been carefully negotiated from the top-down in a manner to preserve the status quo. As Lucas shows, these regimes have implemented policies that fracture the opposition and maintain the balance of power in their favor. Each monarchy has enacted a constitution that has enabled the monarch to suspend the constitution and severely limit civil liberties at his own discretion. Furthermore, each has established a parliamentary body that lacks authority and legitimacy. Neither parliament is accessible to the general population or an accurate portrayal of the constituency. The electoral laws in these governments are strategically engineered to disenfranchise certain populations and to empower regime-loyal constituents (Herb in Lucas 2004).

In terms of political influence, both bodies lack any substantial power and are challenged by the king and regime-appointed institutions. In Bahrain, the elected lower house in parliament is challenged by the members of the upper house, who are appointed by King Hamad (Lawson). The fact that the 2002 amendments contradicted promises for increased parliamentary authority (Neithammer) demonstrates the government's reluctance to truly distribute power that will define political outcomes (Lawson). In Jordan, the influence of the parliament is limited by the large executive powers that supersede those of parliament. In fact, the monarch is able to override the parliament in a number of ways, including the ability to appoint and dismiss the Prime Minister, senators, judges and other senior level functionaries (Metz 1991). In addition, the constitutional power of executive order enables the monarch to issue royal decrees in the absence of the House. In this manner, the monarch is not only able to circumvent the legislature, but is encouraged to fully dismiss the parliament should its interests collide with those of the regime (Metz). The overwhelming power of the monarchs in these two countries is demonstrated by the fact that the leaders have been able to nullify the constitution, suspend parliament, and revoke civil liberties.

The parallel weakness of these two parliaments is explored by Shadi Hamid (2010) in relation to the 2010 elections. He notes that

the elections in Bahrain, considered to be successful, boasted a 67% voter turnout rate with the opposition securing nearly 45% of the seats. However, he argues that such elections, though free and fair, are irrelevant to politics within the country. After all, parliamentary legislation is subject to the approval of the appointed upper house, appointed ministers, and the king himself. Hamid (2010) continues to lament such lame parliaments, noting similar emptiness in the Jordanian elections, especially given the boycotting of the only opposition, the Islamic Action Front. However, weak avenues of political participation are common to Arab monarchies, as they provide opportunities for the government to make concessions in the name of political reform that do not threaten the government or significantly alter the power structure (Lucas 2004).

### **Regime Responses to the Arab Spring**

Currently, the durability of these two Arab monarchies is challenged by protests and demonstrations that have spread across the Middle East in the Arab Spring. While these countries share a number of institutional characteristics and enforce similar social pacts, there is a discrepancy between the political climates during this period of unrest. While protests in Bahrain have escalated and demanded international attention, Jordan's political environment has been much tamer and nearly ignored globally. Moreover, protesters in both countries began with demands for change within the structure of the monarchy, without directly challenging the existence of the monarchy itself. However, as time has progressed, protesters in Bahrain have begun to demand a legitimate power shift to a constitutional monarchy (Muasher and Ottaway).

Muasher and Ottaway note the uniqueness of Bahrain's conflict, due to its sectarian nature and the fact that the current demonstrations reiterate complaints and demands unmet during the mid-1990s. The protests in Bahrain have been extensive and continuous since February of 2011 and have not been assuaged by economic redistribution or discouraged by the threat of violence and use of force by the government. The regime has failed to initiate a substantial dialogue with opposition figures in order to negotiate an end the conflict. Instead, it has largely responded with repression and violence, which have been investigated through reports developed by the kingdom. These reports

expose the human rights violations and “collective punishment” of the Shi’a population, demonstrating the conflict’s sectarian nature (Muasher and Ottaway). Between February and March, 2011, over 30 Bahrainis were killed, opposition members were sentenced to unreasonable jail terms, trials were held without any regard for process of law, Shi’a infrastructure was targeted and destroyed, and a number of protesters were placed in prison. In mid-March, the king declared emergency rule and invited Gulf Cooperation Council forces into Bahrain to protect the monarchy. Though Bahraini security forces had been accused of harsh repression and brutal violence, these practices only escalated with the introduction of GCC involvement and continued to target Shi’a populations. Though the summer saw the decrease in active repression and the lifting of the emergency law, security forces remained deployed, police continued to monitor neighborhoods, and GCC forces failed to withdraw (International Crisis Group).

The International Crisis Group argues that the discrimination against Shi’a has exacerbated sectarian tensions and defeated many hopes for political reform, and has created pressure for this politically and economically marginalized population. Fearing a future uprising if tensions are not alleviated and the opposition is further alienated, the International Crisis Group promotes the use of discourse and compromise to achieve stability in Bahrain, with a constitutional monarchy as the ultimate goal (International Crisis Group).

Demonstrations in Jordan have been insignificant compared to those occurring in Syria and Egypt, and the country has been largely ignored in the discourse of revolution and substantial political reform. From January-April of 2011, however, Friday protests became a stable feature of the political calendar and the grievances of the population prompted government responses (Freer and Hamid).

In Jordan, protests began on January 14, 2011 when leftists and tribal leaders held demonstrations demanding the dismissal of Prime Minister Sami al-Rifai’s government and complaining of inflation, high unemployment, and high taxation. The prime minister responded with subsidy packages to assuage the population. The subsidy packages, which would lower prices on staple products and fuel, failed to pacify protesters, and the King complied with popular demand, dissolving the government, appointing a new Prime Minister (Marouf al-

Bakhit), and replacing some members of the cabinet. He also notably retained a number of “old guard” officials in strategic positions. These appointments were indicative of King Abdullah’s commitment to the status quo. Because this government shuffle, a typical response by Jordanian monarchs in times of political tension, did not satisfy the opposition, the government was again dismissed and replaced in October of 2011 (Freer and Hamid).

In addition to power exchanges within the elite, the King has made structural changes to explore the demands of the oppositions, though many remain subject to the monarch. For example, in March of 2011, the King established the National Dialogue Committee, which proposed a number of reforms, including new electoral laws. However, the proposed electoral laws failed to correct the gerrymandering and inequity in representation. Still, even if the election process were to change, the parliament remains a weak channel of political participation and severely lacks influence in the decision-making process in Jordan. Furthermore, though the king founded the royal commission to advise and propose constitutional amendments in accordance with protester’s demands, he appointed the members himself and strategically excluded members of the opposition. Over all, the Jordanian King maintains the reins to the liberalization process, and “has shown little willingness to cede control of [the] process” (Freer and Hamid, 6).

### **Comparisons of Arab Spring Responses**

There are a number of obvious differences between the reactions of each government to unrest of the Arab Spring. However, it is significant to note how each regime began with distribution of financial benefits, a common response of Arab monarchies to popular discontent. Rents derived from foreign aid (Jordan) and oil rents (Bahrain) serve as a lubricant to ease political tensions, though it cannot solve them. While the Bahraini government attempted only financial compensation before using violent and harsh repression measures, the Jordanian monarchy has publically taken a number of steps, at least in rhetoric, towards satisfying some of the demands of his protesters. The Bahraini government largely ignored the legitimacy of its national political crisis and refused inclusive negotiations in favor of repression. While Shaykh Isa enacted limited political reform in the face of similar conflict in the 1990’s, his son failed to offer concessions

to his constituency and instead alienated and abused large portions of his population. This demonstrates a number of failures in terms of survival strategies; the government failed to find an alternative to violence as a response to discontent and failed to prevent any political costs to the regime. Though the Bahraini monarchy utilized the survival strategies enumerated by Lucas (2005), it put them into practice in a very negative and repressive manner that only deepened sectarian cleavages that may pose a threat to the regime. Though the country, like Jordan, was able to exploit sectarian tensions to weaken regime opposition through the 1990's, it seems no longer able to cope with the cleavages it created as a survival technique. These actions, according to the International Crisis Group, are likely to cause a resurgence of the conflict (International Crisis Group). Perhaps the Bahraini regime will continue to neglect the demands of its population, ensuring that they will inevitably resurface in the future.

### **Conclusion**

Bahrain's unwillingness to meet opposition with flexibility and sensitivity may ultimately cost the authoritative regime the sovereignty and stability it desires. Whereas the Jordanian monarchy has demonstrated responsiveness, however limited, to its constituency and retained a degree of flexibility, the Bahraini government has simply refused to comply, using force and repression to preserve the status quo. Stability, however, is unsustainable through coercion and the Bahraini regime must enact negotiations and regain a level of adjustability to accommodate and alleviate the pressures and tensions that have escalated in the past year. Unless the regime is willing to do so, a constitutional monarchy may be even optimistic for Bahrain and the country may face a future charged with conflict.

Moreover, the Jordanian government must further pursue sensitivity, responsiveness, and compliance with its population in order to secure stability and preserve durability. After all, the similarities between the two countries before the Arab Spring are astounding; Bahrain represents a "terrible warning for Jordan" (Salem). King Abdullah must continue to both announce and enact reforms to satisfy his constituency and must resist from deepening cleavages within the population to a point of instability.

The characteristics that have marked these regimes as Middle



Eastern “durable” authoritarian monarchies are waning as each decreases its willingness to comply with the demands of population and enact successful survival strategies. If the two governments continue at this rate, the success of durable authoritarianism may be disproved. In this event, it will be interesting to see if, as with other fallen Arab monarchies, a similarly authoritarian regime will take its place. Or, perhaps, will the demands for democratic values win out? In either case, however, it seems that the conflicts arising from the Arab Spring will have long-lasting consequences and the monarchies will have a long road ahead of them.

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