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From Sheikhs to
Sultanism

*Statecraft and Authority in Saudi
Arabia and the UAE*



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INTRODUCTION

The six Arab Gulf monarchies—Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, and Bahrain¹—always seem to be in the headlines these days. Though best known for their substantial hydrocarbon exports and extraordinary prosperity (with a combined gross domestic product now almost as large as that of Russia or even Texas),² in recent years some of these Gulf states have also emerged as influential ‘middle powers’, willing to mediate international disputes, fund proxy militias, sponsor *coups d’état*, and even embark on full-scale military interventions.³ Moreover, the wealthiest of the monarchies have been very visibly accumulating considerable ‘soft power’ assets to augment their longstanding military ‘hard power’ relations, mostly with the United States, Britain, France, and other perceived security guarantors.⁴ Focusing on big-name sporting, cultural, and educational brands, the widely publicized strategy has effectively intertwined these states and their resources with top tier soccer,⁵ motor racing,⁶ horseracing,⁷ rugby,⁸ some of the world’s most famous museums and galleries,⁹ and several of the leading North American and European research universities.¹⁰

A plethora of policy reports and non-governmental organization investigations have understandably been dedicated to analysing and collecting data on these important trends. In comparison to a few years ago, there now also exists an impressive body of internationally focused ‘Gulf studies’ academic literature to draw upon, much of it published by the leading scholarly presses and journals. Likewise, a growing number of *Khaleeji* (or ‘Gulfi’) commentators and analysts have been making

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significant conceptual and empirical contributions to the topic, often sharing their work in Arabic and English and using social media to reach an increasingly worldwide audience. Some, for example, have contended that the capital-rich Gulf states have been better placed than the rest of the Arab world to benefit from globalizing forces and that this has led to the ‘Gulf’s defining moment in Arab history’.¹¹ Others, meanwhile, have demonstrated that the Gulf monarchies’ contemporary foreign policies represent a new strategic assertiveness,¹² and that beyond their obvious economic clout the Gulf’s major cities have effectively emerged as the new cultural and educational capitals of the Arab world—especially since more traditional centres such as Cairo, Baghdad, and Damascus have fallen by the wayside.¹³

Much has also been written on society and the day-to-day domestic politics of the Gulf states, with a strong and useful emphasis on the ups-and-downs of far-reaching reforms,¹⁴ human rights concerns,¹⁵ policy-making dilemmas,¹⁶ and—as per the succession-guessing art of ‘Riyadhology’—the never-ending supply of internecine palace intrigues.¹⁷ Remarkably, however, relatively little attention has been given to the nitty-gritty of contemporary statecraft and the ways in which underlying authority structures might be changing in these countries, or—most evidently in Saudi Arabia and the UAE—how they may already have changed.

Certainly, notwithstanding formal continuities there appear to have been recent and possibly interconnected shifts deep inside the political systems of these two states, particularly in the wake of the conspicuous strengthening of personal powers in the hands of their *de facto* rulers: Muhammad bin Salman Al-Saud or ‘MBS’, who emerged in 2015 as Saudi Arabia’s defence minister and deputy crown prince and then in 2017 installed himself as crown prince; and, before him, Muhammad bin Zayed Al-Nahyan or ‘MBZ’, who has been crown prince of Abu Dhabi—the UAE’s largest constituent emirate—since 2004, but seems lately to have established effective control over the entire federation. In the past few years, both men—each now included in *Time*’s ‘100 Most Influential People’¹⁸—have regularly been portrayed in the international media as tearing up the old rules underpinning traditional Gulf politics and as advancing something dramatically different. Thus far, this has not only spurred potentially game-changing economic

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master planning, the launch of vast anti-corruption crackdowns, and the tackling of entrenched religious forces; but also the mass arrest of critics, the hiring of foreign praetorian guards, and even the development of cutting-edge cyber-espionage capabilities.

As the wealthiest and most populous of the Gulf monarchies—and, by quite some margin, the two biggest Arab economies¹⁹—fully and systematically understanding such ‘rule changes’ in Saudi Arabia and the UAE is clearly imperative for those studying the region. Furthermore, given both states now indisputably serve as major components of the global economy and are increasingly influential members of international organizations, there is an urgent need to recognize that major ruptures in the structural logic of their regimes could well end up having a direct impact—for better or worse—on policies, economies, and individual livelihoods all around the world.

Saudi Arabia, after all, may soon be overtaken by the US as the world’s top oil exporter,²⁰ but it still has the second largest proven oil reserves, behind only Venezuela.²¹ It also commands the sixth and tenth biggest sovereign wealth funds, with combined assets of over \$800 billion,²² and was recently upgraded to the all-important emerging market status.²³ In addition, the kingdom now has the third highest military expenditure in the world, ahead of Russia, and behind only the US and China;²⁴ and it has lately eclipsed India as the greatest importer of armaments,²⁵ with contracts thought to be sustaining tens or possibly even hundreds of thousands of jobs in the US and other major manufacturing nations.²⁶ In terms of global governance Saudi Arabia is similarly prominent: its accumulated billions of dollars of donations to numerous United Nations-backed initiatives over the years has given it considerable leverage in global policy circles,²⁷ and its longstanding G20 membership has mushroomed in value, especially after the body began to supplant the ineffective G8/G7 following 2008’s ‘Credit Crunch’.²⁸ In fact, in 2020 Saudi Arabia assumed the G20’s rotating presidency, is expected to host its fifteenth annual leaders’ summit, and has taken responsibility for organizing several preparatory meetings between senior representatives of member states and leading non-governmental organizations.²⁹

The UAE, meanwhile, not only has the seventh largest proven oil reserves in the world—ahead of Russia, despite being a fiftieth of its

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size³⁰—and is a top ten importer of armaments,³¹ but also commands even more sovereign wealth than Saudi Arabia. Having bounced back from some particularly stinging investments in the US banking sector,³² its three biggest funds—ranked third, fourteenth, and fifteenth globally—currently manage combined assets of nearly \$1.2 trillion.³³ Still holding sizeable stakes in several of the best known blue chip and high-tech companies, their property portfolios—recently identified as the biggest in the world—now include vast swathes of central London and Paris, and even Manhattan’s iconic Chrysler Building.³⁴ Courtesy of Dubai (the second largest emirate, with a rich history of *entrepôt* activity),³⁵ the UAE further boasts some of the best trade and communications infrastructure, including the world’s ninth busiest port and third busiest airport,³⁶ and ranks as the fourth most visited destination, ahead of New York City.³⁷ Though lacking anything on a par with Saudi Arabia’s G20 status, the UAE has likewise been building up its globalist credentials. It has housed the International Renewable Energy Agency or ‘IRENA’ since its formation in 2009,³⁸ and staged the Interpol General Assembly in 2018.³⁹ Also planning to host the 192 nation-strong World Expo in 2021, under a banner of ‘opportunity, mobility and sustainability’,⁴⁰ it has undeniably emerged as a major international actor.

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1.1 Scholarly Consensus: Lessons Learned

As a first step in trying to understand the nature and impact of the changes taking place in these two increasingly influential states, it seems important to consider what ‘type’ of regimes their rulers (or rather *de facto* rulers) now represent. Indeed, much of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates’ recent conduct—at home as well as abroad—has evidently already caused considerable conceptual confusion. After all, neither country appears to still conform to the behavioural patterns usually associated with the longstanding ‘Gulf monarchies’ grouping—a popular classification mostly based on the six states’ shared cultural, historical, and economic experiences, and perhaps best symbolized by their almost forty-year-old experiment in politico-economic union, the Gulf Cooperation Council (which emphasized in its founding charter the ‘ties of special relations, common characteristics, and similar systems founded on the creed of Islam’).¹

Nonetheless, despite such contemporary ambiguities the foundations do seem to exist on which to build a regime-type framework, with much of the area studies scholarship agreed on the kinds of political systems that had been developing in Saudi Arabia and

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the UAE prior to the emergence and consolidation of their current regimes. Until recently, for example, Saudi Arabia and the UAE's statecraft and authority structures (alongside those of the other four Gulf monarchies) were mostly understood to have been derived from a mode of culturally rooted 'sheikhly rule'. Under these polities, the government and finances of the state were effectively intertwined with the ruling or royal family, but with the *tamimah* (or 'paramount') sheikh almost always conferring with a wide range of advisors, relatives, merchants, and tribal allies.²

In Islamic terms, such 'sheikhly rule' was essentially governance according to the principles of *Shura* ('consultation')³ and reinforced by the *Uli al-Amr* (the 'Verse of Obedience'), which calls on believers to not only obey Allah and the Prophet Muhammad but also 'those in possession of authority among you'.⁴ Meanwhile, in the discourse of Western social sciences, it was often seen as something on a spectrum between 'patrimonialism' (in which governance is dominated by the ruler, his family, and his friends) and 'neo-patrimonialism' (in which modern-looking institutions and rules serve as a veneer for patrimonialism), though with a greater propensity towards consensus-building than usually found in other authoritarian regimes.⁵ Certainly, notwithstanding the often-substantial differences between the Gulf monarchies' respective state formation processes (including varied degrees of religious influence and contrasting levels of British or US involvement), most scholarly works on their evolving political systems have tended to emphasize the same broad features and characteristics of such consultative-patrimonialism or consultative-neo-patrimonialism.⁶

In his essay on the region's rulers in the nineteenth century, for instance, Peter Lienhardt not only described patrimonial-like structures, but also stressed how ruling sheikhs 'held their power in order to do a job for the people...and were not there by any absolute right or by brute force'.⁷ Likewise, though Harold Dickson's post-Second World War thesis on the Arabian Peninsula recognized the authoritarian tendencies of many sheikhs, it nonetheless portrayed them as 'fathers to their people' and acknowledged their general accessibility and reputations for keeping 'open houses'.⁸ Later reflecting on the period, James Onley and Sulayman Khalaf's anthropological

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study, 'Sheikhly Authority in the Pre-Oil Gulf', determined that rulers usually 'included relatives who were potential rivals in their [court] and consulted them before taking major decisions'.⁹ Rosemarie Said Zahlan similarly conceded that the sheikhs may have had 'in principle... absolute power', but that in practice they operated alongside influential consultative councils made up of other family members and 'social and religious notables'. As she described, these councils were '...according to the Islamic principle of *Shura*...the concept of *Shura* was essential to the administration of authority...most decisions of authority were obtained in that manner'.¹⁰

Writing amidst the massive oil booms of the 1970s, which were fuelling rapid economic development and necessitating more sophisticated governance, John Peterson observed the effective fusion between Dickson's open house politics and the newly emerging, more neo-patrimonial structures. Noting how a 'fundamental evolution in political authority' had, at least in part, led to a 'reliance on political institutions in the Western mould', he then described how '*Shura*, the process of consultation with tribal or community notables... has been formally incorporated into most of the area's governments through provisions for consultative or legislative assemblies'.¹¹ Also linking *Shura* to this nascent neo-patrimonialism, but within a more theological context, Gregory Gause later explained how 'Islamic groups throughout the Gulf states point to the Quranic injunction that rulers practise consultation in governance to support their calls for representative institutions that can act as a check on the arbitrary power of the executive'.¹²

Building on Zahlan, Peterson, and Gause (and concurring with much of the earlier scholarship), Michael Herb's 1999 study on dynastic power in the Gulf monarchies underscored how for many years, '*Bedouin* sheikhs had a pressing need to reach consensus... if a decision was to stick, it had to have wide agreement'. However, he also emphasized that the regimes of the day were still ultimately patrimonial, regardless of their consultative institutions, Islamic or otherwise. As he put it, 'the ruling families do not interpret the Quranic injunction upon rulers to consult with their subjects to mean they should share authority in the actual making of decisions, which remains the prerogative of the rulers themselves'.¹³ Drawing the same

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sorts of conclusions as Herb (though slightly more upbeat in tone), in 2006 Giacomo Luciani contended that ‘the practice of the monarchies and emirates in the Gulf is very much consensual...very few decisions are made without extensive consultation’.¹⁴ Similarly connecting Islam to the process, he further noted how those Arab regimes that relied the most on religious legitimation (a category in which he included the Gulf monarchies) were invariably the most likely to engage in consultative practices.¹⁵

Most other works on the Gulf states, including those with a specific focus on contemporary Saudi and Emirati politics, have tended to paint much the same picture. On Saudi Arabia, for example, in 2006 David Long recognized how more modern, formal institutions may have enhanced the Saudi government’s capacity, but also contended that the concepts of *Shura* and *ijma* (‘consensus’) remained at the core of the system.¹⁶ Likewise, Luciani claimed that (apart from the firing of senior government officials or certain foreign policy initiatives) ‘all Saudi kings’ major decisions for the previous twenty-five years had sought consensus from other key figures, and beyond, even if the consultative process was always behind closed doors’.¹⁷ Since then, Mark C. Thompson has illustrated how Saudi Arabia’s ‘pre-existing culture of consultation and discussion...is used [by the leadership] to negotiate within its own constituency and at times others’.¹⁸ In much the same vein, Stig Stenslie has described in his 2011 volume how there was always a ‘*majlis* tradition’ (in this context referring to consultative councils) under King Abdullah bin Abul-Aziz Al-Saud’s reign at almost all levels of government, stretching down from the monarch himself to provincial governors and city mayors. As Stenslie observed, ‘at such meetings, various problems can be discussed...criticising the Saudi government’s policies is officially prohibited, but there is still certain room for expressing political viewpoints...such matters are often discussed as a way of gauging public opinion’.¹⁹

On the UAE, Fatma Al-Sayegh noted in her 2004 study how consultative mechanisms were still central to the country’s decision-making process, asserting that the UAE’s ‘tribal and traditional political culture helped ensure the success’ of new political institutions. She also described how ‘the political order [still] showed signs of willingness to bring others into the policymaking circle’, and how ‘the political

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elites developed these political structures, which kept abreast of social and political consensus at the local level'.²⁰ Since then, Frauke Heard-Bey has explained that there exists in the UAE a 'system of mutual responsibility between the sheikh and his people', and how under this traditional consensus-based system, 'the authority... can be withdrawn if this leader's performance is not up to expectation and he gradually or suddenly loses majority support'.²¹ Using a similar approach, Kristian Ulrichsen has emphasized in his 2016 monograph the continuing importance of such practices, especially in individual emirate-level politics, as well as acknowledging *Shura's* overall role in the UAE's history.²²

Often in tandem with such culturally informed discussions on their modes of 'sheikhly rule', Saudi Arabia and the UAE's politics (alongside those of the other Gulf monarchies) have also been widely understood in terms of their so-called 'rentier' characteristics. This usually means their perceived ability to co-opt or appease citizens with hydrocarbon-financed social contracts or 'ruling bargains'; predicated on cocktails of 'customary privileges', including generous subsidies, housing, welfare, and almost guaranteed public sector employment.²³ Certainly, in much of the literature focusing on the impact and influence of oil and gas exports on Gulf politics, 'rentierism' has frequently been central to scholarly frameworks. In recent years, it has even become a media-friendly shorthand descriptor for the sorts of wealth distribution strategies and dynamics usually associated with such states. In the *Economist*, for example, a 2018 cover feature on the history of the Gulf monarchies concluded they had long been 'rentier states [that] provided cradle-to-grave benefits in return for obedience',²⁴ while reports in the *Financial Times*, the *Washington Post*, and other such outlets have regularly made similar references.²⁵

Rentierism as a concept was first discussed by Karl Marx in the 1860s in the context of a decadent class that benefits from profit-income derived from renting out property rather than actually producing anything itself.²⁶ It was then expanded upon in the early twentieth century to include the notion of entire 'rentier states' that could supply loans to less developed nations and charge them interest.²⁷ However, most of the contemporary rentier-Gulf analysis derives from Hussein Mahdavy's study, first published in 1970. Mahdavy had

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revised the definition of rentierism to specify those states that were in receipt of significant rent from 'foreign individuals or concerns', and had used Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi's oil-rich Iran as a case study (thereby situating rentierism within the wider 'resource curse' literature).²⁸ He thus managed to demonstrate an explicit connection between hydrocarbon rents being paid by foreign companies to governments, and the subsequent formation of new rentier political systems and societies, complete with sizeable and acquiescent 'rentier elite' classes.²⁹ Building on Mahdavy's work (and again drawing on Marx's views on class formation and the idea of a 'resource curse'), in 1982 Theda Skocpol then explored the relationship between 'rentier absolutism' and the new Islamic Republic of Iran,³⁰ and in 1987 Hazem Beblawi sought to apply much the same concept to the Arab world. Reaching similar conclusions to Mahdavy and Skocpol, Beblawi further determined that rentier states were those 'in which only a few are engaged in the generation of the wealth, with the majority being only involved in the distribution or utilisation of it'.³¹ Comparably, Terry Lynn Karl's 1997 study of oil-rich Venezuela not only demonstrated its evolution from an agrarian economy into a 'centralized petro-state', but also emphasized the way in which distributed rents generated 'specific types of social classes' and soon led to political assent from the masses.³²

With hydrocarbon resources as his independent variable and using time-series cross-national data from more than a hundred states, in 2001 Michael Ross attempted to use quantitative methods to 'test the rentier hypothesis' by trying to prove an inverse relationship between oil wealth and democracy in the Middle East (and elsewhere).³³ Though there were soon challenges to his conclusions,³⁴ and Ross himself acknowledged the difficulties of conducting such experiments on regions in which almost all governments could be considered authoritarian, at least two of his findings were soon widely accepted, especially with regard to the Gulf monarchies. Notably, he inferred that a 'taxation effect' did exist in the hydrocarbon-rich states, whereby governments derived such large revenues from oil and gas sales that they became unlikely to tax their population heavily, if at all, and in turn, the public would be less likely to demand representation or accountability from their rulers. Moreover, he illustrated a 'spending

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effect' in these sorts of states, whereby wealthy governments could pay for extensive patronage projects to enhance the reputation of rulers, and—through the generous funding of quasi-civil society bodies—could engender a 'group formation effect' that inevitably weakened the appeal of poorly funded, unlicensed, and genuinely independent civil society organizations. Indeed, he observed that these regimes often relied primarily on largesse rather than repression to block the formation of powerful social capital.³⁵

Following in Mahdavy's footsteps (and later those of Skocpol, Beblawi, Karl, Ross, and others) numerous scholars have since tested rentier theories directly on the Gulf monarchies, with the resulting publications—many of which have seamlessly combined economic, rational choice, and sociological methods—perhaps constituting the greatest contribution thus far from 'Gulf studies' to mainstream political science.³⁶ A unified concept has yet to emerge,³⁷ and some have noted the limitations and inconsistencies of using rentierism as a panoptic device to understand these countries (often by highlighting the still significant roles played by tribalism and familial structures or the existence of ideologically or religiously motivated oppositionists).³⁸ Nonetheless, most of these works have contributed to a broad agreement that the wealthiest of the Gulf monarchies have long been among the best and most interesting specimens of contemporary rentier states.

Specifically on Saudi Arabia, for example, Rayed Krimly's doctoral dissertation on rentierism provided a detailed comparison of the country's state-society relations in the pre-oil and oil eras, while Robert Looney's subsequent studies attempted to assess the viability of the kingdom's various development objectives in the context of its rentier state characteristics.³⁹ More recently, Steffen Hertog's 2010 volume on the history of oil and the state in Saudi Arabia has demonstrated the enormous influence of oil rents on shaping its political system. By 'unpacking the state', as he puts it, he has managed to show how the oil-rich regime was usually able to dominate on an organizational level, but that the 'segmented clientelism' which resulted from the exceptional heterogeneity of the Saudi state and the fragmented nature of its society—with many different types of intermediaries and 'cascades of brokerage'—

often led to unpredictable and non-uniform outcomes for wealth distribution strategies and other such rentier tactics.⁴⁰

Similarly on the UAE, Wanda Krause's study of Emirati civil society noted that 'the UAE represents one of the most comprehensive and enduring examples of a rentier state consisting of a tribal elite'.⁴¹ Analogously, Khalid Al-Mezaini described how 'rentierism continues to enhance the authorities' legitimacy...the UAE government traditionally offered material rewards to those who supported the ruling families... loyal supporters received direct income, land, and privileges'. As he saw it, 'the formula is simple: the more the state increases people's income, the greater is the legitimacy conferred on it by its people'.⁴² Since then, in his 2014 paired comparison of politics in the UAE and Kuwait, Herb has even classed the UAE as an 'extreme rentier state'; a category he defines as one in which citizens have a 'privileged claim on rent revenues' and in which 'a large majority of citizens depend for their pay checks on oil revenues, not on taxes levied on the private sector'.⁴³

1.2 A New Era: An Autocratic-Authoritarian Turn?

Of the two broad consensuses on the type of regimes that, until lately, were ruling over Saudi Arabia and the UAE, only the rentier paradigm still appears to apply (though perhaps just partially) to Muhammad bin Salman Al-Saud and Muhammad bin Zayed Al-Nahyan's contemporary politics. After all, despite rentier theories recently falling out of fashion, with suggestions that they now 'appear more often as a foil than a bedrock theoretical perspective', and even accusations that they 'haunt' the literature,⁴⁴ it does not yet seem as though rentier-like government-to-citizen relations in Saudi Arabia and the UAE have fundamentally changed or that oil rents are no longer a major political factor.

That said, the two countries' long-established wealth distribution systems are undoubtedly under growing pressure (as are those of the other Gulf monarchies), with signs of unprecedented belt-tightening—or rather, attempted belt-tightening—and with clear efforts already underway to reduce citizens' expectations. Spurred by a number of factors including the United States' technology-led 'shale revolution',⁴⁵ a growing international oil glut,⁴⁶ oil prices plunging by

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more than \$70 per barrel from June 2014 to January 2016 (and then falling even further in early 2020),⁴⁷ and exploding domestic energy demands eating into export potential;⁴⁸ Saudi Arabia and the UAE have not only been accelerating existing efforts to diversify their economic bases by promoting non-oil industries and attracting foreign direct investment, but have also been exploring ways of shifting citizens from public to private sector employment. At the same time, they have been weaning them off benefits, subsidies, and other such perks.

In this context, rather than some kind of abrupt dismantling of rentier state structures under the MBS and MBZ regimes or a sudden preparedness to abandon entirely rentier-derived political benefits, there instead appears to be an evolving, adaptive form of rentierism taking shape in these still wealthy countries, at least in terms of economic liberalization. Indeed, beyond witnessing the continued rise of a more proactive ‘new rentier’ class who are seeking fresh sources of rent and pressing for necessary economic reforms,⁴⁹ we may be reaching Matthew Gray’s anticipated ‘late rentierism’, in which rentier states prove willing to adjust their economies to globalizing forces and other external variables while at the same time trying to preserve existing rentier political dynamics.⁵⁰ Similarly, this is what Adam Hanieh calls the ‘internationalization of Gulf capitalism’, in which ruling family members and regime allies emerge as business-savvy global entrepreneurs, rather than just elite level rentier state clients.⁵¹

In contrast to rentierism, however, the ‘sheikhly rule’ (or consultative-neo-patrimonialism) paradigm looks like an increasingly redundant explicator for the contemporary Saudi and UAE regimes. Neither MBS nor MBZ appear to embrace *Shura* or *ijma* in quite the same way as their predecessors, and all serious forms of consensus-based political systems have ostensibly been suspended, or have even collapsed. Most definitely, a marked and rapid intensification of autocratic-authoritarianism in Saudi Arabia and the UAE seems to have occurred. Both countries—for good or ill, depending on one’s perspective—appear further than ever from European-style constitutional monarchy, let alone the sort of democracy or political freedoms espoused by the US Department of State, which claims that ‘promoting freedom and democracy and protecting human rights around the world are central to US foreign policy’.⁵²

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Indeed, what headline data exists on the comparative state of democracy (or rather authoritarianism) in Saudi Arabia and the UAE strongly suggests there have been recent and substantial efforts to tighten up almost all remaining political and civic freedoms. Ten years ago, for instance, the Freedom House organization had awarded Saudi Arabia the scores of 6.5, 6, and 7 for ‘freedom’, ‘political rights’, and ‘civil liberties’ (on a scale of 1–7, with 7 being the worst). The UAE scored 5.5, 5, and 6 respectively.⁵³ Both were poor sets of scores, but nonetheless placed the two states almost on a par with the likes of Kazakhstan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and represented modest improvements on the past, perhaps indicating that things were moving in the right direction, albeit very slowly.⁵⁴ By 2018, however, Saudi Arabia was receiving the lowest possible scores of 7, 7, and 7, while the UAE had slipped substantially to 6.5, 7, and 6.⁵⁵ In fact, according to Freedom House’s metadata, Saudi Arabia is now the ninth least free state in the world (below states such as Sudan and Somalia), while the UAE is the twenty-ninth (below Chad and Iran).⁵⁶

Correspondingly, the Economist Intelligence Unit’s democracy index paints a very similar picture, with Saudi Arabia now ranked 159th in the world (the joint eighth lowest, and below states such as Sudan and Libya), while the UAE ranks 147th (below Djibouti and Russia).⁵⁷ Meanwhile, data from the Varieties of Democracy or ‘V-Dem’ political science programme has demonstrated much the same situation, with Saudi Arabia and the UAE currently receiving some of the lowest scores in the world on their ‘liberal democracy’, ‘deliberative democracy’, and other democracy-related indices. Remarkably, for ‘deliberative democracy’ the UAE now scores even lower than ten years ago.⁵⁸

Beyond such results, it is also notable how MBS himself has been openly praising authoritarianism, recently telling a Silicon Valley gathering ‘there is an advantage to quickness of decision-making, the kind of fast change that absolute monarchy can do in one step that would take a traditional democracy ten steps’.⁵⁹ Even the slickest pro-Saudi and pro-UAE public relations campaigns dismiss the need for any substantive political reforms, and have made sure to lower international expectations as much as possible. Appearing in televised debates, for example, the executive director of a prominent Saudi-linked US think tank has defended Riyadh’s recent autocratic-authoritarian turn:

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'nobody has been able to carry out dramatic change in the developing world successfully under a pluralistic system... you need a benevolent autocracy', he claimed, adding that 'the Saudi government has gotten more authoritarian...hoping to keep the ship together'.⁶⁰ Prior to this, the UAE's minister of state for foreign affairs made it clear in a state-owned newspaper that political parties and a multi-party system, both usually regarded as requirements for successful democratization,⁶¹ are not part of his government's 'end goal'. As he put it, 'this model does not correspond with our culture or historical development... an important component of this model is the organised political party...we have a natural aversion to political parties because in the Arab world these parties have disintegrated into tribes, clans and sectarian groups'.⁶²

Importantly, such an avowedly anti-democratic stance is rather new territory for Saudi Arabia and the UAE, at least in the twenty-first century. Galvanized by the US's ostensibly democracy-exporting 'Operation Iraqi Freedom' in 2003, and with the US's Middle East Partnership Initiative subsequently promoting the need for 'good governance' across the region (as were the World Trade Organization, the G8, the United Nations Development Programme, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development),⁶³ MBS and MBZ's precursors had at least begun to talk the talk and use 'democracy language';⁶⁴ even if they only ever took baby steps, appeared never to have any intention of allowing for 'competitive authoritarianism' (in which oppositionists could emerge),⁶⁵ and, as Lisa Anderson once observed, still had 'government bureaucracies... incompletely distinguished from family patronage networks'.⁶⁶ Indeed, as Fatma Al-Sayegh remarked in 2004, 'most of the Gulf states came under increased US pressure to introduce democracy...no Gulf leader wanted to incur Washington's wrath...[thus] all of the Gulf monarchies introduced some political reforms'.⁶⁷

Furthermore, as suggested by much of the ensuing scholarship, Saudi Arabia and the UAE's rulers (as with the those of the other Gulf states) had likely regarded some small degree of political liberalization as a useful and manageable means of boosting their own long-term resilience. As Gerd Nonneman noted in 2006, 'what is happening is no more than the securing of the autocratic systems in a different

garb, with greater room for the expression of social and some political pluralism but ultimate control remaining in the hands of the rulers, in order to take the domestic and external pressure off regimes'.⁶⁸ Writing a year later, Anoushivaran Ehteshami and Steven Wright similarly proposed that, 'the tendency is for [Gulf] ruling elites, wishing to retain their traditional hold on power over the long term, to liberalize rather than implement substantive reforms challenging the patriarchal power structure'.⁶⁹

Certainly, despite well-grounded concerns that such rationalist approaches have a tendency to over-emphasize autocrats' 'highly calculated, narrowly self-interested ways',⁷⁰ there does seem a *prima facie* case that the pre-MBS and pre-MBZ administrations had indeed been experimenting with quasi-democratic tactics along the lines of Daniel Brumberg's 'liberalized autocracy' model—in which he expected 'a gradualism [with] small steps' and the emergence of 'tactical political openings whose goal was to sustain rather than transform autocracies'.⁷¹ Moreover, their manoeuvres clearly resembled Oliver Schlumberger and Holger Albrecht's authoritarian 'survival strategy', in which new institutions are used as a low-risk mechanism for gauging public opinion on key topics.⁷² Likewise, in both Saudi Arabia and the UAE there appear to have been identifiable elements of the same sorts of pseudo-reformist 'authoritarian upgrading' measures such as those observed by Steven Heydemann, Francesco Cavatorta, and Raymond Hinnebusch elsewhere in the region, at least prior to the 2011 Arab uprisings.⁷³

1.3 Towards a Hypothesis: From Sheikhs to...Sultanism?

Saudi Arabia and the UAE's increasingly unabashed authoritarianism and apparent rentier state continuities notwithstanding, their current political systems do not map easily onto the region's other prominent regime types, despite their comparable Freedom House, Economist Intelligence Unit, or Varieties of Democracy scores. Looking within the Arab world for example, Egypt is evidently some kind of stratocratic military-led state,⁷⁴ and though both Saudi Arabia and the UAE have powerful and well-equipped militaries, there is little to suggest that either MBS or MBZ are out-and-out military strongmen along the

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lines of the Egyptian president (and former minister of defence), Abdel Fattah El-Sisi.⁷⁵ Contemporary Syrian authoritarianism and, as some have suggested, earlier Iraqi authoritarianism,⁷⁶ also at first glance seem a poor comparison: Bashar Al-Assad's regime continues to rely—formally at least—on a *de facto* one party system and its underpinning *Ba'ath* ('renaissance') Arab nationalist ideology.⁷⁷ In contrast, MBS and MBZ have maintained a prohibition on the formation of political parties, and like their predecessors have shied conspicuously away from ideological platforms, and especially anything that might antagonize their Western allies.⁷⁸

Though the Islamic Republic of Iran might seem to overlap better with Saudi Arabia and the UAE given the ostensible centrality of conservative Islam to their comparably authoritarian regimes,⁷⁹ there are again few substantive parallels. Empowered by the constitutionally legitimated Shia theory of *Vilayat-e Faqih* ('Guardianship of the Jurist'),⁸⁰ Supreme Leader Ali Hosseini Khamenei and the ayatollah-led Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution continue to dominate Iran.⁸¹ In Saudi Arabia, however, it is widely accepted that the Sunni religious establishment (historically underpinned by the unitarian 'Wahhabi' doctrine of Muhammad bin Abd Al-Wahhab)⁸² has been a junior partner to the ruling family for many years. Meanwhile in the UAE there have never really been any theocratic or hierocratic tendencies; Abu Dhabi and Dubai's interrelated elites have historically followed the moderate Maliki school of Islam.⁸³ Writing on Saudi Arabia in 2007, Madawi Al-Rasheed described the state as being 'politically secular and socially religious', on the basis that religious officials had long since relinquished political authority.⁸⁴ Also in 2007, Hertog reflected on how 'the Saudi [clerics]...were an important part of the ruling elite but, despite popular myths, consistently deferred to royal prerogative, as was indeed their ideology',⁸⁵ and in 2009 Muhammad Al-Atawneh noted the extent to which 'Saudi politics is not theocratic, because of the...secondary role that Wahhabi clergy play in politics and governance'.⁸⁶ More recently Khaled Abou El-Fadl has observed how 'despite the humility of the royal title [with King Fahd bin Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud and his successors known as the 'Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques']⁸⁷ the Saudi monarchy has a long history of exploiting the podium of the Great Mosque in Mecca by using its imams to praise,

sanctify and defend the rulers and their actions'.⁸⁸ Correspondingly, Eman Alhusein has suggested that 'over time... Saudis became used to the idea that the state was in charge of the politics and the religious establishment took care of the culture, society, and religion',⁸⁹ whilst Ulrichsen and Annelle Sheline have argued that 'at key junctures where it could have acted otherwise, the leadership... has made decisions that maintained their political supremacy over and against any contestation from religious elites or individual clerics'.⁹⁰ Likewise on the UAE, Kenneth Christie has demonstrated how its rulers had long 'embraced secular economic globalisation... [resulting] in a dilution of any Islamic tendencies in favour of economic success'.⁹¹ Since then, of course, both MBS and MBZ have also clearly been taking an extremely forceful stance against those who have pushed for any kind of organized 'political Islam'.⁹²

So, if the contemporary Saudi and UAE regimes are so manifestly different to their predecessors, and remain distinct from those of other nearby authoritarian states, then what have they become, or what are they in the process of becoming? Peering past the various pejorative, xenophobic, or simply anachronistic descriptors that have been bandied around (such as 'potentates', 'dictatorships', 'tyrannies', 'despotic states', or 'medieval chieftainates'), in some senses they could more plausibly be deemed 'absolute monarchies'.⁹³ After all, on top of MBS's Silicon Valley statements, he used his April 2018 interviews with the *Atlantic* and *Time* to claim that Saudi Arabia is 'a large absolute monarchy' and—in the context of Saudi–US relations and France's 1778 Treaty of Alliance—that 'absolute monarchy is not a threat to any country... if it's not about absolute monarchy, you will not have the United States of America today'.⁹⁴ Nonetheless, beyond any superficial similarities, neither MBS nor MBZ seem to have much in common with historic, archetypal examples of absolutism such as France's King Louis XIV or Russia's Tsar Nicholas II,⁹⁵ and as with their forebears, neither has laid claim to Bourbon or Romanov-style divine authority.⁹⁶ Moreover, as yet neither has even claimed the title of monarch, with both *de facto* rulers remaining constitutionally below their respective *de jure* heads of state: Salman bin Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud (MBS's father, the King of Saudi Arabia) and Khalifa bin Zayed Al-Nahyan (MBZ's older half-brother, the Emir of Abu Dhabi and President of the UAE).

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As such, it might be more fitting to think of the current regimes as some sorts of post-traditional, highly personalistic autocracies, especially given the tenor of MBS and MBZ-related commentary in the international media and the leading policy-oriented journals. The BBC's security correspondent, for example, has declared that 'in many respects MBS *is* Saudi Arabia'.⁹⁷ Bloomberg's reporters have called him Saudi Arabia's 'Mr. Everything',⁹⁸ and recent articles in *Foreign Affairs* have proposed that MBS is 'already the most powerful figure in contemporary Saudi history, having side-lined other members of the ruling family... [and] consolidated his position within the ruling family to such a degree that he [is] free of the constraints imposed by the collective leadership model that characterised the Saudi regime in the past'.⁹⁹ Similarly, the *New York Times* has claimed that the 'young, brash and eager [MBS] has systematically dismantled the system of consensus that kept the peace for decades',¹⁰⁰ whilst a Harvard Belfer Center report has noted that 'his uncles ruled the kingdom through consultation and consensus among the senior sons after the death of their father [but] this crown prince is determined to act unilaterally and with disregard for tradition'.¹⁰¹ A widely read *Foreign Policy* essay has argued that MBS has 'concentrated power to a degree unprecedented in modern Saudi history', that 'his changes to the kingdom's balance of power are transforming the nature of the Saudi state', and that while 'the Saudi government has never been a one-man show... decisions taken by [MBS]... appear to be moving the kingdom in that direction'.¹⁰² Meanwhile, the *Financial Times* has proclaimed MBZ the 'man driving change' and the 'chief executive' of the UAE.¹⁰³ The *New York Times* has suggested he is not only '...*de facto* ruler of the UAE', but is now 'arguably the most powerful leader in the Arab world' and 'one of the most powerful men on Earth',¹⁰⁴ whilst the Associated Press has flagged his 'tremendous influence both home and abroad',¹⁰⁵ and Bloomberg's reporters have described how the UAE's 'military power rises in the Middle East, courtesy of one man [MBZ]'.¹⁰⁶ Going further, a detailed investigation published in the German media has contended that he is 'the real ruler' of the 'autocratically-led UAE' on the basis of having 'perpetually consolidated his power by assuming... important economic and political positions and positioning confidantes and allies in key committees'.¹⁰⁷

Importantly, much of the recent coverage has also emphasized the erratic (and sometimes mistake-prone) nature of MBS and MBZ's respective rules. On MBS, for example, it was widely reported that a memorandum circulated by Germany's Federal Intelligence Service had warned there was a 'latent danger that...he could overreach',¹⁰⁸ while Samer Shehata has cautioned he 'is erratic, irrational and immature'.¹⁰⁹ Likewise, Thomas Lippman has labelled him 'impetuous',¹¹⁰ and Gregory Gause has predicted from his impulsive behaviour that 'the world should expect more surprises'.¹¹¹ More forcefully, the *Washington Post's* correspondents have slammed MBS for 'one mistake after another';¹¹² the *Financial Times* has argued he is 'doing too much, too fast' and is turning Saudi Arabia into 'an unpredictable, aggressive kingdom';¹¹³ and US Senator Marco Rubio has even claimed 'he's gone full gangster...reckless, ruthless'.¹¹⁴ Similarly on MBZ, *Time* has noted his 'risky gambles...a penchant for risk taking',¹¹⁵ and former US officials and diplomats have reportedly labelled him 'a dangerous rogue actor...[who] has waded too deep into conflicts whose outcomes he cannot control'.¹¹⁶ Indeed, Peter Salisbury has explained how his 'very small [ruling] group often makes policy choices that are tactical and reactive, and such *ad hoc* decision-making can lead to overcorrection and missed opportunities';¹¹⁷ while Andreas Krieg has described his apparent 'paranoia' and an 'obsession with regime security, surveillance, and control'.¹¹⁸

Given this level of high profile discourse on MBS and MBZ's personalistic and arbitrary tendencies, it seems reasonable to explore the extent to which some sort of ultra-autocratic, twenty-first-century strain of 'sultanism' may have emerged (or be in the process of emerging) in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. After all, beyond its most literal meanings and historical connotations,¹¹⁹ sultanism's characteristic working definitions in modern political science (the majority still derived from Max Weber's *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* and *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*) not only describe an extreme form of autocracy distinct from regular patrimonialism or neo-patrimonialism, but make sure to emphasize how sultanistic rulers are effectively 'personal chiefs' (often flanked by retainers); how they typically treat the principal arms of the state as their 'personal instruments'; and—more generally—how

they are able to act arbitrarily beyond any traditional constraints.¹²⁰ Though the concept of sultanism (as with rentierism) has fallen by the wayside in Middle Eastern area studies and is now frequently branded as ‘orientalist’,¹²¹ its extensive successful application to several contemporary and recent regimes outside the Arab and Islamic worlds suggests a continuing relevance to comparative political theory, regardless of its controversial intellectual roots.¹²²

Also significant, especially as it appears to reinforce the notion that MBS and MBZ’s regimes are now behaving quite differently to those of the other Gulf monarchies, there are few signs that any of their neighbours are following the same sultanistic path. Regarding Oman, for instance (which is the only Gulf state officially titled a ‘sultanate’),¹²³ it would be hard to make the case that its recently deceased ruler, Qaboos bin Said Al-Said, actually ruled in a sultanistic manner, at least by the end of his lengthy reign. Indeed, notwithstanding stunted political reforms and, as Marc Valeri has emphasized, occasional bouts of repression,¹²⁴ there is little to suggest Qaboos bin Said’s Oman was anything other than neo-patrimonial. US diplomatic correspondence, for example, earlier described how a cabal of powerful merchant families had long been dominating affairs,¹²⁵ while the country’s Economist Intelligence Unit democracy index ranking has remained steadily higher than Saudi Arabia and the UAE’s, and its Freedom House scores for ‘political rights’ have modestly improved (particularly in contrast to Saudi Arabia and the UAE’s declines).¹²⁶ Succeeding in January 2020,¹²⁷ Qaboos bin Said’s cousin and former minister of heritage and culture, Haitham bin Tariq Al-Said,¹²⁸ could of course still take Oman in a different direction, but as it stands this seems extremely unlikely. Appointed during a live-broadcasted ‘intricate process’ (in which Oman’s Royal Family Council and Defence Council read aloud a letter from Qaboos bin Said),¹²⁹ Haitham bin Tariq already appears to have committed to business as usual and—after granting powerful portfolios to presumed rivals—possibly even ruling by coalition.¹³⁰ Moreover, his government has moved fast to ratify a number of previously unsigned international rights conventions, perhaps hinting that an even softer brand of Omani authoritarianism lies ahead.¹³¹

Similarly when it comes to Qatar, which is often considered one of the most autocratic and authoritarian of the Gulf states, it feels

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difficult to claim that its young emir, Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, is much more than the figurehead of a dynastic neo-patrimonial system. Following the unexpected abdication in June 2013 of his father, Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, there have been persistent claims that the latter still plays an important role behind the scenes,¹³² especially given that the handover took place during a time of significant regional tensions. Just days before, in fact, a Saudi and Emirati-backed Egyptian ‘grassroots protest movement’ had succeeded in paving the way for a military *coup d’état* and the ousting of the Muslim Brotherhood’s Qatar-backed president.¹³³ As Simon Henderson has noted, ‘on paper, [the real ruler of Qatar] is Emir Tamim... but the leaderships of Saudi Arabia and the UAE... think it is actually Sheikh Hamad, now known as the “father-emir”, who is still pulling the strings’.¹³⁴ Regardless of the exact situation at the top, the continuing political presence of other very influential figures (including former prime minister Hamad bin Jassim Al-Thani and members of the powerful Al-Attiyah family) also suggests Tamim’s regime falls short of exhibiting the kinds of highly personalistic characteristics one would associate with sultanism.¹³⁵ Moreover, though constitutionally mandated political reforms have failed to materialize under Tamim and there have been sporadic instances of repression,¹³⁶ Qatar’s Freedom House scores for ‘political rights’—much like Oman’s—have actually improved, as has its Economist Intelligence Unit ranking,¹³⁷ and in May 2018 it also finally ratified a number of important international rights conventions.¹³⁸

As for Kuwait and Bahrain, neither seem to be on anything close to Saudi Arabia and the UAE’s trajectory. Partly due to their more substantial histories of pre-oil merchant activity and much earlier socio-economic development, both countries have long been regarded as having more vibrant political cultures than their neighbours. Over the years, this has translated into periodic stints of relatively robust parliamentary activity, including no-confidence votes against ministers¹³⁹ (though not quite ruler side-lining ‘parliamentarism’ or ‘parliamentary monarchy’),¹⁴⁰ and has led to a greater number of checks and balances on their respective rulers than in the other Gulf states.¹⁴¹

In Kuwait’s case, ten years ago its Freedom House scores were 4,4, and 4. Though they have since slipped to 5, 5, and 5, the state has

held onto its 'partly free' classification and is still considered one of the most politically liberal Arab states, behind only Tunisia, Lebanon, and Jordan. Meanwhile, the Economist Intelligence Unit now ranks Kuwait some thirty-one places above the UAE and forty-three places above Saudi Arabia.¹⁴² Importantly, the ruling Al-Sabah family remains highly fragmented, with its nonagenarian emir, Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, appearing unable to prevent numerous inter-dynastic struggles from playing out in public—most dramatically between Nasser bin Muhammad Al-Sabah, a former prime minister, and Ahmad Al-Fahad Al-Sabah, a former OPEC Secretary-General and minister of oil.¹⁴³ Moreover, any notion that the emir's seventy-one-year-old son Nasser bin Sabah Al-Sabah might turn into 'Kuwait's MBS' has been largely dismissed by scholars. As Kristin Smith Diwan observes, '[Nasser bin Sabah] has not heretofore demonstrated the political guile and boldness to take on Kuwait's parliamentary system and diverse constituencies...[and] is likely to adopt a more consensual approach to governance, and one less apt to shake up Kuwait's carefully balanced, if sclerotic, system'.¹⁴⁴ Indeed, following Nasser bin Sabah's 2017 joint appointment as minister of defence and first deputy prime minister, he reportedly began to encounter 'stiff resistance' from MPs, many of whom openly condemned draft legislation intended to facilitate his revived 'Silk City' economic free zone project on the basis it was a 'dangerous' attempt to 'create a state within a state'.¹⁴⁵ Remarkably, in November 2019 he was even removed from his positions by his father following a government shake-up and—as the state-backed media described it—his 'feuding in public and trading accusations' with the minister of the interior.¹⁴⁶

Bahrain admittedly now appears on a slipperier slope than Kuwait, having lost its Freedom House 'partly free' status and having fallen below even the UAE in the Economist Intelligence Unit rankings.¹⁴⁷ However, much of the increase in authoritarianism seems to have been driven by collective regime survival interests rather than any would-be sultan's arbitrary power grab. After all, the ramping up of repression and curtailment of freedoms in the wake of 2011's mass protests seem best interpreted as harsh but logical responses to what was seen at the time as being part of a region-wide chain reaction that might even topple the government.¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, there are widely perceived to

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be major, unresolved divisions within the Al-Khalifa family, which also appear at odds with any emerging sultanism, or even autocratic rule. Indeed, the regime's repeated requests for external assistance during its hours of need (which led to Saudi and UAE 'boots on the ground' in 2011 and more recently a \$10 billion fiscal aid package),¹⁴⁹ has led to the formation of a complicated power-balancing dynamic. King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa and his eldest son, Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa, are considered the relative 'moderates'; while the 'hard-line' long-serving prime minister, Khalifa bin Salman Al-Khalifa, and the commander-in-chief of the army, Khalifa bin Ahmad Al-Khalifa,¹⁵⁰ are thought to be closer to Riyadh and Abu Dhabi.¹⁵¹ That said, in recent months there have been suggestions that Nasser bin Hamad Al-Khalifa, the eldest son of King Hamad's second wife, may be one to watch.¹⁵² Married to one of the ruler of Dubai's daughters in 2009 and then appointed commander of the Bahraini Royal Guard in 2011 at just twenty-four years old,¹⁵³ he is also a renowned endurance rider and understood to have fought on the frontlines in Yemen.¹⁵⁴ Recently installed as Bahrain's national security advisor (a newly developed post),¹⁵⁵ he has since been described as a 'rising star'; a 'young man who has been on the rise and much in the news'; and as a 'new conduit for generational ambition'. He is also said to have 'instincts [that] are more populist than [the crown prince's]'.¹⁵⁶

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2.1 Research Tasks and Hypothesis-Testing: A Systematic Study

Three major research tasks appear necessary to advance a suitably scientific, evidence-based interpretation of the apparent changes in statecraft and authority structures in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, and—as per the framework—to test robustly the hypothesis that Muhammad bin Salman Al-Saud and Muhammad bin Zayed Al-Nahyan have effectively supplanted the ‘sheikhly rule’ (or consultative-neo-patrimonialism) of their predecessors with something more autocratic, more personalistic, and perhaps even analytically distinct.

Firstly, given the proposed conceptual centrality of sultanism to comprehending MBS and MBZ’s regimes—and considering its rather dated ‘original’ definitions—there is a pressing need to develop a more state-of-the-art understanding of the term [Chapter Three]. This will help navigate the presently vast, messy, and often confusing nomenclature of supposedly derivate contemporary sultanisms, including ‘neo-sultanism’, ‘sultanistic neopatrimonialism’, ‘authoritarian sultanism’, and numerous other overlapping references.¹ In turn, this will make it a little easier to situate Saudi Arabia and the UAE’s current polities within a more constructive international typology of autocratic-authoritarianism.

Secondly, beyond determining suitable starting points for research into MBS and MBZ’s regimes, a fuller comprehension of the *de facto*

rulers' exact 'routes to power' is evidently required [Chapter Four]. Specifically, a detailed chronology of their respective ascents is essential, as is the identification of pre-existing kinship and professional networks. So too is the development of an awareness of surrounding political and economic factors, and the gathering of any other pertinent biographic (or even psychobiographic)² details that may shed light on their remarkable career trajectories and significant accumulation of personal—and perhaps sultanistic—powers.

Thirdly, and most substantively, an investigation must be made into MBS and MBZ's modes of governance, and the extent to which they now differ from those of their forebears [Chapters Five to Eight]. Borrowing from Johannes Gerschewski's empirically grounded thesis on the 'pillars' usually underpinning the stability of autocratic regimes—which he identifies as legitimation, co-option, and repression³—this seems best achieved by systematically assessing the two men's approaches to establishing control, gaining consent, and—where necessary—enforcing their authority. In particular, a thorough examination is needed of what appear to have been MBS and MBZ's highest priorities: the management of close relatives and other elites; the administration of economic affairs (especially in the context of adaptive rentier state strategies and evolving economic models); and the supervision of political and judicial institutions, the media, and security organizations. In parallel, but arguably more complex, attention should also be focussed on their handling of a range of key ideological and religious issues, including those seen as potentially threatening to regime security or capable of undermining key economic objectives.

2.2 Methodological Challenges: Navigating the Fields of Power

Perhaps unsurprisingly given Saudi Arabia and the UAE's assumed blend of autocratic-authoritarianism, several serious methodological challenges arise from attempting to carry out these research tasks. Certainly, the data gathering environment in these states seems to reflect what Pierre Bourdieu would call the 'structures of their fields of power',⁴ and on first inspection it appears very hard to achieve the depth of empirical investigation needed to satisfy academia's calls for

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the greater accumulation of knowledge in comparative politics.⁵ For scholars working on authoritarianism in other, less prosperous parts of the world, some of the difficulties involved in researching MBS and MBZ's regimes will likely feel familiar and very much part-and-parcel of the terrain. In other instances, however, the obstacles are clearly more specific to these extremely wealthy and globally integrated autocracies. As Shireen Al-Adeimi has put it (with reference to studying MBS), 'if this was an African warlord from a poor country, would we even be having this conversation?'⁶

Most obviously, when it comes to published or 'secondary data' from official sources, there are high levels of opacity and bureaucratic abstruseness in Saudi Arabia and the UAE—as one would expect to find in non-democratic states—and the situation does not seem to be improving.⁷ According to the open-source Global Open Data Index, which measures the availability and quality of government data, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are currently ranked 103rd and 98th in the world respectively, placing them both below the likes of China and Togo, and far behind all the other Gulf states.⁸ Similarly, the Data Quality Index, published by the London-based World Economics, ranks Saudi Arabia and the UAE very poorly, placing them barely above Rwanda, and substantially below Qatar and Bahrain.⁹ Though the World Wide Web Foundation's Statistical Open Barometer is a little more limited in its focus, and lacks information on the UAE, it nonetheless strongly suggests that government data in Saudi Arabia is rarely kept up-to-date and is often difficult to find.¹⁰

In this context there have inevitably been episodes in which researchers trying to work with official Saudi or UAE material on matters of urgent national or international interest have encountered significant inconsistencies (or complete absences) in the data. In 2014, for example, just as oil prices began their freefall, one of the most important data points for understanding the functioning of the two states was their so-called 'breakeven price'. This was not only needed by economists to determine their fiscal resilience, but also by political scientists to gauge their ability to sustain rentier-like structures, and therefore their likely political stability. The IMF's analysts, extrapolating from official data, initially suggested alarmingly high breakeven prices of \$106 per barrel for Saudi Arabia and \$91 for

the UAE, some \$75 and \$60 above the subsequent oil price lows.¹¹ However, the analysts soon realized they had been significantly off the mark. Not only did the IMF revise its projections sharply downwards, but an array of figures published by other organizations further fuelled the confusion.¹² Deutsche Bank, for example, calculated Saudi Arabia's price at \$95, while Bank of America Merrill Lynch put it at only \$85.¹³ Meanwhile, the Economist Intelligence Unit had the UAE's price at \$79, and Deutsche Bank pegged it at a much more comfortable \$70—some \$21 lower than the IMF's estimate.¹⁴

Since then even bigger question marks have been raised over official data on the Saudi Arabian National Oil Company (more commonly known as Saudi Aramco),¹⁵ especially in the wake of MBS's January 2016 announcement that shares in the company would be offered publicly in order to boost sovereign wealth.¹⁶ As Saudi Aramco is the kingdom's main interface with the global economy, and arguably also the cornerstone of its entire rentier state, analysts were soon stunned by the wild disparities in the little information that was available and the extreme difficulties they faced in trying to generate meaningful data of their own. To begin with, government representatives kept insisting that the company's assets and concessions justified a \$2–2.5 trillion valuation¹⁷—figures that were immediately challenged and in some cases even met with 'shock and laughter'.¹⁸ Oil industry consultants Wood Mackenzie, for example, counter-claimed that Saudi Aramco was only worth about \$400 billion,¹⁹ while PointState Capital's Zachary Schreiber—who had correctly predicted the oil price crash in 2014—revealed he was shorting the Saudi riyal on the basis that the Saudi Aramco 'golden goose' would be insufficient to meet the kingdom's deficits and its economy would be 'structurally insolvent in two or three years'.²⁰

Though an April 2018 leak of Saudi Aramco's financial data (and an eventual official disclosure a year later) led to much better independent estimates of \$1.2 and then \$1.1 trillion,²¹ in many ways the damage had already been done. Despite belated confirmations that the company was in fact much more valuable than the likes of Apple, Microsoft, and Amazon,²² the Saudi government's perceived opacity on such an important matter was understood to have strongly dissuaded the investor community. Indeed, in summer 2018 it was revealed a private

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decision had already been taken to suspend the offering for at least another year.²³ As Bloomberg's correspondents put it, Saudi Aramco had become a 'zombie' offering due to 'a combination of hubris on the valuation, an overambitious timetable, and indifference—if not derision—from global investors'.²⁴

In the UAE's case, poor quality official data may not have yet led to anything quite as harmful as the Saudi Aramco debacle, but it has certainly generated a fair amount of international criticism. In 2008, for example, a largely unnecessary scandal erupted over data on the UAE's foreign aid programme, effectively detracting from the state's intended philanthropic (or soft power) objectives.²⁵ Lacking a central organization compiling the donations of the country's various aid donating organs, including those at the individual emirate level, the UAE's claim that it had been spending 3.6 per cent of GDP on foreign aid was met with disbelief and disparaged by various United Nations representatives. While the figure was obviously highly inaccurate at more than five times the UN's 0.7 per cent global target,²⁶ a new federal Office of the Co-ordination of Foreign Aid—established in 2009—has consistently reported UAE foreign aid at over 1 per cent of GDP,²⁷ and therefore not only above the UN's target but also well above the likes of Norway and Denmark, and almost on a par with Sweden.²⁸

More recently, and especially since the 2014 oil price crash, the UAE has also been repeatedly censured for the lack of reliable data on the economic health of Dubai, which remains its biggest trade and tourism hub. With conflicting reports circulating of substantial house price drops and expatriate professionals leaving in their droves,²⁹ fears of a repeat of 2009's global Credit Crunch-induced 'Dubai crash' have understandably been mounting, and investors are hungry for more reassuring or at least more accurate information.³⁰ Remarkably, however, in March 2019 Bloomberg confirmed that the UAE 'still hasn't reported how [Dubai's] GDP performed since 2017... also missing are other figures considered basic elsewhere, ranging from retail and auto sales to industrial production'. As Tarek Fadlallah, chief executive officer of the Middle East unit of Nomura Asset Management complained, 'the reliance on anecdotal evidence in Dubai means the market is more susceptible to gossip and distortions as information is passed down through "Chinese whispers"'.³¹

Beyond official sources, national non-governmental and civil society organizations—including trade unions and professional associations—also seem to have struggled to produce consistent and timely data. Moreover, due to a mix of heavy co-optation (sometimes involving ruling family patronage), and repression (comprising tight controls and often closure), in almost no circumstances do they appear to have been able to produce data that has significantly challenged established government narratives.³² Indeed, the Varieties of Democracy programme's scores for civil society participatory environments currently place Saudi Arabia on a par with North Korea and China, while the UAE is barely ahead of Somalia and well behind Arab states like Jordan and Libya.³³ Similarly, national and local media organizations—most of which are either state-owned or very heavily monitored by the authorities—rarely produce their own data, especially on contentious issues,³⁴ and thus seem to perform few functions of the 'fourth estate'.³⁵ In fact, according to the 2019 World Press Freedom Index, published by Reporters Without Borders, Saudi Arabia's level of press freedom is considered one of the absolute worst in the world; it ranks at 172nd, after falling three places from the previous year. Although the UAE's level is a little better, it is also on a downwards trajectory, ranking 133rd after falling five places from the previous year.³⁶

While Saudi Arabia and the UAE's national universities have tended to be teaching-focused and primarily geared towards training rentier state-style public sector employees,³⁷ those that do have research or public policy functions look just as constrained as non-governmental organizations and the media. There are credible reports describing a culture of self-censorship and, when necessary, direct censorship. As a recent visiting scholar to the UAE's national university has put it, 'censorship is regularly applied to academics and scholarly events',³⁸ whilst a widely-read *Foreign Policy* essay has noted that there exists a 'depressing pattern that has seen the UAE authorities take closer control of domestic academic institutions...the UAE currently is a deeply inimical place for the values that universities are supposed to uphold'.³⁹ Meanwhile in Saudi Arabia, the Scholars at Risk Academic Freedom Monitoring Project has recorded numerous faculty arrests. Some have been charged with offences such as 'undermining state policies' and 'providing false information about Saudi Arabia to

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international organizations and media'.⁴⁰ In March 2019, a lecturer at one of the country's biggest universities was reportedly even detained at a panel event at the Riyadh Book Fair, after discussing his human rights work.⁴¹

Some of the foreign branch campus universities operating in the UAE, the most prominent of which are Abu Dhabi government funded,⁴² have suffered visa denial issues for incoming faculty.⁴³ As partially co-opted foreign institutions and partially endogenous political creations, they have also largely shied away from researching potentially sensitive topics—with New York University's Abu Dhabi campus described by the *Chronicle of Higher Education* as a 'careful guest in a foreign land' and *Le Monde* voicing 'suspicions of censorship' with regard to La Sorbonne Abu Dhabi.⁴⁴ However, they still appear to enjoy a little leeway, including unfettered internet access.⁴⁵ Likewise, the high-profile King Abdullah University of Science and Technology in Saudi Arabia—which was US-designed and has entered into a \$50 million 'Academic Excellence Alliance' with Imperial College London⁴⁶—seems to have been mostly left to its own devices. These relative freedoms perhaps indicate the ongoing usefulness of such branch campuses as soft power assets,⁴⁷ and a general expectation that their senior, often expatriate administrators will do their best to limit any potentially controversial Saudi or UAE-related data production.

Branches of foreign NGOs and foreign government-organized organizations, especially those that have focused on in-country data gathering, have, however, enjoyed much less tolerance than the foreign universities. Saudi Arabia maintains a near total ban on such bodies, and in 2012 the UAE shut down the offices of organizations such as the United States' National Democratic Institute and RAND Research Institute, Germany's Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, and the commercially run Gallup Polling Center. Though full explanations for the closures were never provided, it later emerged that these entities had been accused of 'international interference' and of stoking the 2011 Arab uprisings, especially in Egypt.⁴⁸

A less obvious problem—or at least potential problem—with regard to secondary data collection on Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and one that does not really seem to apply to the study of other, poorer authoritarian states around the world, has been the apparent

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capacity of their regimes to subtly shape and steer external research agendas. Long before the foreign university branch campus strategy, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and other Gulf monarchies' respective ruling families—and in some cases government-backed intermediaries or foundations—were frequently the greatest international donors to the West's premier research institutions. Their substantial patronage has often been linked to constituent departments, institutes, centres, programmes, or chairs that have had a specific academic focus on the Gulf states, Middle Eastern politics, Islamic studies, or other such relevant topics.⁴⁹

According to a 2018 dataset published by the US Department of Education's Foreign Gifts and Contracts Report, over the preceding six years the Gulf states' continued to account for nearly a quarter of all foreign payments to US universities. Saudi Arabia provided \$581 million, including \$75.2 million to George Washington University and \$30.6 million to Harvard University. The UAE supplied \$213 million, including \$80.7 million to New York University.⁵⁰ Saudi Arabia and the UAE have also been among the biggest benefactors to the US's leading think tanks, with a 2014 *New York Times* investigation revealing that they had recently gifted millions of dollars to influential organizations including: the World Resource Institute, the Stimson Center, the Middle East Institute, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the Brookings Institution, and the Atlantic Council.⁵¹ While no up-to-date figures exist for British universities or research institutions, data assembled for the period 1984 to 2008 indicates that at least \$90.8 million (and possibly as much as \$293.4 million)⁵² was donated by Gulf states, including at least \$53.3 million from Saudi Arabia and at least \$22.9 million from the UAE.⁵³

Such substantial funding has naturally led to significant media attention and is increasingly generating debate among scholars and politicians. The *New York Times*, for example, has quoted philosopher Sally Haslanger as stating that Saudi funding for the Massachusetts Institute for Technology confers 'symbolic capital on the Saudi regime', and that 'MIT's name, integrity, credibility and scientific excellence have power...and we have used it to burnish the reputation of Muhammad bin Salman'.⁵⁴ In an interview with *Inside Higher Ed*, Zachary Lockman has similarly noted that 'the Saudis have seen such donations as a way

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to acquire goodwill, legitimacy and support in US academia (and beyond)... of course donors want to ensure that the people filling these chairs and running these programs will be sympathetic to the policies of these countries' regimes, though they cannot always make that happen'.⁵⁵ Likewise, Kristian Ulrichsen has told the *Financial Times* that 'it's not easy to track [the Gulf funding]...but if centres want to safeguard funding streams, then they might either commission research that falls within a specific remit and perhaps not commission research that doesn't, or individual academics might feel they don't wish to cross certain lines in case the funding is jeopardised'.⁵⁶

Going further, Anthony Glees has claimed in the *Telegraph* that, 'by donating to [British] higher education institutions, Arab and Islamic states are able to dictate a research agenda and influence public opinion in a way which we would not allow for our political parties'. A number of British MPs have even called for a more thorough investigation into the matter. The chairman of the Education Select Committee, for example, recently told universities that they needed to 'think very carefully' about where they accepted money from and stated '[he would] rather they looked at democratic countries [for funding] as opposed to dictatorships or countries with questionable human rights records'. A former minister also stated that '[universities] should not be taking donations from people who are seeking to influence their direction, or hold views inconsistent with promoting tolerance and values of mutual respect and democracy'.⁵⁷

Though there is as yet little hard evidence to fully back these stances and demonstrate the real impact of such funding patterns on Gulf-related research and data production (beyond fairly conspicuous 'gatekeeper' and institutional-level biases), the *New York Times* has described how 'US universities' collaborations with the Saudis are akin to consulting, but academics do not call it that, unless it is work done on the side; they call it academic research'.⁵⁸ In the context of Gulf support for think tanks, its correspondents have further noted that 'the money is increasingly transforming the once-staid think-tank world into a muscular arm of foreign governments' lobbying...it has set off troubling questions about intellectual freedom: some scholars say they have been pressured to reach conclusions friendly to the government financing the research'.⁵⁹

Meanwhile in the British context, the BBC reported in 2013 that ‘very senior UAE officials’ had sought to place restrictions on a conference on the Arab uprisings being organized by the London School of Economics, which to that date had received \$8.5 million in UAE state-linked donations.⁶⁰ In 2015 a robust study based on quantitative content analysis then concluded that, ‘[British] Gulf-funded institutions focus more on their donor countries than do non Gulf-funded institutions, but they give more attention to issues of education and youth unemployment than issues of democracy, human rights, and gender equality when writing about their donor countries’. As the study’s authors explained, ‘the fact that democracy and human rights were talked about less among Gulf-funded institutions than non-Gulf-funded institutions may indicate a selective bias regarding issues that are known to be sensitive to donor countries... our research [shows] some strong correlational patterns, providing empirical support for a much-speculated phenomenon’.⁶¹

2.3 Methodological Opportunities: Circumventing the Fields of Power

There are thus manifold difficulties associated with acquiring solid data from official sources and with relying on data produced by national and local non-governmental and media organizations, national universities, or even prominent Gulf-funded international research institutions. Nonetheless, there are a number of other secondary data sources that not only appear reliable, but also sufficiently non-partisan. As such, they may represent some plausible ways of circumventing the current structures of the fields of power in Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Most obviously, beyond their headline-grabbing world rankings and executive analyses, the small number of well-respected institutions producing extensive and long-running cross-national data sets, including the aforementioned Freedom House organization, the Economist Intelligence Unit, and the Varieties of Democracy programme, undoubtedly provide valuable material for understanding some of the macro-level changes in these two states. The latitudinal nature of their data, which is often provided for almost every country in the world, not only allows for dispassionate and impartial quantitative analysis of Saudi Arabia and the UAE’s contemporary statecraft and

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authority structures, but also allows for meaningful comparisons with other relevant states. Moreover, the usually extensive longitudinal nature of their data—which sometimes stretches back decades, and over forty years in Freedom House’s case⁶²—can also facilitate comparative historical analysis. This includes, of course, quantitative comparative work on the situations before and after MBS and MBZ’s *de facto* successions.⁶³

Though these sorts of cross-national coding projects have always had their critics,⁶⁴ and even if they do sometimes seem to be built on difficult-to-define conceptual constructs such as ‘freedom’ or ‘full democracies’,⁶⁵ most are now underpinned by fairly robust and transparent methods. In Freedom House’s case, data gathered by a large team of external analysts is later vetted by expert advisors and regional specialists, with the ‘final product representing the consensus of the analysts, advisers, and Freedom House staff’.⁶⁶ Providing a particularly comprehensive discussion of its methods, the Economist Intelligence Unit similarly draws on a large number of external and internal expert assessments, while also triangulating these with the results of existing data in the public domain.⁶⁷ With arguably the most rigorous methodology, V-Dem uses extensive peer moderation and even innovatory ‘bridge coding’ to ensure consistency between the five or more external experts focusing on each country.⁶⁸

In terms of funding, there also seem few concerns, at least with regard to the best known projects: Freedom House may be a US government-funded organization, but there is no evidence it has experienced any form of governmental interference,⁶⁹ the Economist Intelligence Unit is owned by the reputable Economist Group, which is now part-owned by the Italian Agnelli industrial dynasty along with a number of smaller shareholders,⁷⁰ and V-Dem is based at the University of Gothenburg and entirely financed by academic donors and foundations such as the European Research Council, the Swedish Research Council, and the Stiftelsen Riksbankens Jubileumsfond.⁷¹

Also useful—at least with regard to acquiring fresh descriptive data—are the detailed investigative reports sometimes produced by the leading international broadsheet newspapers and media organizations, many of which have a long history of covering the region and, in some cases, still employ semi-permanent overseas correspondents.

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Bolstering the Oxford Internet Institute's recent findings on the value of traditional newspapers to social science research,⁷² in recent years such publications have not only 'broken' several of the most important stories on Saudi Arabia and the UAE, but have often also undertaken the only serious follow-up inquiries. For example, in May 2011 the *New York Times* drew on a mixture of documentary evidence and interviews to reveal that the Blackwater founder Erik Prince had set up a 'secret desert force' on behalf of MBZ.⁷³ In January 2016 a series of Bloomberg reports underpinned by successful Freedom of Information Act requests cast the first proper light on Saudi Arabia's secretive US Department of the Treasury bond holdings,⁷⁴ and in January 2019 an interview-based Reuters special investigation finally confirmed the existence of a sophisticated cyber-intelligence agency operating from Abu Dhabi.⁷⁵

Importantly, unlike the heavily co-opted national and local Saudi and Emirati media organizations, for the most part these high-level, world class publications have maintained a reputation for fairness and objectivity when it comes to Gulf-related matters. There is also little to suggest that their editorial independence has ever been significantly compromised, even if there have been isolated instances of correspondents being detained or having their telephones hacked,⁷⁶ occasions where local distributors have pulped print-runs carrying controversial articles,⁷⁷ and (in 2014, at least) a rather specific anti-Qatar campaign having been promoted by a well-known British newspaper.⁷⁸

Nonetheless, as with Gulf-funded international research institutions, concerns are now growing following several recently established joint ventures between top tier Western media outlets and Saudi or Emirati state-linked entities. There are fears that such collaborative platforms may eventually face censorship or at least some form of restrictions when it comes to Gulf-related content, and that the big-name brands behind them may eventually be compromised. In 2012, for example, the all-Arabic *Sky News Arabia* launched in Abu Dhabi's 'twofour54' media free zone following a partnership between British Sky Broadcasting and a newly formed company called the Abu Dhabi Media Investment Corporation.⁷⁹ The ownership is reportedly split fifty-fifty between BSkyB and Mansur bin Zayed Al-Nahyan (one of MBZ's full brothers).⁸⁰ In 2018 the *Telegraph* alleged that *Sky News*

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Arabia had been following a pro-Emirati and pro-Saudi editorial line, especially when it came to covering key events.⁸¹

Meanwhile in Saudi Arabia, a controversial licensing agreement between Britain's *Independent* newspaper and the Saudi Research and Marketing Group has recently led to the launching of new Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Urdu platforms. The SRMG's former chairman is now serving as Saudi Arabia's minister for culture,⁸² and the organization has been described as being 'closely entwined with the political and PR aims of the Saudi state...its activities go beyond the remit of a traditional publisher'. Moreover, the editor-in-chief of the Arabic version of the *Independent* is understood to have a history of working for other Saudi state-linked newspapers, including the SRMG's *Asharq Al-Awsat* and the royal family-owned *Al-Hayat* and *Al-Watan*.⁸³ Perhaps unsurprisingly given this context, the spin-offs have been routinely criticized for their apparent pro-Saudi bias, with the Arabic version having been accused of burnishing MBS's image,⁸⁴ and with the Turkish version having been banned in Turkey on the basis of its 'links to Riyadh', and following calls in the Saudi media for it to be used to 'transfer the battle to the land of the opponent'.⁸⁵ Concurrently, candidates for a job with the Persian version reportedly 'walked away because they were not persuaded that it conformed to the *Independent's* existing editorial standards', with one surmising that the *Independent's* proposed editorial control would only be 'nominal'.⁸⁶

More seriously, and perhaps indicating future problems for the original English language publications involved in such ventures, in June 2019 it was announced that Britain's Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport had launched a watchdog inquiry into the capacity of the *Independent* and the *Evening Standard* to report the news accurately. In particular, it would investigate their ability to conform to the national security section of Britain's Enterprise Act, which stipulates 'the need for (a) accurate presentation of news; and (b) free expression of opinion'. Soon after, it was revealed that two Saudi state-linked entities registered in the Cayman Islands had earlier taken a combined stake worth between 25 and 50 per cent in the newspapers' joint holding company, and that the British government was concerned this 'may have an effect on the *Evening Standard* and the *Independent's* news agendas'.⁸⁷ Though the inquiry was later blocked

following a Competition Appeals Tribunal ruling that the Secretary of State had left it too late to intervene formally, the government's lawyers had nonetheless gone so far as to declare that 'what is of concern to Her Majesty's Government is that a foreign state could be acquiring a substantial stake in [the owner of the *Evening Standard* and the *Independent*] simultaneously'.⁸⁸

Potentially also helpful for obtaining fresh (or reasonably fresh) descriptive data on Saudi Arabia and the UAE are some of the more credible repositories of recently 'leaked' official documentation or correspondence. Among the best known is the so-called 'Cablegate' library: a giant collection of US diplomatic cables mostly dating from 2003 to 2010. Indicating the enormous strategic significance of the Gulf states to US interests, the archive features more than 12,000 cables referring to Saudi Arabia and more than 5,000 referring to the UAE.⁸⁹ With many of the cables authored by US ambassadors or other embassy staff, they offer a rare contemporary insight into the official understandings of one of the most important external actors in the region, and in this sense appear to represent an effective—if expedient—means of bypassing the usual decades-long wait before such material would surface in publicly accessible state archives.

Problematically for researchers, Cablegate's contents have never been formally verified by the US government, and its usage has often been frowned upon, including by universities. In December 2010, for example, Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs initially cautioned its students against reading or sharing information from the cables on the basis that it 'would call into question your ability to deal with confidential information, which is part of most positions with the federal government'.⁹⁰ Since then the topic has spurred a significant debate in academic circles, with no real consensus having emerged.⁹¹

Nonetheless, despite Cablegate's controversial nature, and notwithstanding its now slightly dated contents—the final cable was sent nearly five years before MBS's first major appointments⁹²—it seems too valuable a resource to ignore, especially when it comes to gathering information on the functioning of extremely opaque regimes. Not only have many of the cables already been published by leading outlets such as the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, *Le Monde*, *El*

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Pais, and *Der Spiegel*,⁹³ but they are now often informally referred to by former US officials, none of whom challenge their veracity. Many are also regularly cited by peer-reviewed scholarly journal articles,⁹⁴ and Cablegate material has even begun to feature in written evidence submissions to certain courts of law, with Britain's Supreme Court confirming in February 2018 that the cables are indeed admissible.⁹⁵

Since Cablegate's release, several ostensibly similar archives of contemporary official correspondence have been published that also contain documents relating to the inner workings of the Saudi and Emirati states. However, at present none look to be as authenticable as Cablegate, and it seems prudent to disregard their contents for academic data gathering purposes. June 2015, for example, saw the publication of a tranche of more than 120,000 cables and other communications purportedly dispatched by Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of the Interior, and General Intelligence Presidency.⁹⁶ The bulk of the archive consists of scanned, undated material often lacking identification codes, and the leak was reportedly the work of an Iran-linked hacking group called the 'Yemeni Cyber Army'. On this basis it seems reasonable to assume that at least some of the documents may have been doctored.⁹⁷

Even less plausible has been the data recently published by a new wave of anonymous platforms, most of which have concentrated on uploading documents, videos, and pictures that clearly aim to incriminate or tarnish the reputations of specific rival states. 'Emirateleaks', for example, claims to be a 'media platform specialized in spreading the scandals of the Emirates and its crimes',⁹⁸ but may well be operated by rival state actors in the region such as Qatar or Iran. Likewise, 'Qatarileaks' claims to be 'Qatar-opposition linked',⁹⁹ but is understood to have been set up by a UAE-based technology company. In this regard, such resources are likely less about sharing important information in the public interest, and instead more about manipulating or even weaponizing a new, post-Cablegate form of online data delivery.

2.4 Methodological Opportunities: Primary Data Prospects

Beyond the use of reliable non-partisan secondary data sources, the second and third research tasks also seem to lend themselves to

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certain primary data collection methods, even if these now appear equally—or even more—challenged by the current structures of the fields of power. Interviews and surveys, most notably, can serve not only as mechanisms for imputing or ‘filling in the gaps’ in the available secondary data, but their qualitative components may help determine which inferences or deductions are best supported. In the context of Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and especially in the wake of their apparent autocratic-authoritarian turns, even rather modest primary data sets would seem particularly valuable.

For example, interviews with incumbent or former state functionaries—including those at relatively junior levels—might be able to prise open the MBS and MBZ regimes’ ‘black boxes’. Descriptive answers would potentially go far further than official press releases and other such data by offering insights into actual decision-making motives and inputs as well as outputs. Likewise, interviews with a range of other local stakeholders such as private sector businesspeople, academics, and activists may contextualize the situation further, as experiential answers could perhaps present different perspectives or even spotlight the need for important new lines of inquiry.

Unfortunately, it is undeniably getting harder for international researchers to gather interview data on the Gulf states, especially regarding potentially sensitive topics such as statecraft and authority structures. Though there have been several pathbreaking ethnographic studies on Saudi Arabia and the UAE in recent years, including some that have really helped us to ‘see like an autocrat’, these have primarily focused on social and cultural issues,¹⁰⁰ and have often relied on difficult-to-replicate levels of personal access to specific groups or individuals, including ruling family members.¹⁰¹ Meanwhile, there are numerous indicators that researchers attempting to utilize more formal interviewing methods of the type that underpinned a wave of earlier monographs on the domestic politics of Saudi Arabia and the UAE¹⁰² may now be facing much greater difficulties. Some of the more recent reports of problems encountered by interviewers or their interviewees, including arrests and imprisonment, strongly suggest there is a growing ‘culture of suspicion’ in both states and—to borrow Janine Clark’s phrase—a ‘looming smell of the *Mukhabarat* [intelligence service]’.¹⁰³

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Even so, there appear to be a number of suitable ‘workarounds’ to allow for at least some form of robust interviewing. Beyond fully anonymizing the process and resorting to remote interviews via video conferencing, it is often possible to conduct face-to-face interviews in ostensibly more neutral settings, including heavily visited cities elsewhere in the region such as Istanbul and Cairo, or in major global metropolises like New York and London. In fact, for historical-cultural reasons the latter is often still considered a second home by many Saudi and Emirati citizens, having famously been dubbed ‘Little Arabia’ and the ‘Eighth Emirate’.¹⁰⁴ Nonetheless, such *jugaads* or semi-solutions are not without their own flaws. Electronic methods inevitably de-personalize the process, and perhaps reduce the quality and depth of answers, whilst international settings limit the available cross-section of interviewees to those with the resources and ability to undertake overseas travel. After all, the Saudi and Emirati authorities are frequently known to impose ‘travel bans’ as a means of punishing or restricting the movements of some of their more outspoken citizens.¹⁰⁵

Though surveys are invariably more limited than interviews when it comes to gathering detailed information, in some ways they have the potential to go much further, especially when it comes to gauging the overall national mood and capturing the voice of the ‘average citizen’. In this sense, a sufficiently large scale survey might allow the researcher to canvas a much fuller spectrum of society in states such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE, including the substantial and often more indigent communities far outside the principal conurbations, whose views rarely feature in the local or international media.

Helpfully, the use of extensive surveys for the study of political issues in the region has a rich pedigree. Much of this can be traced to the pioneering work of Daniel Lerner, who in the late 1950s investigated the modernization and ‘passing’ of traditional society in the Middle East.¹⁰⁶ A significant contribution has also been made by contemporary scholars like Mark Tessler and his colleagues, who have used surveys to explore the political orientations of ordinary citizens and the roles of gender and Islam in conflict.¹⁰⁷ Though the history of applying such human-centred, bottom-up approaches directly to Saudi Arabia and the UAE is more modest, there are nonetheless several outstanding examples. In 1995, for example, Jamal Sanad Al-Suwaidi published

his findings on Arab concepts of democracy based on evidence from a poll of nearly 400 Emirati university students (the majority of whom indicated a strong preference for elective government).¹⁰⁸ In 2000 Sally Findlow conducted a similarly comprehensive survey on nationalism in the UAE,¹⁰⁹ and in 2006 Mansur Moaddel shared results from a survey of more than 1,500 Saudi citizens on attitudes to gender, religion, and politics.¹¹⁰ Remarkably, in 2012 Marta Saldaña Martín then managed to canvas nearly 700 Emirati university students on the subjects of political reform, elections, and institutional effectiveness.¹¹¹

As with formal interviewing, however, it is increasingly difficult to conduct surveys on these sorts of topics in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, especially using traditional methods such as face-to-face questioning or the distribution of hard copy questionnaires. Notwithstanding Justin Gengler's recent conclusion—with some caveats—that Gulf Arabs appear 'no less likely to enjoy or value surveys than any other cultural group',¹¹² it is now undoubtedly very challenging for individual researchers to carry out any form of on-the-ground polling related to politics in either of these countries. Moreover, given the aforementioned bans and restrictions placed on data-gathering foreign NGOs and commercial survey firms,¹¹³ it has also become harder to engage third party survey specialists. Indeed, with the apparent exception of the Qatar government-funded Arab Opinion Index (which continues to produce data based on face-to-face interviews in Saudi Arabia, though not the UAE),¹¹⁴ and the Dubai-headquartered Arab Youth Survey (which conducts face-to-face interviews in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and thirteen other Arab states),¹¹⁵ most other canvassing efforts have evidently struggled. The widely used Arab Barometer, which gathers thoughts on topics ranging from trust in government to elections and revolutions, has been unable to collect data from Saudi Arabia since 2011, and it has never collected data from the UAE.¹¹⁶ The World Values Survey meanwhile, which gauges opinions on an even broader range of political, social, and economic issues has no data on Saudi Arabia since the period 1999–2004, and it has never collected data from the UAE.¹¹⁷

Nevertheless, there do appear to be appropriate alternative methods. Most obviously, Saudi Arabia and the UAE's internet connectivity rates are now among the highest in the world, allowing

for a new means to contact and survey citizens without the need for potentially problematic intermediaries or risky data gathering locations. In fact, according to the International Telecommunications Union, more than 82 per cent of those living in Saudi Arabia and nearly 95 per cent of those in the UAE now have regular internet access, with the two countries respectively ranked seventeenth and thirty-ninth in the world, above the likes of Israel and France.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, according to data provided by the leading social media platforms, the UAE now has the highest social media penetration rate in the world, with 99 per cent of the adult population being registered users, whilst Saudi Arabia has the seventeenth highest with 68 per cent, putting it ahead of Britain and close behind the US.¹¹⁹

Social media engagement as a tool of political science has of course already begun to generate considerable methodological debate.¹²⁰ In Middle East area studies the discussion is also gaining traction, especially after the apparently prominent—but disputed—role of social media in fuelling 2008's 'April 6 Movement' in Egypt, which promoted a general strike;¹²¹ 2009's 'Green Movement' in Iran, which protested against the re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad;¹²² and most dramatically the 2011 Arab uprisings, as popularized by the Google executive-cum-activist Wael Ghonim's bestselling book *Revolution 2.0*.¹²³ In her essay on using online research tools in Egypt, for example, Elizabeth Monier has explored the potential of using Facebook to connect with her subjects, and has detailed her efforts to ensure that 'the balance was tipped in favour of it being a friend [rather than a foe], as long as checks and balances are carefully maintained'.¹²⁴ Similarly, in his work on researching protest mobilization in Kuwait, Geoffrey Martin has laid out the numerous advantages (and disadvantages) of utilizing Twitter, and has demonstrated the need to develop new social media sampling techniques.¹²⁵ Also innovatively, Jennifer Pan and Alexandra Siegel have used experimental quantitative methods to investigate the impact of 'offline repression' on online dissent in Saudi Arabia by analysing the contents of over 300 million tweets relating to dozens of Saudi 'opinion leaders'.¹²⁶ In the meantime, following the latest version of the Arab Social Media Report, which electronically surveyed a substantial number of respondents on several sensitive questions, researchers at the Dubai-based Muhammad bin Rashid

School of Government have been busy formulating a sophisticated methodology of their own.¹²⁷

2.5 Methodological Opportunities: Primary Data Gathering

Though far from perfect, such primary data gathering workarounds do seem to enable potentially valuable additional methods in support of the second and third research tasks. They not only embody the sorts of ‘good enough methodologies’—as described by Pamina Firchow and Roger MacGinty—that are reasonably scientific and appropriate for the sensitivities of the case studies,¹²⁸ but also heed the calls (made most prominently by Michael Stern, Ipek Bilgen, and Don Dillman) for sufficient flexibility in adapting to changing technological and cultural patterns in the research environment.¹²⁹

Regarding interviews, for example, those that feature in this book have been anonymized and were carried out either remotely or in several different locations, including necessarily neutral settings. To further minimize risk, questions on presumed ‘red-line topics’—including the domestic impact of Saudi Arabia and the UAE’s roles in current regional confrontations and the broader ramifications of recent high-profile Saudi assassinations—were excluded. To avoid over-emphasizing particular viewpoints and to help limit any ‘framing effect’ (in which small or subtle differences in prefacing can lead to significantly different answers, especially in non-democracies),¹³⁰ all of the selected questions—including two that were explicitly listed as optional¹³¹—were fully standardized and followed a predetermined structure.¹³² The majority of interviewees were identified using existing academic networks or via a popular professionally-oriented social media platform, with the number of interlocutors kept to the bare minimum. Overall, between October 2017 and July 2019 a total of forty-five incumbent or former citizen state functionaries were interviewed (twenty-five from Saudi Arabia and twenty from the UAE).¹³³ A total of fifty-three other citizen stakeholders were interviewed, including private sector businesspeople, academics, and activists (twenty-three from Saudi Arabia and thirty from the UAE).¹³⁴

Though a number of expatriates would likely have been willing to participate, they were not approached on the basis that their differing

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nationalities and contrasting backgrounds might have significantly complicated the data gathering process. Furthermore, their potential ‘outsider’ views on matters such as statecraft and authority structures might have ended up obscuring important patterns or trends in the data.¹³⁵ After all, the majority of expatriates in these two countries are relatively short-term residents, and with only limited routes to naturalization available, even to veteran professionals,¹³⁶ almost all are effectively economic migrants intending to eventually relocate or retire outside the region. As only partial, employment-focused stakeholders in the Saudi and Emirati states, they might reasonably be expected to hold particularly cautious views or to have little sustained interest in the politics of their temporary host nations.¹³⁷

Similarly, all survey data in this book—presumed ‘red-line topics’ again being excluded—has been anonymized and, wherever possible, was gathered without the need for interlocutors. Potential participants were identified via mainstream social media platforms using opportunity sampling with elements of stratified sampling,¹³⁸ and then invited to participate using direct messaging facilities.¹³⁹ The relative directness of the method—as opposed to observing or interacting passively with publicly posted social media content, for example—felt like a straightforward, logical evolution from some of the more established technology-led surveying techniques such as email and mobile phone-assisted approaches¹⁴⁰ (the latter still being used extensively in parts of the developing world that are harder to access).¹⁴¹

In total 475 Saudi citizens and 425 Emirati citizens of all ages were approached, over the same time period as the interviews, with an overall response rate of 57 per cent.¹⁴² To ensure sufficient clarity a pre-test was performed on a small group of twenty persons, with no difficulties reported. All surveys were initially administered in Modern Standard Arabic—also known as *Fusha*¹⁴³—on the basis that Arabic is the official language of both Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and has recently emerged as the most important social media medium across the region (with 72 per cent of Arab Twitter users and 55 per cent of Arab Facebook users now posting in Arabic).¹⁴⁴ In only two cases were minor language problems encountered; both respondents were Emirati citizens who had been naturalized through marriage and were not fluent in Arabic, so an alternative English version was supplied.

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As well as requesting respondents to confirm their nationality, the survey included two further control questions to determine geographic location and gender. Mindful of the need to gather data from both inside and outside Saudi Arabia and the UAE's most prominent cities, it was hoped that a significant number of participants would also hail from smaller cities and towns. Though 64 per cent of respondents did report their locations as being the major metropolises of Riyadh, Jeddah, Abu Dhabi, and Dubai,¹⁴⁵ a substantial minority claimed they were based in or near to Mecca, Medina, Sultanah, and Dammam (in Saudi Arabia), or Sharjah, Ajman, Ra's al-Khaimah, and Al-Ain (in the UAE).¹⁴⁶ Similarly, heedful of what is assumed to be a chronic gender imbalance in social media users elsewhere in the region—with only about 30 per cent of Arab users believed to be women¹⁴⁷—it was hoped that a reasonable parity of male and female views could be achieved. Unfortunately this was unsuccessful, for reasons that are not clear. Although 43 per cent of the total invitations were sent to potential participants with female names,¹⁴⁸ only a small number returned the survey, representing just 16 per cent of all respondents.¹⁴⁹ Other control questions would have undoubtedly been useful (for example helping determine respondents' approximate net worth, career stage, or religious sect), however these were deemed to be too sensitive and likely to reduce the overall rate of response.

The remainder of the survey, which focused exclusively on topics relating to the second and third research tasks, was divided into several closed, statement-based questions, including one that was explicitly listed as optional.¹⁵⁰ These were followed by a smaller number of open-ended, qualitative questions, again including one that was explicitly listed as optional,¹⁵¹ with the opportunity to provide brief single line descriptive answers. To ensure that the closed component was as straightforward as possible—and to facilitate further quantitative analysis—the popular Likert scale was adopted with a simple five-level set of pre-coded numerical responses: 1 (strongly disagree); 2 (disagree); 3 (neither agree nor disagree); 4 (agree); and 5 (strongly agree).¹⁵² In only three cases were difficulties experienced in understanding how to answer the questions, but after providing a small number of sample answers the respondents were able to complete the survey successfully.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. Listed by GDP, in descending order.
2. In 2018 the combined GDP of the six Gulf monarchies was \$1.6 trillion. Author compiled figure based on GDP as recorded by World Bank national accounts data and OECD national accounts data (Saudi Arabia: \$782 billion; UAE \$414 billion; Qatar: \$192 billion; Kuwait: \$142 billion; Oman: \$79 billion; Bahrain: \$38 billion). In 2018 Russia's GDP was \$1.7 trillion. In 2017 the State of Texas's GDP was \$1.8 trillion. World Bank, 'GDP (current US\$)' [date accessed: 20 November 2019]; US Department of Commerce Bureau of Economic Analysis, 'GDP by state' [date accessed: 20 November 2019].
3. The term 'middle power' came into general use in the 1940s. As George Glazebrook noted at the time, 'in between [great and small states] lie a number of countries which make no claim to the title of great power, but have been shown to be capable of exerting a degree of strength and influence not found in the small powers...these are the middle powers'. Since then, numerous scholars have applied the term to states in the Middle East such as Turkey, Syria, and Iran. More recently the term has been applied directly to certain Gulf states, most notably Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar. G. Glazebrook, 'The Middle Powers in the United Nations System' in *International Organization*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1947; M. Müftüler and M. Yüksel, 'Turkey: A Middle Power in the New Order' in A. Cooper (ed.), *Niche Diplomacy. Studies in Diplomacy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997); A. Ehteshami and R. Hinnebusch, *Syria and Iran: Middle Powers in a Penetrated Regional System* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1997); S. Mabon, 'The Kingdom and the Glory? Saudi Arabia as a Middle Power in the Contemporary Middle East' in A. Saouli (ed.), *Unfulfilled Aspirations: Middle Power Politics in the Middle East* (London: Hurst & Co., 2020); R. Mason, 'Small-State Aspirations to Middlepowerhood: The Cases of Qatar and the UAE' in A. Saouli (ed.), *Unfulfilled Aspirations: Middle Power Politics in the Middle East* (London: Hurst & Co., 2020); I. Hassan, 'The UAE: A Small State with Regional Middle Power Aspirations' in A. Saouli (ed.), *Unfulfilled Aspirations: Middle Power Politics in the Middle East* (London: Hurst & Co., 2020).

4. According to Joseph Nye, countries can develop attractive ‘soft power’ assets to help co-opt rather than coerce others into offering them support. In April 2017 the UAE even established a government-backed ‘Soft Power Council’ with the objective of ‘defining a comprehensive strategy to reinforce the country’s position and consolidate its values of respect and appreciation with governments and citizens across the world’. For a discussion see J. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004); *Gulf News*, ‘Mohammad Bin Rashid launches UAE Soft Power Council’, 29 April 2017.
5. For example, beyond Qatar’s upcoming hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup, in 2011 the Qatar Investment Authority bought Paris St. Germain (now owned by Qatar Sports Investment), while in 2008 the Abu Dhabi United Group for Development and Investment bought Manchester City Football Club. *Guardian*, ‘Qatar wins 2022 World Cup bid’, 2 December 2010; *Le Parisien*, ‘Le Qatar sans limite’, 7 March 2012 [in French]; BBC, ‘Hughes to hold City owner talks’, 11 November 2008. For a discussion on the Abu Dhabi United Group for Development and Investment see section 5.1 endnote 41.
6. Beyond substantial Gulf state-linked sponsorships for motor racing teams, Abu Dhabi and Bahrain both host Formula One grands prix, and in 2018 Saudi Arabia began hosting a Formula E-Prix. Fédération Internationale de l’Automobile, ‘Press Release: World Motor Sport Council – Decisions’, 5 November 2008; Bahrain International Circuit, ‘Our Story: Making Motorsport History’ [date accessed: 1 February 2019]; ABB Formula-E Championship, ‘2018 Saudia Ad Diriyah E-Prix’ [date accessed: 1 February 2019].
7. In addition to historic and substantial Gulf ruling family involvement in the British, French, and US horseracing industries (mostly through the ownership of horses, stables, and studs) and the hosting of major horseracing events in the Gulf (most notably the Dubai World Cup), various Gulf states have also provided substantial sponsorship for prestigious international races. Most significantly, since 2008 Qatar has been the official sponsor of France’s most prestigious race—the Prix de l’Arc de Triomphe (with the race’s official logo naming Qatar and featuring the purple and white colours of the Qatari flag). In 2015, a Qatar entity announced \$63 million in funding for a series of races at Britain’s Royal Ascot. Similarly, in 2017 Abu Dhabi announced that it would be sponsoring France’s Poule d’Essai des Poulains race. *Gulf Times*, ‘Extension of sponsorship of Qatar Prix de l’Arc de Triomphe under consideration, says Sheikh Abdullah’, 7 October 2018; *Telegraph*, ‘Qatar to unveil £50m British horseracing deal’, 24 May 2015; *National*, ‘Abu Dhabi signs five-year sponsorship deal for two premier French horse racing fixtures’, 13 May 2017.
8. Dubai’s Emirates airline was, for example, the official sponsor of both the 2015 and 2019 Rugby World Cups (held in Japan and England, respectively). It was also the first sponsor to have ever acquired the rights to brand the shirts of match officials. Emirates, ‘Sponsorships: Rugby’ [date accessed: 5 April 2019].
9. Long in the pipeline, in November 2017 Le Louvre Abu Dhabi finally opened. Also in Abu Dhabi, in June 2018 the British Museum renewed an earlier ten-year agreement to help establish the Zayed National Museum, and in May 2019 the Guggenheim Foundation announced that construction of the ‘Guggenheim Abu Dhabi’ would begin soon and would be completed in approximately four years.

- National*, 'British Museum renames gallery after Sheikh Zayed', 20 June 2018; *National*, 'Emmanuel Macron and UAE leaders formally open Louvre Abu Dhabi', 8 November 2017; *Dezeen*, 'Construction set to begin on Frank Gehry's long-awaited Guggenheim Abu Dhabi', 8 May 2019.
10. Including New York University and La Sorbonne in the UAE; and Georgetown University, Northwestern University, Carnegie Mellon University, Texas A&M University, and Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar. For a discussion on New York University and La Sorbonne in the UAE see section 2.2.
 11. As argued by Abdulkhaleq Abdulla in A. Abdulla, *The Gulf Moment in Contemporary Arab History* (Beirut: Dar Al-Farabi, 2018) [in Arabic]. Also see *ArabWeekly*, 'Emirati author chronicles rise of Gulf countries', 29 July 2018.
 12. As argued by Nawaf Obaid, with reference to Saudi Arabia. Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Center, 'Nawaf Obaid on a new assertive Saudi Arabia', 22 November 2013.
 13. As argued by Sultan Al-Qassemi. Al-Monitor, 'Thriving Gulf Cities Emerge as New Centers of Arab World', 8 October 2013; *National*, 'A shift in Arab influence: The rise and rise of Gulf cities', 18 April 2016.
 14. Recent studies include: J. Sage Mitchell, 'Political and Socioeconomic Transformation in the GCC: Image and reality' in *History Compass*, Vol. 8, No. 3, 2010; I. Forstenlechner and E. Rutledge, 'Unemployment in the Gulf: Time to Update the Social Contract' in *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 2010; M. Alsudairi and G. Tatapudi, 'Social Innovation: Can it be a Strategy for Influencing GCC Public Welfare?' in *Innovation*, Vol. 16, No. 2, 2014 (2014).
 15. Recent studies include: K. Alfadhel, 'The GCC Human Rights Declaration: An Instrumentation of Cultural Relativism' in *Arab Law Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No. 1, 2017; R. Alhargan, 'Saudi Arabia: Civil Rights and Local Actors' in *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 2012.
 16. Recent studies include: M. Thompson and N. Quilliam, 'State, Citizens and Institutions: Policy Making in the GCC' in *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 25, No. 3, 2018; K. Ulrichsen, *The United Arab Emirates: Power, Politics, and Policy-Making* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016); H. Khodr, 'A Preliminary Comparative Study of Policy Making in Two GCC Countries – Qatar and Kuwait: Processes, Politics, and Participants' in *Politics and Policy*, Vol. 42, No. 2, 2014.
 17. For an overview of ruling family succession prospects and disputes see J. Kechichian, *Power and Succession in Arab Monarchies: A Reference Guide* (Boulder: Rienner, 2008). For a discussion on the importance and relevance of Riyadhology, see S. Henderson, 'To Understand the Complexities of Saudi Arabia, a Quick Course in "Riyadhology"', Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Analysis, 10 January 2018.
 18. MBS was included in the 2018 edition and MBZ was included in the 2019 edition. *Time*, '100 Most Influential People 2018: Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman' [date accessed: 24 April 2019]; *Time*, '100 Most Influential People 2019: Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed' [date accessed: 24 April 2019].
 19. In 2017 Saudi Arabia's GDP was \$684 billion and the UAE's GDP was \$383 billion, as recorded by World Bank national accounts data and OECD national accounts data. By comparison, in 2017 the third wealthiest Gulf monarchy, Qatar, had a GDP of \$168 billion, while the wealthiest non-Gulf monarchy Arab state, Egypt, had a

- GDP of \$235 billion. In 2017 Saudi Arabia's population was 32.9 million and the UAE's population was 9.4 million, as recorded by the United Nations Population Division. By comparison, in 2017 the third most populous Gulf monarchy was Oman, with 4.6 million. World Bank, 'GDP country comparisons' [date accessed: 9 October 2019]; United Nations Population Division, 'Population: Saudi Arabia' [date accessed: 9 October 2019]; United Nations Population Division, 'Population: UAE' [date accessed: 9 October 2019].
20. In April 2018 Citigroup predicted that the US would overtake Saudi Arabia to become the world's top oil exporter. In September 2019 the US did overtake Saudi Arabia, though only briefly. Bloomberg, 'Citi says US may become World's top oil exporter next year', 26 April 2018; Reuters, 'US briefly overtakes Saudi Arabia as top oil exporter: IEA', 12 September 2019.
 21. In 2017 Saudi had 266 billion barrels of proven crude oil reserves while Venezuela had 302 billion barrels. US Energy Information Administration, 'International Energy Statistics' [date accessed: 8 January 2019].
 22. Referring to the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency's foreign holdings (worth \$516 billion) and the Public Investment Fund (worth \$360 billion). Sovereign Wealth Fund Institute, 'Largest sovereign wealth funds by assets under management' [date accessed: 8 January 2019].
 23. The upgrade was confirmed in June 2018 and the two-step upgrading process began in May 2019. In February 2020 it was reported that Saudi Arabia's emerging market status had already generated \$53 billion in foreign capital inflows. MCSI, 'Press release: Results of MCSI 2018 market classification review', 20 June 2018; MCSI, 'Saudi Arabia inclusion and emerging markets', 28 March 2019; Reuters, 'MSCI adds Saudi Arabia, Argentina indexes to emerging markets index', 14 May 2019; *Arab News*, 'Saudi Arabia reaps \$53bn dividend from emerging market status', 21 February 2020.
 24. In 2017 Saudi Arabia spent \$69.5 billion on its military. Stockholm International Peace Research Military Expenditure Database, 'Military expenditure by country, in constant 2016 \$US m., 2009–2017' [date accessed: 7 January 2019].
 25. Stockholm International Peace Research Arms Transfers Database, 'Trend indicator values of arms imports to the top 50 largest importers, 2017–2017' [date accessed: 8 January 2019].
 26. In October 2018 Lockheed Martin and Raytheon estimated that, respectively, 18,000 and 10,000 of their US workers were engaged on Saudi orders. In the context of a \$110 billion armaments deal signed with Saudi Arabia in 2017, in late 2018 US President Donald Trump made claims in separate interviews that 500,000 and then 600,000 jobs were at stake (but these figures have been disputed by industry officials, given that the top five US contractors only employ 383,000 workers). Reuters, 'Exclusive: Defense firms see only hundreds of new U.S. jobs from Saudi mega deal', 30 October 2018; Associated Press, 'AP Fact Check: Trump inflates jobs impact of Saudi arms deal', 20 October 2018.
 27. In 2008, for example, Saudi Arabia donated \$318 million to a UN World Food Programme emergency appeal. In fact, Saudi Arabia's donation ended up being more than half of the total donations. In 2015 Saudi Arabia donated \$274 million to a UN humanitarian assistance appeal for Yemen, and in 2018 (together with

- the UAE) donated \$930 million to the UN-organized Yemen Humanitarian Fund. *Guardian*, ‘Saudis donate £250m to UN’s food appeal’, 24 May 2008; *Arab News*, ‘Saudi Arabia donated \$115 billion to help 90 countries’, 5 October 2015; United Nations News, ‘UN receives nearly \$1 billion from Saudi Arabia and UAE for humanitarian response to Yemen crisis’, 28 March 2018.
28. A. Heywood, *Global Politics* [Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011], p. 121.
 29. Notwithstanding potential Coronavirus issues, the G20’s fifteenth annual leaders’ summit is expected to be held in Riyadh in November 2020. Saudi Press Agency, ‘Saudi Arabia hosts the 15th G20 Leaders Summit in 2020’, 17 April 2019.
 30. In 2017 the UAE had 98 billion barrels of proven crude oil reserves while Russia had 80 billion barrels. Russia’s total territory (both land and sea) is 17,100,000 square kilometres while the UAE’s is 84,000 square kilometres. US Energy Information Administration, ‘International Energy Statistics’ [date accessed: 8 January 2019]; CIA World Factbook ‘Russia: Geography’ [date accessed: 13 July 2019]; CIA World Factbook ‘United Arab Emirates: Geography’ [date accessed: 13 July 2019].
 31. In 2016 the UAE was the 6th greatest importer of armaments and in 2017 it was the 10th greatest. Stockholm International Peace Research Arms Transfers Database, ‘Trend indicator values of arms imports to the top 50 largest importers, 2017–2017’ [date accessed: 8 January 2019].
 32. Most notably, in 2007 the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority invested \$7.5 billion in Citigroup, in exchange for a 4.9 per cent stake. Following Citigroup’s subsequent difficulties (including two government bailouts), ADIA entered into arbitration to try to recover its investment, but eventually failed. Reuters, ‘Abu Dhabi fund loses crisis-related arbitration against Citigroup’, 28 March 2017; US Court of Appeals, Second Circuit, ‘Citigroup Inc., v. Abu Dhabi Investment Authority’, Docket No. 13–4825–cv, 14 January 2015.
 33. Referring to ADIA (worth \$683 billion), the Investment Corporation of Dubai (worth \$234 billion), and the Mubadala Investment Company (worth \$226 billion). Sovereign Wealth Fund Institute, ‘Largest sovereign wealth funds by assets under management’ [date accessed: 8 January 2019].
 34. According to a research note published by Credit Agricole’s Indosuez wealth management, Abu Dhabi’s sovereign wealth funds own \$62 billion of real estate. The Chrysler Building investment was made by the Abu Dhabi Investment Council. *Arabian Business*, ‘Abu Dhabi fund named world’s biggest real estate investor’, 6 June 2018; Reuters, ‘Abu Dhabi, Qatar among top five global real estate investors: report’, 6 June 2018; *New York Times*, ‘Abu Dhabi Buys 90% Stake in Chrysler Building’, 10 July 2008.
 35. For a discussion on Dubai’s rich history as a trading *entrepôt* see C. Davidson, *Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success* (London: Hurst & Co., 2008), pp. 67–98; S. Rizvi, ‘From Tents to High Rise: Economic Development of the United Arab Emirates’ in *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 4, 1993.
 36. In 2016 Port Jebel Ali processed 14.7 million teus of cargo and in 2017 Dubai International Airport was used by 88 million passengers. Lloyds List Maritime Intelligence, ‘09 Dubai (United Arab Emirates)’, 2 August 2017; Airports Council International, ‘ACI World publishes annual world airport traffic report’, 20 September 2018.

37. Mastercard Press Releases, 'Big Cities, Big Business: Bangkok, London and Paris Lead the Way in Mastercard's 2018 Global Destination Cities Index', 25 September 2018.
38. IRENA is supported by the UN Office for Project Services. Emirates News Agency, 'UAE: IRENA and UNOPS to work together', 23 March 2010.
39. Also noteworthy is that the UAE donated \$58 million to Interpol projects in 2017. Interpol Press Release, 'UAE pledges EUR 50 million to support seven key Interpol projects', 27 March 2017; Interpol Press Release, 'Interpol General Assembly focuses on innovation in policing', 18 November 2018.
40. In November 2013, the *Bureau International des Expositions* selected Dubai as the host for World Expo 2020. The event was originally scheduled to begin in October 2020, but the organizers have requested a one-year delay due to the coronavirus pandemic. It will have the theme of 'Connecting Minds, Creating the Future' and the sub-themes of 'Opportunity, Mobility, and Sustainability'. CNBC, 'Dubai celebrates winning right to host Expo 2020', 27 November 2013; Expo 2020 Dubai UAE, 'Discover: Themes and Sub-Themes' [date accessed: 2 December 2019]; Expo 2020 Dubai UAE, 'What's New: 192 countries to take part in Expo 2020', 25 April 2019; Reuters, 'Expo 2020 Dubai organisers support one year delay due to coronavirus', 30 March 2020.

1. BUILDING A REGIME-TYPE FRAMEWORK

1. The Gulf Cooperation Council was established in 1981. Gulf Cooperation Council, 'Charter of the GCC', 25 May 1981.
2. Numerous studies on the region have noted the prominence of 'paramount' sheikhs'. See for example: M. Peck, *The A to Z of the Gulf Arab States* (New York: Scarecrow, 2010), p. 277; D. Hawley, *The Trucial States* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1970), p. 187; C. Allen Jr., *Oman: The Modernization of the Sultanate* (Boulder: Westview, 1987), p. 9; J. Peterson, 'Tribes and Politics in Eastern Arabia' in *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 31, No. 3, 1977, p. 298.
3. Specifically, the second and third Quranic references to *Shura*, which stress the need for people to conduct their affairs through mutual consultation and describe Prophet Muhammad taking counsel from his followers. Quran, *Surah Ash-Shuraa* 42:38; Quran, *Surah Ali Imran* 3:159.
4. Quran, *Uli al-Amr* 4:59. According to some prominent scholarly interpretations (including that of Muqatil bin Sulayman Al-Balkhi), the reference to 'those in possession of authority among you' must include military commanders / political leaders. O. Leaman (ed.), *The Qu'ran: An Encyclopaedia* (Abingdon: Taylor and Francis, 206), p.672.
5. 'Patrimonialism' and 'neo-patrimonialism' being very widely used terms derived from Max Weber's original description of patrimonialism as a type of political authority found in his volume *Economy and Society*, first published in 1922. M. Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1978), Part 1 [edited by G. Roth and C. Wittich], pp. 231. For a succinct set of contemporary definitions see F. Fukuyama, *Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014), pp. 287–8.

6. A notable exception being James Onley and Sulayman Khalaf's study, which sees the fusion between religious and political authority in Saudi Arabia and Oman as being distinct from the more secular 'sheikhly authority' associated with the historically British-dominated smaller Gulf sheikhdoms. J. Onley and S. Khalaf, 'Shaikhly Authority in the Pre-Oil Gulf: An Historical–Anthropological Study' in *History and Anthropology*, Vol. 17, No. 3, 2006, p. 191.
7. P. Lienhardt, 'The Authority of Shaykhs in the Gulf: An Essay in Nineteenth-Century History' in R. Sergeant and R. Bidwell (eds.), *Arabian Studies Volume 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p.68.
8. H. Dickson, *The Arab of the Desert: A Glimpse into Badawin Life in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1949), pp. 52–3; J. Onley and S. Khalaf, 'Shaikhly Authority in the Pre-Oil Gulf: An Historical–Anthropological Study' in *History and Anthropology*, Vol. 17, No. 3, 2006, p. 199.
9. J. Onley and S. Khalaf, 'Shaikhly Authority in the Pre-Oil Gulf: An Historical–Anthropological Study' in *History and Anthropology*, Vol. 17, No. 3, 2006, p. 194.
10. Zahlian also quotes Bertram Thomas, a British advisor to one of the region's rulers, who had claimed that the system 'had its own kind of democracy, namely, a social democracy side by side with traditional authoritarianism in government'. R. Zahlian, *The Making of the Modern Gulf States* (London: Harper Collins, 1989), pp. 21–2.
11. J. Peterson, 'Tribes and Politics in Eastern Arabia' in *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 31, No. 3, 1977, pp. 297–9.
12. G. Gause, *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1994), p. 85.
13. M. Herb, *All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution, and Democracy in Middle Eastern Monarchies* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), p. 44.
14. G. Luciani, 'Democracy vs Shura in the Age of the Internet' in A. Khalaf and G. Luciani (eds.), *Constitutional Reform and Political Participation in the Gulf* (Dubai: Gulf Research Centre, 2006), p. 277.
15. He placed Saudi Arabia in the 'high consultation / high religious legitimisation' category (along with Jordan and Morocco), and the UAE and Qatar in the category one step below. He placed Arab republics such as Iraq, Syria, and Libya in the 'low consultation / low religious legitimacy' category. *Ibid.*, pp. 283–4.
16. D. Long, 'The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia' in K. Yambert (ed.), *The Contemporary Middle East* (Boulder: Westview, 2006), pp. 192–4.
17. G. Luciani, 'Democracy vs Shura in the Age of the Internet' in A. Khalaf and G. Luciani (eds.), *Constitutional Reform and Political Participation in the Gulf* (Dubai: Gulf Research Centre, 2006), p. 278.
18. M.C. Thompson, *Saudi Arabia and the Path to Political Change: National Dialogue and Civil Society* (London: IB Tauris, 2014), p. 27.
19. S. Stenslie, *Regime Stability in Saudi Arabia: The Challenge of Succession* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), p. 96.
20. F. Al-Sayegh, 'Post 9/11 Changes in the Gulf: The Case of the UAE' in *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 2004, p. 115.
21. F. Heard-Bey, 'The United Arab Emirates: Statehood and Nation-Building in a Traditional Society' in *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 59, No. 3, 2005, p. 369.

22. Ulrichsen gives the example of the ruler of Fujairah who ‘to this day’ continues to hold an open *majlis* once a week during which any member of the community may attend and present his or her issue or case before the ruler in person. K. Ulrichsen, *The United Arab Emirates: Power, Politics, and Policy-Making* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), p. 29.
23. For a recent overview of such ‘ruling bargains’ in the context of the Gulf monarchies see R. Lucas, ‘The Persian Gulf Monarchies and the Arab Spring’ in M. Kamrava (ed.), *Beyond the Arab Spring: The Evolving Ruling Bargain in the Middle East* (London: Hurst & Co., 2014), pp. 313–15. For a discussion on rentier social contract benefits being best understood as flexible ‘customary privileges’ rather than as inflexible ‘rights’ see J. Krane, ‘Subsidy Reform and Tax Increases in the Rentier Middle East’ in Project on Middle East Political Science, ‘The Politics of Rentier States in the Gulf’, *POMEPS Studies* No. 33, January 2019, p. 23.
24. *Economist*, ‘How oil transformed the Gulf—From pearls to black gold’, 21 July 2018.
25. See for example *Financial Times*, ‘Iran poses an economic challenge to Saudi Arabia’, 26 January 2016; *Washington Post*, ‘Gulf states pursue unique approaches to falling oil prices’, 9 January 2015.
26. R. Pollin, ‘Resurrection of the Rentier’, *New Left Review*, Vol. 46, July–August 2007, pp. 140–53.
27. M. Ross, ‘Does Oil Hinder Democracy’, *World Politics*, Vol. 53, No. 3, 2001, p. 329.
28. The idea that significant natural resources might be a curse rather than a blessing (especially in low- and middle-income states) began to emerge in scholarly debates in the 1950s and 1960s. The specific term ‘resource curse’ was first used by Richard Auty in his 1994 study of six newly industrialized states. R. Auty, ‘Industrial Policy Reform in Six Large Newly Industrializing Countries: The Resource Curse Thesis’ in *World Development*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 1994; M. Ross, ‘The Political Economy of the Resource Curse’ in *World Politics*, Vol. 51, No. 2, 1999.
29. H. Mahdavy, ‘The Patterns and Problems of Economic Development in Rentier States: The Case of Iran’ in M. Cook (ed.), *Studies in Economic History of the Middle East* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 428.
30. T. Skocpol, ‘Rentier State and Shia Islam in the Iranian Revolution’ in *Theory and Society*, Vol. 11, No. 3, 1982, p. 268.
31. H. Beblawi, ‘The Rentier State in the Arab World’ in H. Beblawi and G. Luciani (eds.), *The Rentier State* (New York: Croom Helm, 1987), p. 51.
32. T. Lynn Karl, *The Paradox of Plenty: Oil Booms and Petro-States* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 15–17.
33. M. Ross, ‘Does Oil Hinder Democracy’, *World Politics*, Vol. 53, No. 3, 2001, pp. 325–6, 331, 347.
34. Most notably from Herb, Sven Oskarsson, and Eric Ottosen. In 2005 Herb built a new dataset and used different methods to test Ross’s theory and arrived at only ambivalent conclusions. In particular, he noted the importance of other variables beyond hydrocarbon wealth, including the existence of oil-financed and potentially modernizing forces such as education and the complexities of Middle Eastern regional politics. In 2010 Oskarsson and Ottosen used time-series cross-section data from a thirty-year period to demonstrate the limits of Ross’s theory, especially

- regarding what constituted democratic and authoritarian political systems. M. Herb, 'No Representation Without Taxation? Rents, Development, and Democracy' in *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 37, No. 3, 2005, pp. 297, 310–311; S. Oskarsson and E. Ottosen, 'Does Oil Still Hinder Democracy?' in *Journal of Development Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 6, 2010, p. 1067.
35. M. Ross, 'Does Oil Hinder Democracy', *World Politics*, Vol. 53, No. 3, 2001, p. 331–3.
 36. Examples include J. Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf: Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); J. Ismael, *Kuwait: Dependency and Class in a Rentier State* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1993); S. Hertog, 'The Sociology of the Gulf Rentier Systems: Societies of Intermediaries' in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 52, No. 2, 2010; M. Gray, *Qatar: Politics and the Challenges of Development* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2013); and (in a paired comparison of Saudi Arabia and Yemen), K. Chaudhry, *The Price of Wealth: Economies and Institutions in the Middle East* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).
 37. S. Hertog, 'The Sociology of the Gulf Rentier Systems: Societies of Intermediaries' in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 52, No. 2, 2010, p. 1.
 38. Herb, for example, has argued in the context of the Gulf's 'dynastic monarchies' that rentier theory can only predict that such states will be authoritarian, and not how they will be authoritarian in the context of tribal and familial structures. As Jessie Moritz notes, many activists in the Gulf states who had received rentier state benefits were nonetheless still mobilized and often 'justified their action by reference to an ideology that encouraged challenges to state authority (for example Marxist-leftism, or religious groups who perceived a moral imperative to push for their beliefs)'. As Moritz also argues, this suggests that 'the [rentier state] co-optation mechanism has either been ineffective or overpowered by these other drivers of political mobilization'. Specifically regarding political Islam groups Gwenn Okruhlik notes how in Saudi Arabia, oil rents have often generated dissent in such quarters, rather than buying it off, as rentier theory would expect. Similarly, Courtney Freer has demonstrated how in Qatar and the UAE oil rents have failed to render political Islam groups irrelevant, and how such groups have managed to adapt to rentier circumstances. M. Herb, *All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution, and Democracy in Middle Eastern Monarchies* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), p. 3; J. Moritz, 'Oil and Societal Quiescence: Rethinking Causal Mechanisms in Rentier State Theory' in Project on Middle East Political Science, 'The Politics of Rentier States in the Gulf', *POMEPS Studies* No. 33, January 2019, p. 41; G. Okruhlik, 'Rentier Wealth, Unruly Law, and the Rise of Opposition: The Political Economy of Rentier States' in *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 31, April 1999, p. 11; C. Freer, 'Rentier Islamism in the Absence of Elections: The Political Role of Muslim Brotherhood Affiliates in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates' in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 3, 2017, p. 479; C. Freer, 'Does Government Funding Help Control the Religious Sphere? The Case of the Gulf Cooperation Council', London School of Economics Blog, 12 February 2020.
 39. R. Krimly, 'The political economy of rentier states: a case study of Saudi Arabia in the oil era, 1950–1990', PhD dissertation, George Washington University,

- 1993; R. Looney, 'Saudi Arabia: Measures of Transition from a Rentier State' in J. Kéchichian (ed.), *Iran, Iraq, and the Arab Gulf States* (New York: Palgrave, 2001); R. Looney, 'Development Strategies for Saudi Arabia: Escaping the Rentier State Syndrome' in *US Naval Postgraduate School Strategic Insights*, Vol 3, No. 3, 2004.
40. Hertog explains 'segmented clientelism' as a function of Saudi Arabia's 'parallel and often strictly separate existence of institutions and clienteles in the Saudi distributional system...'. He also describes how in Saudi Arabia, 'brokers are usually individuals...their brokerage function is often concealed behind a more innocuous outward position: businessman, lawyer, provider of "typing services", consultant, prince, and bureaucrat are some of the roles behind which a broker can lurk... the more complex the system, the more likely it is that transactions will involve cascades of brokerage, with several intermediaries between a good and its recipient'. S. Hertog, *Princes, Brokers, and Bureaucrats: Oil and the State in Saudi Arabia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), pp. 10–12; S. Hertog, 'The Sociology of the Gulf Rentier Systems: Societies of Intermediaries' in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 52, No. 2, 2010, p. 4.
 41. W. Krause, *Women in Civil Society: The State, Islamism, and Networks in the UAE* (New York: Palgrave, 2008), p. 1.
 42. K. Al-Mezaini, 'Private sector actors in the UAE and their role in the process of economic and political reform' in S. Hertog, G. Luciani, M. Valeri (eds.), *Business Politics in the Middle East* (London: Hurst & Co., 2013), p. 45.
 43. Herb's 'extreme rentier state' category also included Kuwait, Qatar, and Brunei. M. Herb, *The Wages of Oil: Parliaments and Economic Development in Kuwait and the UAE* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), pp. 14–15.
 44. M. Herb and M. Lynch, 'Introduction: The Politics of Rentier States in the Gulf' in Project on Middle East Political Science, 'The Politics of Rentier States in the Gulf', *POMEPS Studies* No. 33, January 2019, p. 3; A. Kropf and M. Ramady (eds.), *Employment and Career Motivation in the Arab Gulf States: The Rentier Mentality Revisited* (Berlin, Gerlach Press, 2015), p. 1.
 45. US oil production rose from 5.5 million barrels per day in 2010 to 9.4 million barrels per day in 2015, largely due to advanced hydraulic fracturing and computer-aided drilling techniques used to extract oil from existing shale formations. US Energy Information Administration, 'Table 11.1b World Crude Oil Production: Persian Gulf Nations, Non-OPEC, and World' [date accessed: 16 April 2019]; *Financial Times*, 'The US shale revolution: How it changed the world (and why nothing will ever be the same again)', 24 April 2015; Atlantic Council, 'The Shale Revolution and the New Geopolitics of Energy', 31 October 2014.
 46. From 2010 to 2015 total world oil production rose from 74.9 million barrels per day to 80.8 million barrels per day, mostly due to the increase in US production. US Energy Information Administration, 'Table 11.1b World Crude Oil Production: Persian Gulf Nations, Non-OPEC, and World' [date accessed: 16 April 2019].
 47. In June 2014 Brent crude oil was \$111.80 per barrel and in January 2016 it was \$30.70. Since then the highest oil price was \$81.03 in October 2018. In March 2020 it began to fall further, reaching just \$19.07 at the beginning of April 2020. US Energy Information Administration, 'Europe Brent Spot Price FOB (Dollars per Barrel)' [date accessed: 17 April 2020].

48. In 2007 Saudi Arabia consumed 2.4 million barrels of oil per day and the UAE consumed 0.6. In 2017 Saudi Arabia's consumption had risen to 3.9 million (an increase of 63 per cent) and the UAE's consumption had risen to 1 million (a 67 per cent increase). In 2007 Saudi Arabia consumed 70.7 billion cubic metres of natural gas and the UAE consumed 47.9 billion. In 2017, Saudi Arabia's consumption had risen to 111.4 billion (a 58 per cent increase) and the UAE's consumption had risen to 72.2 billion (a 51 per cent increase). British Petroleum, 'Statistical Review of World Energy: 2018' [date accessed: 18 April 2019], pp. 15, 29. For a further discussion of this phenomenon see J. Krane, 'Stability versus Sustainability: Energy Policy in the Gulf Monarchies' in *Energy Journal*, Vol. 36, No. 4, 2015; J. Krane, *Energy Kingdoms: Oil and Political Survival in the Persian Gulf* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019); J. Krane, 'Subsidy Reform and Tax Increases in the Rentier Middle East' in Project on Middle East Political Science, 'The Politics of Rentier States in the Gulf', *POMEPS Studies* No. 33, January 2019, p. 22.
49. Originally defined in the UAE context as those 'seeking fresh and less finite sources of economic rent from non-oil related activities such as the leasing of real-estate and the ownership of business parks... [they] have been pressed to seek a number of liberalising reforms in an effort to remove existing restrictive practices, to attract greater foreign investment...' C. Davidson, *The United Arab Emirates: A Study in Survival* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2005), chapter 4.
50. M. Gray, 'A Theory of Late Rentierism in the Arab State of the Gulf' in Georgetown University Qatar Centre for International and Regional Studies, Occasional Papers, August 2011, pp. 1–2, 37.
51. A. Hanieh, *Capitalism and Class in the Gulf Arab States* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011), pp. 2, 14.
52. US Department of State Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 'Mission Statement' [date accessed: 18 April 2019].
53. Freedom House, 'Freedom in the World 2008: Saudi Arabia', 1 January 2009; Freedom House, 'Freedom in the World 2008: United Arab Emirates', 1 January 2009.
54. Kazakhstan was awarded 5.5, 5, and 6; while the Democratic Republic of the Congo was awarded 5.5, 6, and 5. Freedom House, 'Freedom in the World 2008: Freedom in the World Countries', 1 January 2009.
55. Freedom House, 'Freedom in the World 2019: Saudi Arabia', 1 January 2019; Freedom House, 'Freedom in the World 2019: United Arab Emirates', 1 January 2019.
56. Ranked by aggregate scores. Freedom House, 'Freedom in the World 2019: Freedom in the World Countries', 1 January 2019.
57. Economist Intelligence Unit, 'Democracy Index 2018: Me too? Political participation, protest and democracy' [date accessed: 1 July 2019], pp. 39–40.
58. In 2018 Saudi Arabia's liberal democracy score was 0.04 (on a scale of 0 to 1) and its deliberative democracy score was 0.06. The UAE's liberal democracy score was 0.11 and its deliberative democracy score was 0.12 (the latter falling from 0.15 in 2008). The Varieties of Democracy project understands liberal democracy as 'emphasising the importance of protecting individual and minority rights against the tyranny of the state and the tyranny of the majority', and understands

deliberative democracy as ‘the process by which decisions are reached in a polity... a deliberative process is one in which public reasoning focused on the common good motivates political decisions—as contrasted with emotional appeals, solidary attachments, parochial interests, or coercion’. Varieties of Democracy, ‘2019 data’ [date accessed: 24 February 2020].

59. According to Karen Elliot House, during a 2010 meeting between her and King Salman, MBS also agreed (from the side-lines) with his father’s statement that ‘tribal tensions make democracy impossible in Saudi Arabia because every tribe would be a party and chaos would ensue’. B. Hubbard, *MBS: The Rise to Power of Mohammed bin Salman* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2020); *New York Times*, ‘“MBS” Chronicles the Shockingly Young, Powerful and Ruthless Saudi Crown Prince’, 9 March 2020; K. Elliot House, ‘Profile of a Prince: Promise and Peril in Mohammed bin Salman’s Vision 2030’, Belfer Center Paper, April 2019, pp. 9–10.
60. Citing Ali Shihabi of the Arabia Foundation, who has been described in the US media as ‘a kind of unofficial Saudi ambassador to the US’. The Arabia Foundation was understood to have been funded by Saudi businesspeople but was closed in July 2019 due to reported ‘differences of opinion’ amongst its donors. Since January 2020 Shihabi has been a board member of the Neom economic free zone’s advisory board. Al-Jazeera, ‘Khashoggi: Saudi Arabia can never be a democracy on MBS’s watch’, 3 October 2018; CNN, ‘GPS: Did Saudi Arabia get MORE authoritarian?’, 8 March 2019; *Politico*, ‘How a smooth Saudi operative charms Washington and defends the indefensible’, 23 October 2018; *National*, ‘Arabia Foundation think tank shuts down in Washington’, 31 July 2019; *Arab News*, ‘Ali Shihabi, Saudi author and member of the Neom advisory board’, 20 March 2020.
61. See for example R. Dahl, ‘What Political Institutions Does Large-Scale Democracy Require?’ in *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 120, No. 2, 2005, pp. 196–7; J. Cohen, ‘Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy’ in A. Hamlin and P. Petit (eds.), *The Good Polity: Normative Analysis of the State* (New York: Blackwell, 1989), p. 356.
62. Citing Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Anwar Gargash, *National*, ‘Amid challenges, UAE policies engage gradual reforms’, 26 August 2012.
63. As Oliver Schlumberger notes, at this time the US and many international organizations were expressing the view that Middle East authoritarianism was an obstacle to economic development. O. Schlumberger, ‘Arab Authoritarianism: Debating the Dynamics and Durability of Nondemocratic Regimes’ in O. Schlumberger (ed.), *Debating Arab Authoritarianism: Dynamics and Durability in Nondemocratic Regimes* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2007), pp. 3–4.
64. For a discussion on the ‘democracy language’ see H. Albrecht and O. Schlumberger, ‘Waiting for Godot: Regime Change Without Democratization in the Middle East’ in *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 25, No. 4, 2004, p. 376.
65. For a discussion on competitive authoritarianism see L. Way and S. Levitsky, ‘Elections Without Democracy: The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism’ in *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 2002.
66. L. Anderson, ‘The State in the Middle East and North Africa’ in *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 1987, p. 3.
67. F. Al-Sayegh, ‘Post 9/11 Changes in the Gulf: The Case of the UAE’ in *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 2004, p. 107.

68. With specific reference to Saudi Arabia and the UAE he also noted that ‘it would appear that some recognition of the need to adapt is present among most of the royal families in the Gulf...the organisation of municipal elections in Saudi Arabia was a further sign of such recognition...and so are the tentative moves in...the UAE’. G. Nonneman, ‘Political Reform in the Gulf Monarchies: From Liberalisation to Democratisation? A Comparative Perspective’, University of Durham Institute for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, Working Paper Series, No. 80, June 2006, pp. 29–31.
69. A. Ehteshami and S. Wright, ‘Political Change in the Arab Oil Monarchies: From Liberalization to Enfranchisement’ in *International Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 5, 2007, p. 914.
70. Calvert Jones, for example, has argued that ‘good theoretical reasons are provided why the liberal move could serve an autocrat’s interests, and subsequent predictions about behavior are said to be successful...but evidence is missing that autocrats actually reason in such highly-calculated, narrowly self-interested ways’. C.W. Jones, ‘Seeing Like an Autocrat: Liberal Social Engineering in an Illiberal State’ in *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 2015, p. 24.
71. Writing in 2002 Brumberg described how the Middle East had been witnessing a transition back to authoritarianism following ‘tactical political openings whose goal was to sustain rather than transform autocracies.’ D. Brumberg, ‘Democratization in the Arab World? The Trap of Liberalized Autocracy’ in *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 13, No. 4, 2002, pp. 56, 66–7.
72. Writing in 2000 Schlumberger observed that in most Arab states any attempt at political liberalization was a usually a regime ‘survival strategy’ that ‘did not go far beyond the introduction of a mechanism for venting popular political dissent’. Writing in 2004 with Albrecht he further noted that new institutions such as parliaments could serve as an important means of assessing public opinion on key topics. As they put it, ‘without risking much, the regimes can assess whether specific policies face serious resistance among the social groups and segments that their power is based on’. O. Schlumberger, ‘The Arab Middle East and the Question of Democratization: Some Critical Remarks’ in *Democratization*, Vol. 7, No. 4, 2000, p. 118; H. Albrecht and O. Schlumberger, ‘Waiting for Godot: Regime Change Without Democratization in the Middle East’ in *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 25, No. 4, 2004, p. 381.
73. Writing in 2007 Heydemann noted how, in a process of authoritarian upgrading, ‘Arab regimes have adapted to pressures for political change by developing strategies to contain and manage demands to democratize...they have expanded political spaces—electoral arenas in particular—where controlled forms of political contestation can occur’. Writing in 2010 Cavatorta noted how most elections in the Arab world were designed to confirm incumbents and, specifically on Morocco, how ‘the 2007 elections...did not represent a major turning point for the country, but simply another instrument the monarchy uses to strengthen its position’. Writing specifically on Syria, in 2012 Hinnebusch noted how Bashar Al-Assad had previously attempted to ‘modernize’ or ‘upgrade’ his authoritarianism by consolidating his own ‘reformist’ faction. S. Heydemann, ‘Upgrading Authoritarianism in the Arab World’, Brookings Institution Saban Center for

Middle East Policy, Analysis Paper No. 13, October 2007, p. 1; F. Cavatorta, 'The Convergence of Governance: Upgrading Authoritarianism in the Arab World and Downgrading Democracy Elsewhere?' in *Middle East Critique*, Vol. 19, No. 3, 2010, p. 217; R. Hinnebusch, 'Syria: From Authoritarian Upgrading to Revolution?' in *International Affairs*, Vol. 88, No. 1, 2012, p. 95.

74. A stratocracy being a military-led government which is supported or enforced by legislation.
75. In 2018 Freedom House gave Egypt scores of 6, 6, and 6 for freedom, political rights, and civil liberties. In 2018 the Economist Intelligence Unit ranked Egypt 127th in the world, above the UAE's 147th position and above Saudi Arabia's 159th position. Freedom House, 'Freedom in the World 2019: Egypt', 1 January 2019; Economist Intelligence Unit, 'Democracy Index 2018: Me too? Political participation, protest and democracy' [date accessed: 1 July 2019], p. 32.
76. Writing for *Foreign Policy*, Ryan Costello and Sina Toossi have made the case that '[MBS's] meteoric rise to power bears striking similarities to that of a past US ally-turned-nemesis whose brutality was initially overlooked by his Washington patrons: former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein'. Similarly, writing for the *Washington Post*, Jackson Diehl has argued that MBS is 'our next Saddam Hussein' on the basis that both were initially supported by the US and both were once considered modernizers. R. Costello and S. Toossi, 'Mohammed bin Salman Is the Next Saddam Hussein', *Foreign Policy*, 29 October 2018; *Washington Post*, 'Our New Saddam Hussein', 7 July 2019.
77. In 2018 Freedom House gave Syria scores of 6, 6, and 6 for freedom, political rights, and civil liberties. In 2018 the Economist Intelligence Unit ranked Syria 166th in the world, below the UAE's 147th position and below Saudi Arabia's 159th position. Freedom House, 'Freedom in the World 2019: Syria', 1 January 2019; Economist Intelligence Unit, 'Democracy Index 2018: Me too? Political participation, protest and democracy' [date accessed: 1 July 2019], p. 32. In 2012 the new Syrian constitution permitted a multi-party system. Syrian Arab News Agency, 'Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic Approved in Popular Referendum on February 27, 2012', 28 February 2012.
78. For a discussion on the prohibition of political parties in Saudi Arabia and the UAE see section 7.1. For a discussion on the lack of ideological platforms see section 8.1.
79. In 2018 Freedom House gave Iran scores of 6, 6, and 6 for freedom, political rights, and civil liberties. In 2018 the Economist Intelligence Unit ranked Iran 150th in the world, below the UAE's 147th position and above Saudi Arabia's 159th position. Freedom House, 'Freedom in the World 2019: Iran', 1 January 2019; Economist Intelligence Unit, 'Democracy Index 2018: Me too? Political participation, protest and democracy' [date accessed: 1 July 2019], p. 32.
80. Articles 4, 5, and 57 explain and legitimate the jurist's supremacy while articles 110 and 177 expand upon the jurist's powers. Constitute Project, 'Iran (Islamic Republic of)'s Constitution of 1979 with Amendments through 1989' [date accessed: 23 April 2019], pp. 10, 20, 29–30, 42–3.
81. For recent discussions see C. Sherrill, 'After Khamenei: Who Will Succeed Iran's Supreme Leader?' in *Orbis*, Vol. 55, No. 4, 2011, pp.632–635; A. Ganji, 'Who Is Ali

- Khamenei: The Worldview of Iran's Supreme Leader' in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 92, No. 5, 2013.
82. Wahhabism being based on the unitarian teachings of the eighteenth-century preacher Muhammad bin Abd Al-Wahhab, who had called for a more purified brand of Islam based on the fundamental tenets of Islam as laid down by the Quran and a doctrine of *tawhid* (absolute monotheism based on the 'centrality of God's unqualified oneness in Sunni Islam'). Ultimately led by the Al-Saud dynasty following Al-Wahhab's death, the Wahhabis had become a 'religio-military confederacy under which the desert people, stirred by a great idea, embarked on a common action' and sought constant expansion in the manner of the original Islamic concept of *dar al-harb* or 'territory of war'—referring to the conquering of non-Islamic lands. Though defeated by an Ottoman-backed Egyptian force in the early nineteenth century, the Saudi–Wahhabi alliance soon returned to power, controlling even more of central Arabia by the end of the century. M. Peck, *The United Arab Emirates: A Venture in Unity* (Boulder: Westview, 1986), pp. 29–30; D. Hawley, *The Trucial States* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1970), pp. 96–7; C. Belgrave, *The Pirate Coast* (London: Bell and Sons, 1966), p.25; M. Juergensmeyer and W. Clark Roof (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Global Religion* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2011), p. 1,369; C. Glasse (ed.), *The New Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), pp. 469–72; J. Esposito, *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 333.
 83. The Maliki school deriving its rulings from *istislah* (the principle of public interest) in those areas in which the Quran or the *hadith* do not provide explicit guidance. J. Nasir, *The Islamic Law of Personal Status* (Leiden: Brill Academic, 1990), pp. 16–17; US Department of State, 'A long hot summer for UAE–Saudi relations (cable: 09ABUDHABI981_a)', 15 October 2009; C. Davidson, *Abu Dhabi: Oil and Beyond* (London: Hurst & Co., 2009), pp. 8–9.
 84. M. Al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State: Islamic Voices from a New Generation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 57–8.
 85. S. Hertog, 'Shaping the Saudi State: Human Agency's Shifting Role in Rentier-State Formation' in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 4, 2007, p. 543.
 86. M. Al-Atawneh, 'Is Saudi Arabia a Theocracy? Religion and Governance in Contemporary Saudi Arabia' in *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 5, 2009, p. 733.
 87. The King of Saudi Arabia's religious title being *Khadim al-Haramayn al-Sharifayn* which more precisely translates as 'The Servant of the Two Noble Sanctuaries'. This title has been in use since the reign of King Fahd bin Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud.
 88. *New York Times*, 'Saudi Arabia Is Misusing Mecca', 12 November 2018.
 89. E. Alhusein, 'Saudi First: How hyper-nationalism is transforming Saudi Arabia', European Council on Foreign Relations, 19 June 2019.
 90. K. Ulrichsen and A. Sheline, 'Mohammed bin Salman and Religious Authority and Reform in Saudi Arabia', Baker Institute for Public Policy, 19 September 2019, p. 1.
 91. K. Christie, 'Globalisation, Religion and State Formation in the United Arab Emirates and Pakistan' in *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 2010, p. 203.
 92. For a discussion on MBS and MBZ's stance on political Islam see section 8.4.

93. In his 2004 study on parliaments in the Arab world, Herb notes that only Saudi Arabia and the UAE can be considered ‘absolute monarchies’. In 2018 Ellen Wald similarly claimed that Saudi Arabia ‘is an absolute monarchy...when it comes down to it, the monarch can really take anything’. M. Herb, ‘Princes and Parliaments in the Arab World’ in *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 58, No. 3, 2004, p. 368; Bloomberg, ‘Saudi Prince’s Rise to Power Turns Him into a Billionaire Boss’, 11 August 2019.
94. MBS’s first answer was prompted by his interviewer claiming that Saudi Arabia was an absolute monarchy. MBS qualified his statement by claiming that ‘the Saudi fabric is much more complicated than you think...and actually our king doesn’t have absolute power...his power is based in law’. *Atlantic*, ‘Saudi Crown Prince: Iran’s Supreme Leader Makes Hitler Look Good’, 2 April 2018; *Time*, ‘Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Talks to TIME About the Middle East, Saudi Arabia’s Plans and President Trump’, 5 April 2018; US Department of State Office of the Historian, ‘French Alliance, French Assistance, and European Diplomacy during the American Revolution, 1778–1782’ [date accessed: 3 April 2020].
95. For discussions on divine authority in France and Russia see P. Roberts, ‘Royal Authority and Justice during the French Religious Wars’ in *Past & Present*, No. 184, 2004; L. Hughes, *The Romanovs: Ruling Russia, 1613–1917* (New York: Continuum, 2009).
96. As Sebastian Maisel notes, in Saudi Arabia ‘the doctrine of divine right of kings would be considered heresy’. S. Maisel, ‘Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’ in M. Gasiorowski, D. Long, and B. Reich (eds.), *The Government and Politics of the Middle East and North Africa* (Boulder, Westview, 2013), p. 109.
97. BBC, ‘Mohammed bin Salman: How Saudi Arabia’s crown prince rose to power’ [date accessed: 24 October 2019]
98. Bloomberg, ‘The \$2 Trillion Project to Get Saudi Arabia’s Economy Off Oil’, 21 April 2016.
99. G. Gause, ‘Fresh Prince’, *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2018; G. Gause, ‘Why the US Should Stay Out of Saudi Politics’, *Foreign Affairs*, 18 December 2018.
100. *New York Times*, ‘Uproar Over Dissident Rattles Saudi Royal Family’, 19 October 2018.
101. K. Elliot House, ‘Profile of a Prince: Promise and Peril in Mohammed bin Salman’s Vision 2030’, Belfer Center Paper, April 2019, p. 6.
102. K. Ulrichsen, ‘Crown Prince of Disorder’, *Foreign Policy*, 21 March 2018.
103. *Financial Times*, ‘UAE: the Middle East’s power broker flexes its muscles’, 24 October 2017.
104. *New York Times*, ‘The most powerful Arab ruler isn’t MBS. It’s MBZ’, 3 June 2019; *New York Times*, ‘Mohammed bin Zayed’s Dark Vision of the Middle East’s Future’, 9 January 2020.
105. Associated Press, ‘Powerful Emirati crown prince entangled by Mueller report’, 19 April 2019.
106. Bloomberg, ‘A Military Power Rises in the Mideast, Courtesy of One Man’, 24 November 2015.
107. Qantara, ‘UAE foreign policy and the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi: Hardly a ruler in waiting’, 28 March 2018 [in German].

108. *New York Times*, ‘Germany Rebukes Its Own Intelligence Agency for Criticizing Saudi Policy’, 3 December 2015; *Telegraph*, ‘Saudi Arabia destabilising Arab world, German intelligence warns’, 2 December 2015; Reuters, ‘German spy agency warns of Saudi shift to “impulsive” policies’, 2 December 2015.
109. *New York Times*, ‘The Prince Who Would Remake the World’, 21 June 2018.
110. T. Lippman, ‘2019 Hasn’t Been Good to Mohammed bin Salman’, Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, 19 December 2019.
111. G. Gause, ‘Why the US Should Stay Out of Saudi Politics’, *Foreign Affairs*, 18 December 2018.
112. *Washington Post*, ‘Has Mohammed bin Salman finally gone too far?’, 16 October 2018.
113. *Financial Times*, ‘Saudi Arabia’s strongman is doing too much, too fast’, 7 March 2018.
114. Senator Marco Rubio’s comments were in the context of a Senate confirmation hearing on the appointment of the new US ambassador to Saudi Arabia, John Abizaid. Arab Digest, ‘Saudi Arabia: pressures on kingdom and King’, 8 March 2019; *Politico*, ‘Rubio says Saudi crown prince has gone “full gangster”’, 6 March 2019.
115. *Time*, ‘100 Most Influential People 2019: Crown Prince Mohamed bin Zayed’ [date accessed: 24 April 2019].
116. Referring to Barack Obama era officials. *New York Times*, ‘Mohammed bin Zayed’s Dark Vision of the Middle East’s Future’, 9 January 2020.
117. P. Salisbury, ‘Risk Perception and Appetite in UAE Foreign and National Security Policy’, Chatham House, Middle East and North Africa Programme, July 2020, p. 2.
118. *Zenith*, ‘Die MbZ-Doktrin’, 10 July 2018 [in German].
119. For a discussion on the literal and historical meanings of sultanism see section 3.1.
120. See for example, M. Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1978), Part 1 [edited by G. Roth and C. Wittich], pp. 231–2, 341; M. Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947). p. 347. For a discussion on Weber’s definitions of sultanism see section 3.1.
121. ‘Orientalism’ in this sense usually referring to a Western-centric notion that the eastern world remains static and undeveloped as a result of its oriental culture. For recent balanced overviews of orientalism in contemporary political thought see D. Varisco, *Reading Orientalism: Said and the Unsaid* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), pp. 3–28; A. Shatz, ‘Orientalism, Then and Now’, *New York Review of Books*, 20 May 2019. For a discussion on sultanism’s oriental origins and criticism of the concept’s orientalist underpinnings see sections 3.1 and 3.2.
122. For a discussion on the application of sultanism to regimes outside the Arab and Islamic worlds and the ‘freeing’ of sultanism from its earlier orientalist connotations see sections 3.5 and 3.6.
123. Outside the region, the only other state to call itself officially a sultanate is Brunei. However, the Yogyakarta specially administered district in Indonesia and Malaysia’s nine hereditary monarchies are also referred to as sultanates. See section 3.5.
124. M. Valeri, ‘Oman’ in C. Davidson (ed.), *Power and Politics in the Persian Gulf Monarchies* (London: Hurst & Co., 2011), p. 158; M. Valeri, ‘Simmering unrest and succession

- challenges in Oman', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, January 2015, pp. 11–15.
125. US Department of State, 'Oman, Inc.: Business Oligarchs and Government in Oman's Economy (cable: 09MUSCAT851_a)', 16 August 2009.
 126. In both 2008 and 2018 the Economist Intelligence Unit ranked Oman 140th in the world, above the UAE's 147th position and Saudi Arabia's 159th position. Between 2008 and 2018 Freedom House's 'political rights' score for Oman improved from 6 to 5. Economist Intelligence Unit, 'The Economist Intelligence Unit's Index of Democracy 2008' [date accessed: 3 May 2019], pp. 7–8; Economist Intelligence Unit, 'Democracy Index 2018: Me too? Political participation, protest and democracy' [date accessed: 1 July 2019], p. 32; Freedom House, 'Freedom in the World 2008: Oman', 1 January 2009; Freedom House, 'Freedom in the World 2019: Oman', 1 January 2019.
 127. Reuters, 'Oman's new ruler Haitham bin Tariq takes oath: newspapers', 11 January 2020.
 128. M. Valeri, *Oman: Politics and Society in the Qaboos State* (London: Hurst & Co., 2009), pp. 97, 124.
 129. Having no sons, Qaboos bin Said had never publicly designated an heir, but was understood to have named his chosen successor in his will. Associated Press, 'Oman names culture minister as successor to Sultan Qaboos', 11 January 2020; Congressional Research Service, 'Oman: Reform, Security, and US Policy', 26 April 2016, p. 3.
 130. In a televised February 2020 address Haitham bin Tariq promised 'a continuation of his predecessor's agenda'. With regard to a ruling coalition, Haitham bin Tariq's two older brothers were long assumed to be rivals. The eldest, Shihab bin Tariq Al-Said, was appointed deputy prime minister for defence affairs in March 2020. The second eldest, Assad bin Tariq Al-Said, has maintained his position as deputy prime minister for international affairs. *National*, 'Oman's Sultan Haitham sets out agenda of peace in public address', 23 February 2020; K. Smith Diwan, 'Oman's New Sultan Unlikely to Pursue Qaboos' Monopoly of Power', Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, 10 February 2020; *Oman Observer*, 'Sayyid Asaad appointed Deputy Prime Minister for international relations affairs', 2 March 2017; *Oman Pulse*, 'His Majesty The Sultan appoints new Deputy Prime Minister for Defense Affairs', 9 March 2020.
 131. In April 2020 the Omani government partially ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (with reservations on the right to form trade unions and the right to strike—as per article 8), thus leaving Saudi Arabia and the UAE as the only Gulf states not to have signed it. At the same time, the government also fully ratified the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment of Human Rights. Up until then Oman had been the only Gulf state not to have signed it. Omani Centre for Human Rights, 'The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights', 18 April 2020.
 132. *New York Times*, 'In Surprise, Emir of Qatar Plans to Abdicate, Handing Power to Son', 24 June 2013.

133. President Muhammad Morsi was ousted on 3 July 2013 following a sustained campaign by the *Tamarod* or ‘Rebellion’ movement. Though described by the international media at the time as a ‘grassroots protest movement’ (and with US Secretary of State John Kerry refusing to describe it as a coup, but rather claiming it was ‘restoring democracy’), it later emerged that *Tamarod* had been orchestrated by the Egyptian military and was partly financed by Saudi Arabia and the UAE. As a former US diplomat has since suggested, ‘there’s every reason to believe [MBZ] staged a coup...for a tiny country in the Persian Gulf to overthrow the ruler of Egypt and put their guy in, that’s a big achievement’. BBC, ‘Profile: Egypt’s Tamarod protest movement’, 1 July 2013; *New York Times*, ‘Recordings Suggest Emirates and Egyptian Military Pushed Ousting of Morsi’, 1 March 2015; *New York Times*, ‘Mohammed bin Zayed’s Dark Vision of the Middle East’s Future’, 9 January 2020; D. Roberts, ‘Qatar and the Muslim Brotherhood: Pragmatism or Preference?’ in *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 21, No. 3, 2014, p. 84; BBC, ‘Egypt army “restoring democracy”, says John Kerry’, 1 August 2013.
134. S. Henderson, ‘The Palace Intrigue at the Heart of the Qatar Crisis’, *Foreign Policy*, 30 June 2017.
135. Prominent members of the Al-Attiyah family include Abdul Rahman bin Hamad Al-Attiyah (a former Secretary-General of the GCC), Abdullah bin Hamad Al-Attiyah (a former deputy prime minister and minister of energy and industry), Hamad bin Ali Al-Attiyah (a former minister of state for defence and chief of staff of the armed forces), and Khalid bin Mohammad Al-Attiyah (a former minister of foreign affairs and the current minister of state for defence).
136. Qatar’s 2004 constitution mandated elections for the government’s forty-five-member advisory council. However, these elections have been repeatedly delayed, most recently in 2016 when a decree was issued to delay the elections for a further three years. In recent years, repression seems to have become less common. In its 2018 report on Qatar, for example, the US Department of State’s Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor noted that five ‘citizens and expatriates’ had been arbitrarily arrested, but that ‘civilian authorities maintained effective control over security forces’ and that ‘there were no reports of disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities’. Economist Intelligence Unit, ‘Emir postpones legislative election until 2019’, 20 July 2016; US Department of State Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, ‘Qatar 2018 Human Rights Report’ [date accessed: 29 April 2019].
137. In 2008 the Economist Intelligence Unit ranked Qatar 144th in the world and in 2018 it was ranked 133rd in the world. Between 2008 and 2018 Freedom House’s ‘political rights’ score for Qatar improved from 6 to 5. Economist Intelligence Unit, ‘The Economist Intelligence Unit’s Index of Democracy 2008’ [date accessed: 3 May 2019], pp. 7–8; Economist Intelligence Unit, ‘Democracy Index 2018: Me too? Political participation, protest and democracy’ [date accessed: 1 July 2019], pp. 32; Freedom House, ‘Freedom in the World 2008: Qatar’, 1 January 2009; Freedom House, ‘Freedom in the World 2019: Qatar’, 1 January 2019.
138. In May 2018 the Qatari government ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and (as one of only three Gulf states to do so—along with Bahrain and Kuwait) the International Covenant on Civil and

- Political Rights. Amnesty International, ‘Qatar finally joins two key human rights treaties—but what does it really mean for migrant workers?’, 13 June 2018.
139. Constitute Project, ‘Kuwait’s Constitution of 1962, reinstated in 1992: article 101’ [date accessed 1 May 2019], p. 17; Constitute Project, ‘Bahrain’s Constitution of 2002: articles 65–6’ [date accessed 1 May 2019], p. 17.
140. As Herb has defined it, ‘parliamentarism’ is the ability of a parliament to ‘determine the composition of the government, with the monarch having little voice’. As Samuel Huntington has defined it, ‘parliamentary monarchy’ is a situation in which the monarch reigns but rule is carried out by ‘a cabinet formed by political parties and responsible to a popularly elected parliament...the ultimate source of legitimacy lies in the people’. M. Herb, ‘Princes and Parliaments in the Arab World’ in *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 58, No. 3, 2004, p. 368; S. Huntington, ‘The Political Modernization of Traditional Monarchies’ in *Daedalus*, Vol. 95, No. 3, 1966, p. 763.
141. For a discussion on Kuwait’s political culture, see J. Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf: Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp 1–14; S. Yom, ‘Oil, Coalitions, and Regime Durability: The Origins and Persistence of Popular Rentierism in Kuwait’ in *Studies in Comparative International Development*, Vol. 46, No. 2, 2011, pp. 217–41; M. Herb, ‘The Origins of Kuwait’s National Assembly’, LSE Kuwait Programme Paper Series, No. 39, 2016, p. 8. For a discussion on Bahrain’s political culture, see M. Herb, ‘Democratization in the Arab World? Emirs and Parliaments in the Gulf’ in *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 13, No. 4, 2003, pp. 45–7; G. Power, ‘The Difficult Development of Parliamentary Politics in the Gulf: Parliaments and the Process of Managed Reform in Kuwait, Bahrain and Oman’, LSE Kuwait Programme Paper Series, No. 25, 2012, pp. 12–16.
142. In 2018 Freedom House scored Tunisia 2, 3, and 2.5. Lebanon’s scores were 5, 4, and 4.5. Jordan’s scores were 5, 5, and 5. In 2018 the Economist Intelligence Unit ranked Kuwait joint-116th in the world. Freedom House, ‘Freedom in the World 2008: Kuwait’, 1 January 2009; Freedom House, ‘Freedom in the World 2019: Kuwait’, 1 January 2019; Freedom House, ‘Freedom in the World 2019: Tunisia’, 1 January 2019; Freedom House, ‘Freedom in the World 2019: Lebanon’, 1 January 2019; Freedom House, ‘Freedom in the World 2019: Jordan’, 1 January 2019; Economist Intelligence Unit, ‘Democracy Index 2018: Me too? Political participation, protest and democracy’ [date accessed: 1 July 2019], p. 32.
143. Nasser bin Muhammad was prime minister from 2006 to 2011, when he was ousted following popular protests. Ahmed Al-Fahad was OPEC Secretary-General in 2005 and minister of oil from 2002 to 2006. BBC, ‘Kuwait’s prime minister resigns after protests’, 28 November 2011; OPEC, ‘Secretary Generals of OPEC, 1961–2008’ [date accessed 2 May 2019], p. 3; Kuwait Petroleum Corporation, ‘Oil Ministers in History’ [date accessed 2 May 2019]. For a discussion on the long-running feud between the two men see Economist Intelligence Unit, ‘Olympic ban highlights ongoing royal family power struggle’, 13 January 2017; *International Policy Digest*, ‘Kuwaiti Rulers Fight their Internal Battles on the Sports Field’, 20 June 2016.
144. K. Smith Diwan, ‘Kuwait’s MbS: The Reform Agenda of Nasser Sabah al-Ahmed al-Sabah’, Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, 16 April 2018.
145. Agence France-Presse, ‘New Kuwait cabinet: Emir names eldest son as defence minister’, 11 December 2017; Kuwait News Agency, ‘China, Kuwait ink

- cooperative deals, MoUs' 3 June 2014; Reuters, 'Kuwait plan for northern mega city faces political hurdles', 1 May 2019.
146. The minister of the interior, Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah, was also removed from his position. *Kuwait Times*, 'Amir removes top ministers; PM declines post', 18 November 2019; *Forbes*, 'Political Turmoil and Corruption Allegations Cast A Shadow Over Kuwait', 19 November 2019.
 147. In 2008 Freedom House scored Bahrain 5, 5, and 5. In 2018 Bahrain's scores were 7, 6, and 6.5. In 2018 the Economist Intelligence Unit ranked Bahrain 148th in the world, below the UAE's 147th position. Freedom House, 'Freedom in the World 2008: Bahrain', 1 January 2009; Freedom House, 'Freedom in the World 2019: Bahrain', 1 January 2019; Economist Intelligence Unit, 'Democracy Index 2018: Me too? Political participation, protest and democracy' [date accessed: 1 July 2019], p. 32.
 148. For a discussion on the regime's response to the 2011 protests see M. Tétreault, 'The Winter of the Arab Spring in the Gulf Monarchies' in *Globalizations*, Vol. 8, No. 5, 2011, pp. 632–3; K. Ulrichsen, 'After the Arab Spring: power shift in the Middle East?: Bahrain's aborted revolution', LSE IDEAS special reports, May 2012, p. 29.
 149. BBC, 'Gulf states send forces to Bahrain following protests', 14 March 2011. The fiscal aid package was funded by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Kuwait. Reuters, 'Saudi, Kuwait, UAE to sign \$10 billion Bahrain aid deal: Kuwait newspaper', 4 October 2018.
 150. Khalifa bin Salman, an uncle of the king, has been prime minister since 1971. Khalifa bin Ahmad, a descendant of the 'Khawalid' branch of the Al-Khalifa, was appointed commander-in-chief of the Bahrain Defence Force in 2008. Bahrain Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'HRH The Prime Minister' [date accessed: 2 November 2019]; Official Gazette of the Kingdom of Bahrain, 'Royal Decree No. 2 of the Year 2008 on the Appointment of the Commander-in-Chief of the Bahrain Defence Force', 6 January 2008.
 151. For a discussion on the reputation of the various Al-Khalifa members and the apparent tension within the dynasty, see Reuters, 'Analysis - Reforms side-lined along with Bahrain's crown prince', 11 May 2011; Reuters, 'Saudi and Bahrain expected to seek union: minister', 14 May 2012; J. Gengler, 'Bahrain's Crown Prince Makes His Move', *Foreign Policy*, 20 January 2014; L. Louër, 'Sectarianism and Coup-Proofing Strategies in Bahrain' in *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Col. 36, No. 2, 2013, pp. 256–8.
 152. Nasser bin Hamad's mother being Sheikha bint Hassan Al Khrayyesh Al-Ajmi.
 153. Nasser bin Hamad married Shaikha bint Muhammad bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, a daughter of Muhammad bin Rashid Al-Maktoum. *National*, 'UAE, Bahraini royalty wed', 29 September 2009; *Bahrain Tribune*, 'Colonel Shaikh Nasser To Head Royal Guard', 20 June 2011.
 154. In 2016, for example, Nasser bin Hamad won the bronze medal at the World Endurance Championship. In 2015 it was reported that Nasser bin Hamad was being sent to Yemen to assist with Saudi Arabia and the UAE's 'Operation Decisive Storm' joint intervention in Yemen. Bahrain Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Youth and Sports' [date accessed 2 November 2019]; *Al-Arabiya*, 'Bahrain's King: My sons will be sent to help coalition forces in Yemen', 7 September 2015. For a discussion on

Saudi Arabia and the UAE's 'Operation Decisive Storm' joint intervention in Yemen see section 4.5 endnote 255.

155. *New York Times*, 'Bahrain's King Hamad Appoints Son National Security Adviser', 18 October 2019.
156. Gulf States Newsletter, 'Bahrain: Speculation grows over position of PM Khalifa Bin Salman, as Nasser Bin Hamad's star rises further', 17 August 2018; K. Smith Diwan, 'Bahrain's Royal Family Adjusts for the Future', Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, 25 October 2019.

2. RESEARCH METHODS AND DATA COLLECTION

1. For a discussion on these and other such terms see sections 3.3–3.5. For a further discussion on the messy nature of existing typologies and lack of consensus see F. Guliyev, 'Personal Rule, Neopatrimonialism, and Regime Typologies: Integrating Dahlian and Weberian Approaches to Regime Studies' in *Democratization*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 2011, p. 576.
2. Psychobiography being the study of historically significant individuals using a combination of psychological theories and historical evidence. It has been used, thus far, to study influential individuals such as Abraham Lincoln, Adolf Hitler, and Saddam Hussein. B. Carducci, *The Psychology of Personality: Viewpoints, Research, and Applications* (London: Wiley, 2009) p. 196; C. Rollyson, *Biography: A User's Guide* (New York: Ivan Ree, 2008) p. 3.
3. J. Gerschewski, 'The Three Pillars of Stability: Legitimation, Repression and Cooptation in Autocratic Regimes' in *Democratization*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 2013, p. 14
4. P. Bourdieu [translated by P. Collier], *Homo Academicus* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), pp. 40–1.
5. See, for example, B. Geddes, 'Paradigms and Sand Castles in Comparative Politics of Developing Areas' in W. Crotty (ed.), *Political Science: Looking to the Future* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1991), p. 46; D. Collier, 'Critical Junctures, Concepts, and Methods' in G. Munck, R. Snyder, and G. Almond (eds.), *Passion, Craft, and Method in Comparative Politics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), p. 598.
6. *New York Times*, 'Why Is There So Much Saudi Money in American Universities?', 3 July 2019.
7. Singapore, for example, scores very highly across most major government data quality indices. It is ranked 23rd in the world by the Global Open Data Index and 18th by the Data Quality Index. Open Knowledge International, 'Global Open Data Index 2015' [date accessed: 9 May 2019]; World Economics, 'The Data Quality Index (DQI)', 28 September 2018.
8. China was ranked 93rd, Togo 96th, Kuwait 93rd, Qatar 86th, Bahrain 78th, and Oman 66th. Open Knowledge International, 'Global Open Data Index 2015' [date accessed: 9 May 2019].
9. Saudi Arabia was ranked 51st, the UAE 53rd, Rwanda 62nd, Bahrain 37th, and Qatar 40th. World Economics, 'The Data Quality Index (DQI)', 28 September 2018.
10. World Wide Web Foundation, 'Open Data Barometer 2017: Saudi Arabia' [date accessed: 9 May 2019].

11. Based on oil prices of \$30.70 in January 2016. US Energy Information Administration, 'Europe Brent Spot Price FOB (Dollars per Barrel)' [date accessed: 17 April 2019].
12. For its 2015 projections the IMF revised Saudi Arabia's breakeven price to \$94 and the UAE's to just \$65. International Monetary Fund, 'Middle East and Central Asia Regional Economic Outlook: Breakeven Fiscal Oil Price for Saudi Arabia' [date accessed: 15 June 2019]; International Monetary Fund, 'Middle East and Central Asia Regional Economic Outlook: Breakeven Fiscal Oil Price for UAE' [date accessed: 15 June 2019].
13. CNN, 'These countries are getting killed by cheap oil', 30 October 2014; *Arab News*, 'Saudi breakeven oil price crawls higher', 6 January 2014.
14. Economist Intelligence Unit, 'The Middle East's oil price challenge', 8 October 2014; *Telegraph*, 'The countries punished by an Opec-fuelled oil price rout', 27 November 2014.
15. Prior to its formal nationalization in 1988, the company was known as the Arabian–American Oil Company (and before that as the California–Arabian Standard Oil Company). Saudi Aramco, 'Our History: Driven by the Curiosity to Explore' [date accessed: 14 November 2019].
16. The proposal for the initial public offering was to sell a 5 per cent stake in the company via parallel local and international listings. *Economist*, 'Saudi Arabia is considering an IPO of Aramco, probably the world's most valuable company', 7 January 2016; Bloomberg, 'Saudi Aramco's \$2 Trillion Zombie IPO', 7 July 2018; Reuters, 'Exclusive: Aramco IPO halted, oil giant disbands advisers—sources', 22 August 2018.
17. Bloomberg, 'Saudi Aramco's \$2 Trillion Zombie IPO', 7 July 2018.
18. Bloomberg, 'Shock, Laughter Greet Plan for Saudi Arabia's Record Oil IPO', 8 January 2016.
19. *Wall Street Journal*, 'For Aramco Insiders, Prince's \$2 Trillion IPO Valuation Doesn't Add Up', 25 April 2017.
20. *Wall Street Journal*, 'PointState Capital's Zachary Schreiber says he's shorting the Saudi riyal', 4 May 2016.
21. Bloomberg, 'The Aramco Accounts: Inside the World's Most Profitable Company', 13 April 2018; Reuters, 'Breakingviews—Saudi Aramco is big, just not big enough', 2 April 2019.
22. In February 2019 Apple was valued at \$822 billion, Microsoft at \$813 billion, and Amazon at \$806 billion. CNBC, 'Apple is once again the most valuable public company in the world', 6 February 2019.
23. Reuters, 'Exclusive: Aramco IPO halted, oil giant disbands advisers - sources', 22 August 2018.
24. Bloomberg, 'Saudi Aramco's \$2 Trillion Zombie IPO', 7 July 2018.
25. Khalid Al-Mezaini provides a detailed discussion on the motivations behind the UAE's foreign aid programme, concluding that '[it] is guided by certain forces and motives, ranging from political calculation to ideational and cultural forces'. K. Al-Mezaini, *The UAE and Foreign Policy: Foreign Aid, Identities and Interests* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), p. 101.

26. Set by UN Resolution 2626. United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2626 (XXV), 'International Development Strategy for the Second United Nations Development Decade', 24 October 1970, paragraph 43.
27. *National*, 'Emirates' Dh163bn gift to the world since 1971', 1 July 2010; *National*, 'UAE is world's top donor of development aid in 2017, report shows', 9 April 2018.
28. In 2018 Sweden contributed 1.04 per cent of its GDP to foreign aid, Norway contributed 0.98 per cent, and Denmark 0.72 per cent. OECD, 'Official Development Assistance (ODA): preliminary data 2019' [date accessed: 28 June 2019].
29. See for example *Financial Times*, 'Dubai fears the end of its 'build it and they will come' model', 1 April 2019; *Khaleej Times*, 'Dubai house prices to drop 5 to 10% more this year', 8 January 2019; Economist Intelligence Unit, 'Conditions for expatriates become more difficult', 30 June 2016.
30. For a discussion on the Dubai crash see sections 5.4 and 6.2
31. Bloomberg, 'Nobody Knows How Dubai's Economy's Been Doing Lately', 6 March 2019.
32. According to the US Department of State's 2018 briefing on Saudi Arabia, for example, despite the promulgation in 2016 of a new law on civil society organizations, the government is understood to 'strictly limit this right' with the Ministry of Labour and Social Development reportedly using 'arbitrary means, such as requiring unreasonable types and quantities of information, to delay and effectively deny licenses to associations'. Moreover, as Caroline Montagu has described, 'associations registered with, and approved by, the government exist within limited mandates.... other associational life is difficult, often illegal, often virtual and often banned'. Similarly, the US Department of State's 2018 briefing on the UAE notes that there are numerous restrictions on civil society organizations and that 'associations must follow the government's censorship guidelines and receive prior government approval before publishing any material'. US Department of State, '2018 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Saudi Arabia' [date accessed: 23 February 2020]; C. Montagu, 'Civil Society in Saudi Arabia: The Power and Challenges of Association', Chatham House Middle East and North Africa Programme, March 2015, p. 3; Saudi Arabia Law, 'Concerning Associations and Foundations', 17 March 2016; US Department of State, '2018 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: United Arab Emirates' [date accessed: 23 February 2020].
33. In 2018 V-Dem scored Saudi Arabia 0.7 (on a scale of 0 to 3) for civil society participatory environment. The UAE scored 1.79, North Korea and China both scored 0.7, Somalia scored 1.73, Jordan scored 2.15, and Libya scored 2.27. Varieties of Democracy, '2018 data' [date accessed: 11 May 2019].
34. For a discussion on national and local media organizations see section 7.3.
35. Thomas Carlyle attributed the term to Edmund Burke, who used it in a British parliamentary debate in 1787 with regard to allowing the press into the House of Commons. J. Schultz, *Reviving the Fourth Estate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 49.
36. Reporters Without Borders, '2019 World Press Freedom Index: Saudi Arabia' [date accessed: 10 May 2019]; Reporters Without Borders, '2019 World Press Freedom Index: United Arab Emirates' [date accessed: 10 May 2019].

37. For a good discussion on Saudi universities and their relationship with rentier state strategies, see A. Mazawi, 'The Academic Profession in a Rentier State: The Professoriate in Saudi Arabia' in *Minerva*, Vol. 43, No. 3, 2005, p. 224.
38. J. Nagle, 'Academic freedom: I spent four months at UAE's national university – this is what I found', *Conversation*, 22 October 2018.
39. K. Ulrichsen, 'Academic Freedom and UAE Funding', *Foreign Policy*, 25 February 2013.
40. Scholars at Risk Network, 'Academic Freedom Monitoring Project: Saudi Arabia' [date accessed: 11 May 2019].
41. Referring to Anas Al-Mazrou, who had attempted to raise the topic of detained activists. *Financial Times*, 'Saudi Arabia arrests supporters of jailed rights activists', 5 April 2019.
42. In 2011 the *New York Times* reported that 'the financing of NYU Abu Dhabi is noteworthy...the college is being entirely paid for by Abu Dhabi, the largest and richest of the United Arab Emirates, which has so far provided generously, including financial aid for many students and a promise to build a sprawling campus'. *New York Times*, 'NYU in the UAE', 15 April 2011. In 2011 it was also reported that La Sorbonne Abu Dhabi's 'developer, owner, and operator' was the Abu Dhabi government-linked Manhal Development Company. *Gulf News*, 'Mubadala moves 49% stake in Paris-Sorbonne University, Abu Dhabi', 11 April 2011.
43. In 2015 Andrew Ross (an NYU professor of social and cultural analysis who had been intending to research migrant labour issues) was blocked from boarding an aircraft bound for Abu Dhabi on the basis of 'security concerns'. In 2016 an Egyptian doctoral student who had been awarded a research fellowship at NYU Abu Dhabi had her visa denied. In 2017 NYU faculty members Mohamad Bazzi and Arang Keshavarazian were also denied visas. Bazzi and Keshavarazian both claimed to the *New York Times* that they were blocked on the basis they were Shia. In 2018 it was reported that a French academic of Algerian origin, Leila Al-Omrani, had had her new appointment as head of the department of philosophy and sociology cancelled by La Sorbonne Abu Dhabi without explanation. American Association of University Professors—NYU Branch, 'Prof. Andrew Ross barred from travel to NYU Abu Dhabi: Statement from NYU Chapter of the AAUP', 16 March 2015; *Inside Higher Ed*, 'Persona Non Grata', 18 March 2015; *New York Times*, 'NYU Journalism Faculty Boycotts Abu Dhabi Campus', 7 November 2017; *Le Monde*, 'Sorbonne Abou Dhabi: soupçons de censure envers une universitaire', 4 October 2018 [in French].
44. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 'NYU-Abu Dhabi Behaves Like Careful Guest in Foreign Land', 3 June 2012; *Le Monde*, 'Sorbonne Abou Dhabi: soupçons de censure envers une universitaire', 4 October 2018 [in French].
45. New York University Abu Dhabi claims that 'students and faculty at NYU Abu Dhabi have access to the same research and educational materials they currently enjoy at NYU New York, including unrestricted access to the internet'. There have been complaints that this is untrue on the basis that those on campus cannot access internet telephony services such as Skype, however these sorts of services have primarily been blocked for commercial reasons by the UAE's telecommunications providers. New York University Abu Dhabi, 'Overview: Campus Life' [date

- accessed: 15 July 2019]; *Gazelle*, 'Restrictions to Internet services at NYUAD', 30 April 2016.
46. The Washington Advisory Group and the Washington-based SRI International designed the university's academic structure. A. Al-Naimi, *Out of the Desert* (London: Portfolio Penguin, 2016), pp. 250–8; Imperial College, 'Press Release: New alliance announced between Imperial College and King Abdullah University of Science and Technology', 10 March 2008.
 47. For a discussion on soft power see Introduction endnote 4.
 48. The UAE authorities initially claimed that the closures were due to licensing issues. Following later revelations about the UAE's cyber espionage activities, it emerged that the email accounts of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung staff had been targeted. *New York Times*, 'United Arab Emirates Shuttters US-Backed Group', 31 March 2012; CNN, 'Details emerge in UAE closing of pro-democracy groups', 7 April 2012; Reuters, 'UAE shuts down office of U.S. research institute RAND', 20 December 2012; Reuters, 'White House veterans helped Gulf monarchy build secret surveillance unit', 10 December 2019. For a discussion on the UAE's cyber espionage programme see section 7.5.
 49. For an overview of Gulf states' donations to British university departments see J. Draege, and M. Lestra, 'Gulf-Funding of British Universities and the Focus on Human Development' in *Middle East Law and Governance*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2015; Centre for Social Cohesion, 'A Degree of Influence: The Funding of Strategically Important Subjects in UK Universities', March 2009.
 50. US Department of Education Office of Federal Student Aid, 'Foreign Gifts and Contracts Report', 9 August 2018. The report does not differentiate between student tuition payments and actual donations and has been criticized on the basis that it likely underestimates foreign gifts as 'the universities themselves are not clear about what they should report'. *New York Times*, 'Why Is There So Much Saudi Money in American Universities?', 3 July 2019.
 51. Saudi Arabia has funded the Atlantic Council, Brookings Institution, Center for Strategic and International Studies, and Middle East Institute. The UAE has funded all of the above, in addition to the Stimson Center and World Resource Institute. *New York Times*, 'Foreign Powers Buy Influence at Think Tanks', 6 September 2014; *New York Times*, 'Foreign Government Contributions to Nine Think Tanks', 7 September 2014.
 52. In 2008 it was reported by Brunel University's Centre for Intelligence and Security Studies that \$293.4 million in donations from 'Saudi and Muslim sources' had been made to eight British universities since 1995. It was unclear, however, what proportion of these donations originated from the Gulf states. *Telegraph*, 'Extremism fear over Islam studies donations', 13 April 2008.
 53. J. Draege, and M. Lestra, 'Gulf-funding of British Universities and the Focus on Human Development' in *Middle East Law and Governance*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2015, pp. 40–2.
 54. *New York Times*, 'Why Is There So Much Saudi Money in American Universities?', 3 July 2019.
 55. *Inside Higher Ed*, 'Ties that bind', 8 November 2018.
 56. *Financial Times*, 'Universities challenged: scrutiny over Gulf money', 13 December 2018.

57. Referring to MPs Robert Halfon (chairman of the committee) and Andrew Percy. *Telegraph*, ‘Exclusive: MPs demand British universities stop accepting donations from dictatorships’, 13 August 2017.
58. *New York Times*, ‘Why Is There So Much Saudi Money in American Universities?’, 3 July 2019.
59. *New York Times*, ‘Foreign Powers Buy Influence at Think Tanks’, 6 September 2014.
60. BBC, ‘LSE Middle East conference abruptly cancelled’, 22 February 2013.
61. J. Draege, and M. Lestra, ‘Gulf-funding of British Universities and the Focus on Human Development’ in *Middle East Law and Governance*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2015, pp. 25, 36.
62. Freedom House, ‘About Freedom in the World: What is Freedom in the World?’ [date accessed: 30 June 2019].
63. Comparative historical analysis aims to provide historically grounded explanations for substantively important outcomes. For a clear definition see J. Mahoney and D. Rueshemeyer, ‘Comparative historical analysis: achievements and agendas’ in J. Mahoney and D. Rueshemeyer (eds.), *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 3–4.
64. Writing in 1973, for example, Michael Hudson noted that ‘comparativists’ were complaining that such data projects promoted ‘scientism, macro-theorizing, wholly ecological explanations, and mindless data-gathering’. Similarly, writing in 1976, J. Elder argued that ‘that the ‘extraction [of states] from their own contexts... renders such efforts futile’. M. Hudson, ‘Data Problems in Quantitative Comparative Analysis’ in *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 4, 1973, p. 612; J. Elder, ‘Comparative Cross-National Methodology’ in *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1976, p. 225.
65. *Nikkei Asian Review*, ‘Peter Tasker: The flawed ‘science’ behind democracy rankings’, 25 February 2016.
66. Freedom House, ‘About Freedom in the World: How is Freedom in the World Produced?’ [date accessed: 30 June 2019].
67. Economist Intelligence Unit, ‘Democracy Index 2018: Me too? Political participation, protest and democracy’ [date accessed: 1 July 2019], pp. 46–60.
68. Bridge coding requires multiple independent coding methods to be used, with the results then compared. Varieties of Democracy, ‘Methodology’ [date accessed: 1 July 2019].
69. The major grantor for Freedom House is listed as the US government. Freedom House, ‘Financial Statements Year Ended June 30, 2016, and independent auditors’ report’, 31 January 2017. p. 21.
70. In 2015 the Pearson Group sold its 50 per cent stake in the Economist Group, while the Agnelli family’s Exor Group raised its existing 4.7 per cent stake to 43 per cent. The other, smaller shareholders include the Rothschild, Cadbury, and Schroder families. *Observer*, ‘The Economist becomes a family affair’, 15 August 2015.
71. The V-Dem project has multiple funders including the European Research Council and the Swedish Research Council. Varieties of Democracy, ‘Fundings’ [date accessed: 5 March 2019].
72. In his 2018 research report for the Oxford Internet Institute, Eric Meyer demonstrated that high-quality newspapers are increasingly cited in academic

research, and especially in the social sciences where 5.7 per cent of scholarly articles cited at least one of four newspapers (the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Washington Post*). E. Meyer, 'The Scholarly Impacts of Newspapers: the Guardian, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, and New York Times', Oxford Internet Institute, 2 May 2018.

73. *New York Times*, 'Secret Desert Force Set Up by Blackwater's Founder', 14 May 2011. For a discussion on the secret force itself see section 7.7.
74. The bond purchases had been part of a special agreement reached between Saudi Arabia and US after the 1973 oil price shocks. The agreement allowed them to remain above scrutiny and not to be fully included in the Department of the Treasury's otherwise comprehensive breakdown of more than a hundred other sovereign investors. Bloomberg, 'Bloomberg's Wong on Saudi Arabia's US Treasury Holdings', 22 January 2016; Bloomberg, 'Saudi Arabia's Secret Holdings of US Debt Are Suddenly a Big Deal', 24 January 2016.
75. Reuters, 'Special Report: Inside the UAE's secret hacking team of US mercenaries', 30 January 2019. For a discussion on the UAE's cyber espionage programme see section 7.5.
76. In November 2017, for example, two Swiss journalists were detained in the UAE after filming an open market frequented by South Asian migrant workers; in February 2019 a Jordanian correspondent with a history of working for Al-Jazeera was detained in Saudi Arabia; and in January 2020 the *New York Times*' Ben Hubbard claimed there had been a hacking attempt on his telephone the previous summer and that 'technology researchers who inspected the message I received concluded that I was targeted with powerful software...deployed by hackers working for Saudi Arabia'. Reporters Without Borders, 'Swiss TV journalists held for 50 hours in Abu Dhabi', 14 November 2017; Reporters Without Borders, 'News of two foreign journalists missing in Saudi Arabia', 20 May 2019; *New York Times*, 'Someone Tried to Hack My Phone. Technology Researchers Accused Saudi Arabia', 21 January 2020.
77. Most notably, the 30 November 2009 print run of the *Sunday Times* was removed from shelves in the UAE and pulped. The paper had been intensively covering the Dubai crash, and on this date featured a cartoon depicting the ruler of Dubai drowning in a 'sea' of debt. *Wall Street Journal*, 'UAE Removes Sunday London Times From Newsstands', 30 November 2009.
78. In 2014 the *Telegraph* published a number of highly critical articles about Qatar under the banner 'Stop the Funding of Terror'. There are no suggestions that the campaign was dictated to the newspaper by government entities. For a discussion on the campaign see Al-Jazeera, 'Report: UK's Telegraph targeted Qatar over hotels', 15 June 2015.
79. *Washington Post*, 'Latest Arabic news channel, Sky News Arabia, begins broadcasting from UAE capital Abu Dhabi', 6 May 2012.
80. *National*, 'Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed invests in Arabic Sky News', 29 November 2010. For a discussion on Mansur bin Zayed see sections 4.1 and 5.1.
81. Most notably in October 2018, following the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi. *Telegraph*, 'Sky News drawn into Saudi propaganda battle over murder of Jamal Khashoggi', 22 October 2018.

82. Referring to Badr bin Abdullah Al-Saud. For a discussion on his role see section 5.1.
83. *Al-Hayat* is owned by Khalid bin Sultan Al-Saud and *Al-Watan* is owned by Bandar bin Khalid Al-Saud. *Arab News*, ‘Independent Arabia launched by Saudi media group SRMG’, 24 January 2019; Reuters, ‘Saudi Arabia names businessman as labor minister, boosts culture and environment’, 2 June 2018; *Guardian*, ‘Independent’s deal with Saudi publisher back under spotlight’, 19 October 2018; *New York Times*, ‘Spreading the Word: Who’s Who in the Arab Media’, 6 February 2005; *Financial Times*, ‘Saudi Arabia Continues Ban on Newspaper’, 29 August 2007; Bloomberg, ‘Executive Profile: Bandar Bin Khalid Al Faisal’ [date accessed: 2 July 2019].
84. See for example *Gulf Times*, ‘Independent Arabia, UK-based Saudi trumpet!’, 4 March 2019.
85. These comments were made by Badr bin Saud Al-Saud (a minor prince) in an April 2020 article for *Okaz* newspaper. *Guardian*, ‘Independent caught in tit-for-tat Turkey–Saudi media battle’, 21 April 2020; *New Arab*, ‘Saudi-Turkey media war reflects MBS’s growing internal problems’, 29 April 2020; *Okaz*, ‘Turkish Zero’, 13 April 2020 [in Arabic].
86. *Guardian*, ‘Independent’s deal with Saudi publisher back under spotlight’, 19 October 2018.
87. The two entities being Cayman Islands-registered companies, one of which is owned by a Saudi banker reportedly tied to NCB Capital (a division of Saudi Arabia’s National Commercial Bank which is majority owned by a major sovereign wealth fund). The *Evening Standard* was also named in the Ofcom inquiry on the basis that in late 2018 the same Saudi banker had taken a \$32 million stake in the popular London newspaper. *Guardian*, ‘Saudi investor buys significant stake in the Independent’, 29 July 2017; *Guardian*, ‘Evening Standard investor unveiled as Saudi businessman’, 25 February 2019; *Guardian*, ‘Evening Standard and Independent could face inquiry over Saudi funds’, 13 June 2019; *Guardian*, ‘Independent and Standard urge state not to investigate Saudi ties’, 17 June 2019; Bloomberg, ‘UK Orders Probes of Saudi Links to Lebedev NewsTitles’, 27 June 2019; *Guardian*, ‘Saudi state part-owns Evening Standard and Independent, court told’, 23 July 2019. For a discussion on the National Commercial Bank and its owners see section 6.1.
88. The inquiry was blocked on the basis that the government had missed a four-month window to ask the Competition and Markets Authority to launch a full investigation (the government having already passed information on the deal to the regulator in March 2019). *Guardian*, ‘Court blocks inquiry into Independent and Standard’s links to Saudi Arabia’, 16 August 2019; *Financial Times*, ‘UK missed chance to challenge newspaper sale to Saudi, court rules’, 16 August 2019.
89. The archive features 12,214 cables referring to Saudi Arabia and 5,173 referring to the UAE. Public Library of US Diplomacy, ‘Cablegate’ [date accessed: 3 July 2019].
90. The message originated from a US Department of State employee and was forwarded to students by the School of International and Public Affairs’ Office for Career Services. Following ‘national ire’, the school reportedly ‘walked back’ on its statement, with its dean stating that ‘freedom of information and expression is a core value of our institution...thus [the school’s] position is that students have a right to discuss and debate any information in the public arena that they deem relevant to their studies or to their roles as global citizens, and to do so

- without fear of adverse consequences'. Index on Censorship, 'Columbia University warns students against Wikileaks', 6 December 2010; *Huffington Post*, 'Columbia University Walks Back Anti-WikiLeaks Advice', 6 December 2010.
91. For a representative range of viewpoints see G. Lovink and P. Riemens, 'Twelve Theses on Wikileaks' in B. Brevini, A. Hintz, and P. McCurdy (eds.), *The Palgrave Macmillan Beyond Wikileaks* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013), pp. 245–253; B. Thomas, 'Wikileaks and the Question of Responsibility within a Global Democracy' in *European View*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 2011.
 92. The final cable in the archive dates from February 2010. MBS's first major appointments (in January 2015) were as minister of defence and Secretary-General of the Royal Court. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 'US red-faced as Cablegate sparks global diplomatic crisis, courtesy of WikiLeaks', 29 November 2010. For a discussion on MBS's first major appointments see section 4.1.
 93. *New York Times*, 'Leaked Cables Offer Raw Look at US Diplomacy', 28 November 2010.
 94. With reference to the 2011 Arab uprisings, for example, see S. Mabon, 'Aiding Revolution? Wikileaks, communication and the Arab Spring in Egypt' in *ThirdWorld Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 10, 2013; F. Volpi, 'Algeria versus the Arab Spring' in *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 24, No. 3, 2013; E. Snider and D. Faris, 'The Arab Spring: US Democracy Promotion in Egypt' in *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 2011.
 95. UK Supreme Court, 'Judgment: R (on the application of Bancoult No 3) (Appellant) v Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Respondent)', 8 February 2018.
 96. Wikileaks Press Releases, 'WikiLeaks publishes the Saudi Cables', 19 June 2015.
 97. Earlier in 2015 the Yemeni Cyber Army claimed credit for defacing the website of *Al-Hayat*. In June 2015 a web intelligence firm understood to be backed by Google and the CIA reported that the Yemeni Cyber Army might be linked to Iran, on the basis of its IP address usage and other factors. *Al-Arabiya*, 'Pan-Arab newspaper al-Hayat hacked by Yemen Cyber Army', 14 April 2015; *Recorded Future*, 'The Iranian–Saudi Conflict and its Cyber Outlet', 26 June 2015; *Vice*, 'There's Evidence the Yemen Cyber Army Is Actually Iranian', 26 June 2015.
 98. Twitter @EmiratesLeaks: biography [in Arabic] [date accessed 4 July 2019].
 99. *Egypt Today*, 'Qatar Leaks publishes scenes of Hamad's coup against his father', 16 November 2017.
 100. Strong examples include C.W. Jones, 'Seeing Like an Autocrat: Liberal Social Engineering in an Illiberal State' in *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 2015; C.W. Jones, *Bedouins into Bourgeois: Remaking Citizens for Globalization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); J. Bristol-Rhys, *Emirati Women: Generations of Change* (London: Hurst & Co., 2010); Y. Al-Saggaf and K. Williamson, 'Online Communities in Saudi Arabia: Evaluating the Impact on Culture Through Online Semi-Structured Interviews' in *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 2004; A. Le Renard, *A Society of Young Women: Opportunities of Place, Power, and Reform in Saudi Arabia* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2014).
 101. For a representative discussion on this see C.W. Jones, 'Seeing Like an Autocrat: Liberal Social Engineering in an Illiberal State' in *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 2015, p. 24.

102. Monographs on domestic politics in Saudi Arabia and the UAE that have drawn heavily on face-to-face interviews include: S. Hertog, *Princes, Brokers, and Bureaucrats: Oil and the State in Saudi Arabia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010); K. Elliott House, *On Saudi Arabia: Its People, Past, Religion, Fault Lines, and Future* (New York: Vintage, 2012); C. Davidson, *The United Arab Emirates: A Study in Survival* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2005); C. Davidson, *Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success* (London: Hurst & Co., 2008).
103. *Mukhabarat* in this context being the secret police. Clark based her descriptions on a survey of 55 scholars who had undertaken fieldwork in the region, including four who had visited the UAE and three who had visited Saudi Arabia. J. Clark, 'Field Research Methods in the Middle East' in *Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 39, No. 3, 2006, p. 418.
104. For a discussion on London's historical-cultural connections see *Evening Standard*, 'The \$300 billion Arabs are coming', 29 May 2008; *Arab News*, 'London's 'Little Arabia': Glitzy Knightsbridge has long been a playground for Gulf Arabs, but has the boom come to an end?', 7 March 2018; *National*, 'Boris Johnson in UAE: I'm mayor of the eighth emirate', 16 April 2013.
105. For examples of recent travel bans see sections 7.3 and 7.4.
106. D. Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East* (New York: Free Press, 1958).
107. M Tessler and I Warriner, 'Gender, Feminism, and Attitudes Toward International Conflict: Exploring Relationships with Survey Data from the Middle East' in *World Politics*, Vol. 49, No. 2, 1997; M. Tessler and J. Nachtwey, 'Islam and Attitudes Toward International Conflict: Evidence from Survey Research in the Arab World' in *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 42, No. 5, 1998; M. Tessler, *Public Opinion in the Middle East: Survey Research and the Political Orientations of Ordinary Citizens* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011).
108. J. Al-Suwaidi, 'Arab and Western Conceptions of Democracy: Evidence from a UAE Opinion Survey' in D. Garnham and M. Tessler (eds.), *Democracy, War, and Peace in the Middle East* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 82–115. For further discussion on Al-Suwaidi's poll see W. Rugh, 'The United Arab Emirates: What Are the Sources of Its Stability?' in *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 1997, p. 18.
109. S. Findlow, 'The United Arab Emirates: Nationalism and Arab-Islamic Identity', Emirates Centre for Strategic Studies and Research Occasional Paper Series, No. 39, 2000.
110. M. Moaddel, 'The Saudi Public Speaks: Religion, Gender, and Politics' in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 1, 2006.
111. A total of 6629 surveys were sent out, receiving 689 responses. M. Saldaña Martín, 'Rentierism and Political Culture in the United Arab Emirates the Case of UAEU students', PhD dissertation, Exeter University, 2014, pp. 52–4, 276–83.
112. J. Gengler, 'The dangers of unscientific surveys in the Arab world', *Monkey Cage (Washington Post)*, 27 October 2017. Working with co-authors, Gengler's later examination of attitudes to towards public opinion surveys (which drew on original survey data from Qatar) also concluded that 'Qatari and expatriate Arabs hold positive views of surveys, both in absolute terms and relative to individuals from non-Arab

- countries'. However, he also found that 'negative views about survey reliability and intentions increase motivated under-reporting among Arab respondents, whereas non-Arabs are sensitive only to perceived cognitive and time costs'. For a discussion see J. Gengler, M. Tessler, R. Lucas, and J. Forney, 'Why Do You Ask? The Nature and Impacts of Attitudes towards Public Opinion Surveys in the Arab World' in *British Journal of Political Science* [October 2019 online first view], p. 1.
113. For a discussion on these bans and restrictions see section 2.2.
 114. The Arab Opinion Index is produced by the Qatar-based Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 'The Arab Opinion Index: About Us' [date accessed: 6 October 2019].
 115. The Arab Youth Survey is produced by the Dubai-based public relations company Asda'a BCW (following a merger between the Dubai-based Asda'a and the New York-based Burson Cohn and Wolfe). The survey does not include Syria or (for reasons that are not made clear) Qatar. Asda'a BCW, 'About Us' [date accessed: 1 January 2020]; Arab Youth Survey, 'About the Survey' [date accessed: 1 January 2020].
 116. The Arab Barometer included Saudi Arabia in its 'second wave' survey, conducted in 2011. Arab Barometer, 'Online Analysis Tool' [date accessed: 6 October 2019]; Arab Barometer, 'Methodology' [date accessed: 6 October 2019].
 117. The World Values Survey included Saudi Arabia in its 'fourth wave' survey, conducted between 1999 and 2004. World Values Survey, 'Online Data Analysis' [date accessed: 6 October 2019]; World Values Survey, 'What we do: questionnaire development' [date accessed: 6 October 2019].
 118. According to the International Telecommunications Union, Israel is ranked 46th in the world with 81 per cent and France is ranked 50th in the world with 80.5 per cent. Official figures for Saudi Arabia in 2018 put internet penetration even higher at 91 per cent. Internet Telecommunications Union, 'Individuals and the Internet, 2000–2017', 1 December 2018; Zawya, 'Mobile, internet penetration nears 100% in 2018 in Saudi Arabia', 2 January 2019.
 119. According to the data compiled by Hootsuite (based on information provided by the leading social media platforms), in January 2019 Britain's social media penetration rate was 67 per cent and the US's was 70 per cent. Hootsuite, 'Social Media Penetration in 2019' [date accessed: 19 July 2019].
 120. J. Murphy, M. Link, J. Hunter Childs, C. Langer Tesfaye, E. Dean, M. Stern, J. Pasek, J. Cohen, M. Callegaro, and P. Harwood, 'Social Media in Public Opinion Research: Executive Summary of the Aapor Task Force on Emerging Technologies in Public Opinion Research' in *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Volume 78, Issue 4, 2014; P. Sobkowicz, M. Kaschesky, and G. Bouchard, G. 'Opinion Mining in Social Media: Modelling, Simulating, and Forecasting Political Opinions in the Web' in *Government Information Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 4, 2012.
 121. The 'April 6 movement' had a very popular Facebook page. *Wired*, 'Cairo Activists Use Facebook to Rattle Regime', 23 July 2008; J. Gunning and I. Zvi Baron, *Why Occupy a Square?: People, Protests and Movements in the Egyptian Revolution* (London: Hurst & Co. 2014), pp. 66–7.
 122. The 'Green Movement', also known as the 'Twitter Revolution', became synonymous with the demand *ra'i-ye-man kojast*, or 'where is my vote'. The colour

- green was initially used by the campaign of rival candidate Mir-Hossein Mousavi, but soon became a banner for broader opposition to Ahmadinejad. *New York Times*, ‘A Green Revolution for Iran?’, 19 June 2009; *Guardian*, ‘A devastating defeat for Iran’s green revolution’, 14 June 2009; A. Mirsepassi, *Democracy in Modern Iran: Islam, Culture, and Political Change* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), p. ix; H. Dabashi and N. Nikzadfar, ‘Introduction’ in H. Dabashi (ed.), *The Green Movement in Iran* (New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 1–20. For discussion on Twitter’s disputed role see G. Khiabany, ‘Technologies of Liberation and/or Otherwise’ in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 47, No. 2, 2015, p. 350; E. Morozov, *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom* (New York: Public Affairs 2011); B. Rahimi, ‘Rethinking Digital Technologies in the Middle East’ in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 47, No. 2, 2015, p. 362; J. Ramsey, ‘Being Green in Tehran’ in *Critical Muslim*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2012, pp. 129–30; *Atlantic*, ‘Evaluating Iran’s Twitter Revolution’, 18 June 2010.
123. *New York Times*, ‘Google official said he was part of Facebook campaign’, 7 February 2011; *Telegraph*, ‘Revolution 2.0 by Wael Ghonim: review’, 13 January 2012. For a discussion on social media’s disputed role, see G. Khiabany, ‘Technologies of Liberation and/or Otherwise’ in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 47, No. 2, 2015; M. Hussain, ‘Three Arenas for Interrogating Digital Policies in the Middle East’ in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 47, No. 2, 2015.
 124. E. Monier, ‘Online Media as a Research Topic and Research Tool: Fact, Fiction, and Facebook’ in J. Clark and F. Cavatorta (eds.), *Political Science Research in the Middle East and North Africa: Methodological and Ethical Challenges* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 213, 217.
 125. G. Martin, ‘Researching Twitter’ in J. Clark and F. Cavatorta (eds.), *Political Science Research in the Middle East and North Africa: Methodological and Ethical Challenges* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 218–30.
 126. J. Pan and A. Siegel, ‘How Saudi Crackdowns Fail to Silence Online Dissent’ in *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 114, No. 1, 2019, pp. 110, 123.
 127. The Arab Social Media Report has been asking questions ranging from how people go about expressing negative views on government policies to what their concerns are with regard to governmental collection of private data. Mohammed bin Rashid School of Government, ‘Arab Social Media Report 7th Edition: Social Media and the Internet of Things’, December 2017, pp. 15–17, 29.
 128. Firchow and MacGinty describe the need to ‘balance methodological rigor with an understanding of the exigencies of suboptimal research contexts’. P. Firchow and R. MacGinty, ‘Including Hard-to-Access Populations Using Mobile Phone Surveys and Participatory Indicators’ in *Sociological Methods & Research*, Vol. 49, No. 1, 2020, p. 133.
 129. M. Stern, I Bilgen, and D. Dillman, ‘The State of Survey Methodology’ in *Field Methods*, Vol. 26, No. 3, 2014, pp. 284–96.
 130. For a representative discussion on framing theory see D. Chong and J. Druckman, ‘Framing Theory’ in *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 10, 15 June 2007, p. 104.
 131. Referring to interview questions #12a and #12b. As these questions related to regime longevity and stability, it was made clear they were optional. These questions (and their answers) feature in section 10.1.

132. For a full list of interview questions see the appendix.
133. A total of ninety-five invitations were issued, with a response rate of 47 per cent accepted invitations.
134. A total of ninety invitations were issued, with a response rate of 59 per cent accepted invitations.
135. As Gengler notes of economic surveys in the region, for example, ‘nationals and expatriates are aggregated in a way that obfuscates the behaviors and preferences of citizens’. J. Gengler, ‘Understanding Gulf Citizen Preferences Towards Rentier Subsidies’ in Project on Middle East Political Science, ‘The Politics of Rentier States in the Gulf’, *POMEPS Studies* No. 33, January 2019, p. 51.
136. In Saudi Arabia it was announced in late 2019 that naturalization would be possible for ‘brilliant foreign professionals’ who can demonstrate their usefulness to economic development objectives. Meanwhile, UAE law technically allows naturalization for foreigners but only after they have been living for a ‘continuous and statutory manner in the member Emirates for a period not less than thirty years’ and if they are able to prove they ‘know the Arabic language well’. Perhaps setting a precedent, however, in May 2020 the UAE did grant 212 ‘Golden Visas’ (valid for ten years) to doctors ‘in appreciation of their efforts in the fight against the spread of coronavirus’. *Gulf News*, ‘Saudi Arabia to grant nationality to number of professionals’, 5 December 2019; UAE Federal Law No. 17 for 1972, ‘Concerning Nationality, Passports and Amendments thereof’, 18 November, 1972, article 8; *Arab News*, ‘Dubai Ruler Sheikh Mohammed grants golden visas to 212 doctors’, 14 May 2020.
137. For earlier discussions of this phenomenon, see N. Vora, ‘Free Speech and Civil Discourse: Producing Expats, Locals and Migrants in the UAE English-Language Blogosphere’ in *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 18, No.4, 2012, pp. 787–807; C. Davidson, *After the Sheikhs: The Coming Collapse of the Gulf Monarchies* (London: Hurst & Co., 2012), pp. 11–12, 50, 62–6; C. Davidson, ‘Expatriates and the Gulf Monarchies: Politics, Security and the Arab Spring’ in *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 45, No. 2, 2014, pp. 273–4.
138. Opportunity sampling consisting of taking the sample from people who are available at the time and fit the basic criteria (in this context people who appeared to identify themselves in their social media profiles—mostly with location data—as being either Saudi or Emirati citizens). Given that a determined effort was made to sample as many females as possible, there was also an element of stratified sampling (see section 2.5 endnotes 148 and 149).
139. For a full list of survey questions see the appendix.
140. For a discussion on more established technology-led surveying techniques see A. Manzo and J. Burke, ‘Increasing Response Rate in Web-Based/Internet Surveys’ in L. Gideon (ed.), *Handbook of Survey Methodology for the Social Sciences* (New York: Springer, 2012); G. Mesch, ‘E-Mail Surveys’ in L. Gideon (ed.), *Handbook of Survey Methodology for the Social Sciences* (New York: Springer, 2012); B. Dillon, ‘Using Mobile Phones to Collect Panel Data in Developing Countries’ in *Journal of International Development*, Vol. 24, No. 4, 2012, pp. 518–27; A. Van Heerden, S. Norris, S. Tollman, and L. Richter, ‘Collecting Health Research Data Comparing Mobile Phone-Assisted Personal Interviewing to Paper-and-pen Data Collection’ in *Field Methods*, Vol. 26, No. 4, 2014, pp. 307–21.

141. G. Demombynes, P. Gubbins, and A. Romeo, 'Challenges and Opportunities of Mobile Phone-Based Data Collection: Evidence from South Sudan', World Bank Policy Research Working Paper, January 2013; M. Tomlinson, W. Solomon, Y. Singh, T. Doherty, M. Chopra, P. Ijumba, A. Tsai, and D. Jackson, 'The Use of Mobile Phones as a Data Collection Tool: A Report from a Household Survey in South Africa' in *BMC Medical Informatics and Decision Making*, Vol. 9, December 2009, p. 51; P. Van der Windt and M. Humphreys, 'Crowdseeding in Eastern Congo Using Cell Phones to Collect Conflict Events Data in Real Time' in *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 60, No. 4, 2016, pp. 748–81. Even in the Gulf region, mobile phone surveying continues to be used, with the 2018 edition of Northwestern University's 'Media Use in the Middle East' survey having employed random digit telephone dialling to secure telephone interviews with Qatari participants. Northwestern University, 'Media Use in the Middle East 2018: Method' [date accessed: 10 July 2019].
142. 510 responded of which 283 were Saudi citizens and 227 were Emirati citizens.
143. *Fusha* referring to the 'eloquence' of Modern Standard Arabic.
144. Mohammed bin Rashid School of Government, 'Arab Social Media Report 7th Edition: Social Media and the Internet of Things', December 2017, pp. 32.
145. 326 reported their locations as: Riyadh (88), Jeddah (56), Abu Dhabi (64), or Dubai (118).
146. 121 reported their locations as: Mecca (36), Medina (20), Sultanah (11), Dammam (7), Sharjah (31), Ajman (15), Ra's al-Khaimah (13), Al-Ain (8). Twenty-five Saudi citizens and eighteen Emirati citizens reported their locations as being elsewhere (either in much smaller cities or in towns or villages).
147. Mohammed bin Rashid School of Government, 'Arab Social Media Report 7th Edition: Social Media and the Internet of Things', December 2017, pp. 32.
148. Representing 385 invitations.
149. There was a total of eighty-two female respondents.
150. Referring to survey question 12a. As this question related to regime longevity and stability it was made clear it was optional. This question (and its answers) features in section 10.1.
151. Referring to survey question 12b. As this question related to regime longevity and stability it was made clear it was optional. This question (and its answers) features in section 10.1.
152. Derived from the scale first introduced by Rensis Likert, and since widely adopted across the social sciences. R. Likert, 'A Technique for the Measurement of Attitudes' in *Archives of Psychology*, Vol. 22, No. 140, 1932, pp. 1–55.

3. SULTANISM: STATE OF THE ART

1. In particular, the definitions of sultanism found in *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* and *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, published in 1922 and 1947 respectively. M. Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), Part 1 [edited by G. Roth and C. Wittich]; M. Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947).