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Explaining Protests in the Gulf Monarchies During the Arab Uprisings: The Role of Coalitions, Oil and International Influences – by Andreas Kaufmann

June 12, 2014

This article aims to explain why the six Gulf monarchies Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain experienced such varying degrees of protest during the Arab uprisings in 2011 and why Bahrain experienced mass protest while the other five monarchies did not. This article argues that the reason for the monarchies' different experiences lies in the varying size of the monarchs' ruling coalitions on the eve of the uprisings. This factor determines whether there was a base of politically and economically excluded actors large enough to stage mass protests. The article demonstrates that whether a monarch disposed of a narrow ruling coalition (as in Bahrain) or a broad coalition (as in the other five monarchies) was heavily influenced by the monarchies' histories of foreign power interference in internal affairs (or the absence thereof).

Introduction

In early 2011, the ousting of Tunisia's President Ben Ali ignited political turmoil in large parts of the Arab world, followed by the fall of authoritarian regimes in Egypt, Libya and Yemen. In Syria, popular uprisings developed into a brutal civil war whose outcome remains open at the time of writing. Contrary to these Arab republics, the six monarchies Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Oman, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar and Bahrain all remained in place. However, a closer look at these six monarchies reveals that they faced varying degrees of opposition: in Qatar and the UAE, no protest mobilized at all, whereas Saudi Arabia and Oman experienced only a few protests.^[1] In Kuwait, there were more protests but the demands remained moderate.^[2] However, there was one monarchy which stood out from the other five in view of the scale of the protests: Bahrain.^[3]

On 14 February 2011, Bahrain's first protests began in the capital Manama, where several dozen protesters were injured and one was killed when Bahraini security forces tried to disperse the crowds. During the following days, protests intensified dramatically. By 25 February, over 100,000 protestors filled the streets of Manama, a staggering number for a country with a population of approximately 500,000.^[4] The Bahraini regime responded with a mixture of repression and accommodation, which did not stop the protests from growing.^[5] As the Bahraini security forces became increasingly overwhelmed at the beginning of March, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) agreed to deploy approximately 1,000 troops from Saudi Arabia and 500 police officers from the UAE to back up the Bahraini security forces.^[6] Reinforced, the regime commenced a full-scale crackdown on 15 March and stormed the Pearl Roundabout in central Manama where protesters had camped for about a month.^[7] Since then, the situation has stagnated and tensions have remained high.^[8]

These unexpected events in the Arab world have triggered various debates among political scientists. However, the question of why most monarchies remained basically untouched while one of them, Bahrain, experienced a regime-shaking crisis has not received much attention.^[9] The present article aims to examine why the six Gulf monarchies experienced such varying degrees of political turmoil during the Arab uprisings in 2011 and why Bahrain experienced mass protests while the other five Gulf monarchies Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and the UAE did not.^[10] The way this question is stated implies that protests in Bahrain were distinctively larger than in the other Gulf monarchies. Though numbers can vary depending on sources, Figure 1 illustrates that there has indeed been a significant difference among the countries with regards to the number of participants in protests in 2011.^[11]



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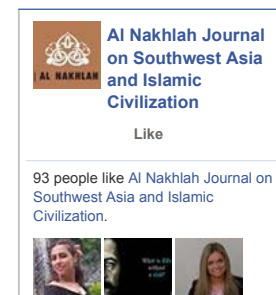
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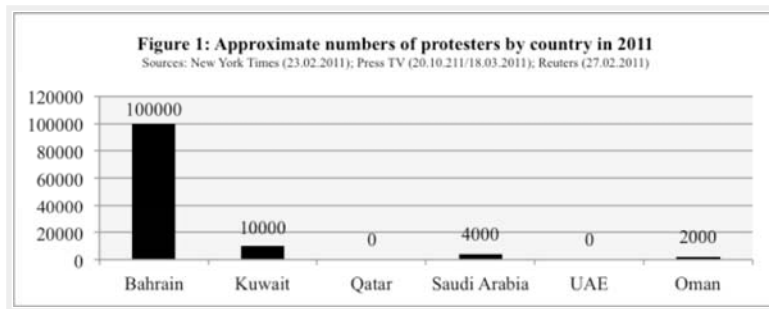
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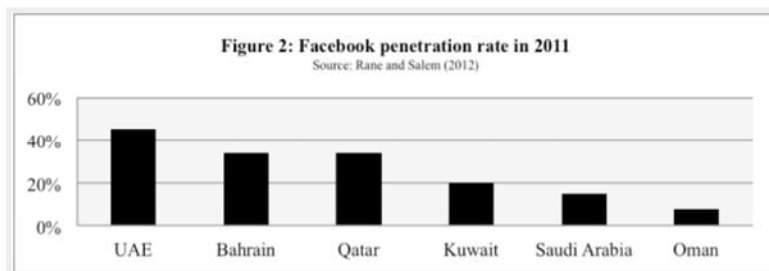
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Factors that cannot explain the different experiences

There are a number of potential explanations for these varying experiences in the six monarchies; yet under scrutiny they prove insufficient. First of all, one might argue that Bahrain's highly connected and very active online community could account for the diffusion of the protests to Bahrain, but not to the other monarchies.^[12] While it is true that Bahrainis are highly connected to the Internet and have long experience in online activism, a closer look at the numbers (Figure 2) reveals that there is in fact no direct correlation between, for example, the Facebook penetration rate in a country and the scale of the protests experienced in that same country during the Arab uprisings (Figure 1).^[13]



Another potential argument might be that centuries' old sectarian divides between the Sunni and Shi'a communities in Bahrain were the reason for the larger size of the protests. Although it is true that Bahrain is the only Gulf monarchy in which a Shi'a majority is ruled by a Sunni minority (the exact percentages are unknown), such a mono-causal argumentation is not satisfactory as both Saudi Arabia (10-15%) and Kuwait (30-40%) are also home to significant Shi'a communities, but have not experienced large-scale protests.^[14]

An alternative explanation might be that the protests simply reflected the countries' economic situations. It is undisputed that there are indeed differences between the six countries in question with respect to economic parameters. Looking for example at the countries' Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, Qatar (\$58,256.97 in 2010) appears to be by far the richest of the six monarchies, followed by Kuwait (\$28,615.95), the United Arab Emirates (\$24,219.3), Bahrain (\$16,722.24), Saudi Arabia (\$15,994.78) and Oman (\$14,962.03).^[15] However, comparing these findings with the abovementioned protest levels reveals that economic parameters alone can impossibly account for the countries' varied experiences during the Arab uprisings. Therefore, some other factor must have been behind their vastly different experiences in 2011.

Case selection

The case selection is justified on the grounds that all six monarchies share major characteristics that control for many potential confounding variables: First of all, as Muslim-majority states of the Arab Gulf, they have similar cultural and religious endowments. Secondly, in all six cases, the ruling families who dominate the political spheres today came to power in the 18th century, and with the exception of Saudi Arabia, received protection from the British Empire early on.^[16] The third shared characteristic is that all six monarchies only became formally independent in the 20th century and all experienced significant changes in their socioeconomic landscapes with the advent of oil wealth in the second half of the 20th century. Yet there exist differences between the cases, and as will be argued in this article, the countries diverge in one particular aspect that is directly relevant to the understanding of the events in 2011: the

Karzai Human rights Ibrahim Warde Identity
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size of the monarchs' ruling coalitions.

Coalitions and Rentier State Theory

The starting point of classical scholarship on authoritarian regimes has been that autocrats cannot possibly rule a country alone.[17] They therefore depend on a ruling coalition of social forces.[18] This involves leaders forging alliances with other social groups and establishing patronage structures in which supporters receive benefits in exchange for political loyalty.[19] In forming such coalitions, autocrats need to find the right balance between loyalty and repression: the larger the coalition, the less repression is needed, but that comes at high costs as resources must be continuously allocated to satisfy supporters.[20]

In the 1970s, political scientists became increasingly interested in the political impacts of oil income. It is in this context that the basic concepts of classical rentier state literature emerged. The central hypothesis emanating from this literature proposes that natural resources rents allow autocrats to build a strong and autonomous state apparatus without any need for domestic taxation.[21] Autocrats, therefore, have the opportunity to construct a narrow and exclusive ruling coalition, while 'bribing' the public into compliance with mass welfare policies.[22]

This literature was recently revisited, amongst others, by Smith[23], Lowi[24] and Yom[25]. These authors argue that the size of the ruling coalition in rentier states is not determined by oil wealth per se, but by the countries' experiences in dealing with societal contestation before oil started to influence the reorganization of state institutions.[26] This view suggests that autocrats who struggle to consolidate power are forced to forge new alliances with previously marginalized social groups in order to ensure that they remain in power. Yom and Gause[27] further developed this argument and introduced the notion of 'cross-cutting coalitions', defined as the "historical alliances linking different social constituencies to the ruling family".[28] According to these authors, such broad coalitions are "the hallmark of success for autocracies, regardless of institutional structure." [29] In addition, international support can have a crucial impact on coalitions as it can help autocrats to eliminate rival groups and ensure regime survival. [30] Instead of making new pacts with contentious groups to guarantee stability, rulers backed by foreign powers can crush the opposition without having to make meaningful concessions.

Based on this alternative framework, the following argument about the likelihood of mass protest can be advanced: An authoritarian regime that never felt threatened enough to forge coalitions with a broad scope of social actors due to strong foreign support (especially during the state-building process) is more likely to experience large-scale protests than one which was forced to do so. The absence of a broad coalition is primarily associated with the presence of a strong foreign power willing to support a contested regime during critical junctures, allowing the regime to crush opposition movements and exclude them from power even before the advent of oil wealth. Once oil becomes abundant, these regimes can cement their rule by initiating development and redistribution policies that benefit their narrow coalition partners and further marginalize the opposition. Since important actors are systematically excluded from political and economic power and have a lot to gain from overthrowing their rulers, there is an increased likelihood of mass protest.[31]

Hypothesis

The central thesis of this article is that in five of the six Gulf monarchies – namely Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE – leaders were forced to forge coalitions with major social actors in their kingdoms at critical moments in their history; either because they had no foreign power to rely on, or because that power was not willing to intervene at their side to oppress the opposition.[32] Only in Bahrain was this not the case, as Britain intervened repeatedly in the internal affairs of the kingdom in favor of the al-Khalifa rulers, allowing them to not reach out beyond their narrow ruling coalition. As a result of these different historical trajectories, Bahrain was the Gulf monarchy that was standing on the weakest foundation on the eve of the Arab uprisings in 2011, facing a large and determined opposition whose demands had never been addressed in the past and, therefore, had a lot to gain from overthrowing the al-Khalifa regime. In the other five monarchies, the broader ruling coalitions considerably reduced the likelihood of protest.

Methodology

This article consists of a comparative historical case study and uses qualitative research tools. Given that the aim is to explore historical paths over a relatively long period of time, process-tracing is the most adequate technique.[33] More precisely, process tracing will explore how the presence or absence of foreign power interferences impacted the ruling coalitions in the six monarchies and how this led to the countries' varied experiences during the Arab uprisings. The analysis is organized in three sequences: the first sequence explores the historical origins of the ruling coalitions that date back to the 18th century and demonstrates how foreign powers influenced early coalitional arrangements. The second begins with the discovery of oil after the end of the Second World War and examines how oil wealth affected the ruling coalitions in the six monarchies. The third sequence analyses how coalitions developed from the 1990-91 Gulf War to the Arab uprisings in early 2011.

Coalition arrangements and the influence of foreign powers in the pre-oil period (~1750-1945)

The first prototype of the contemporary Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was established in 1744 and was based upon an alliance between the tribal leader Muhammad bin Saud and the religious leader Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab.[34] This historic alliance laid the basis for the Saudi-Wahhabi partnership that would remain a crucial feature of the kingdom until today.[35] In 1932, the al-Saud clan established the present-day kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In its early years, the kingdom was ruled not by a bureaucratic state apparatus, but by trusted regional governors, supported by local intermediaries and clients.[36] In an attempt to consolidate his rule, then King Ibn Saud co-opted the key social forces, collaborated with prominent families and tribes; and promoted Wahhabi indoctrination.[37] Apart from the protection Britain offered against foreign intervention, there was no direct interference into the domestic affairs of the Saudi Kingdom. Rather than relying on foreign support, the rule of the al-Saud family was therefore built upon on a complex system of alliances with various social forces, long before oil started to play a role in Saudi Arabia.

In Oman, the interaction between the inland and the coastal areas historically had the strongest influence on the political development of the country.[38] The religious leadership (the Imam), adhering to the Ibadi school of Islam, was traditionally based in the interior whereas the political leadership (the Sultanat) had its headquarters in the coastal areas around Muscat.[39] In the first half of the 19th century, a growing conflict between these two opposing forces considerably weakened the whole country and paved the way for increased British influence.[40] After decades of instability and conflict between the Sultanat and the Imam, and with both sides realizing that they were both too weak to defeat one another, they signed an agreement in 1920 in order to lay the foundation for a peaceful coexistence.[41] Britain played a crucial role in this matter due to its dissatisfaction with the constant instability in the years leading up to the agreement.[42] It is also during this period that the weak Sultanat forged new coalitions with merchant elites to consolidate its leadership and regain strength.[43] This status quo would remain unchallenged until the discovery of oil after the end of the Second World War.

Kuwait was founded in the early 18th century by a variety of clans of which the al-Sabah quickly became preeminent.[44] However, the rule of the al-Sabah family remained limited due to a strong dependency on financial resources from the merchant elites in the sheikhdom.[45] Furthermore, alliances had to be forged with tribal leaders guarding the country's desert hinterland; the al-Sabah simply did not have the resources to control the periphery themselves.[46] At the turn of the 20th century, tensions increased between the al-Sabah family and the merchants over an increase in taxes. As a consequence, the al-Sabah increasingly looked to Britain for support.[47] Much to their despair, however, Britain refrained from interfering to support their rule.[48] As diplomatic surveys reveal, Britain could have defeated the opposition movements from the beginning but instead pressured the al-Sabah to make concessions in order to avoid further instability.[49] Britain's unwillingness to intervene in favor of the al-Sabah forced them to tolerate the opposition and consider new ways of consolidating their rule, which materialized in the state-building process after the end of the Second World War.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the present-day territory of Qatar only consisted of a small group of poor villages.[50] Qatar's population was primarily tribal and nomadic, which placed leaders in a similarly weak position as in the early-days of Kuwait: their ability to collect taxes depended on the consent of the tribes.[51] In the late 1860s, the al-Thani family emerged as the dominant authority in the country and signed an agreement with Britain in 1916.[52] Like the al-Sabah in Kuwait and the Sultanat in Oman, the al-Thani hoped that their cooperation with Britain would not only protect them against

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foreign interventions, but that it would also guarantee their internal supremacy.^[53] In reality, however, this helped little to alleviate internal divides within their large ruling family. It also did not save the sheikhdom from a series of economic crises in the interwar period. In sum, pre-oil era Qatar was institutionally weak and economically poor, with a large but divided ruling family that was unable to address the sheikhdom's chronic economic problems.^[54]

The UAE is a federation of seven emirates, each of which has a separate history.^[55] However, they share a number of characteristics: They all became protectorates of the British Empire in the early 19th century and only became independent when forming the UAE in 1971.^[56] Britain promised full support to the sheikhs against external threats in exchange for guarantees that their towns would not tolerate pirates that might endanger the shipping routes to India.^[57] Two main groups of tribes have dominated the UAE since the 18th century, the Qawasim and the Bani Yas.^[58] Notable threats to their authority only emerged in the 1930s in the context of the World recession when merchants complained that their rulers' agreements with Britain would worsen their economic situation.^[59] As a consequence, protests erupted and demanded that the rulers limited their personal income and distribute rents more equitably. As will be seen in the next sequence, the advent of oil wealth introduced a completely new dynamic in this quest for redistribution of national income and strongly facilitated coalition arrangements between the dominant groups and merchant elites.

The Bahrain archipelago was originally inhabited by the Baharinah, a Shi'a community. In the late 18th century, they were joined by a Sunni community under the lead of the al-Khalifa family, which defeated the Persian occupation on the archipelago. Unlike elsewhere in the Gulf States, the al-Khalifa did not come to power from within the society, but became rulers as a result of conquest.^[60] Towards the end of the 19th century, the al-Khalifa regime contributed increasingly to discriminatory practices against the indigenous Shi'a majority. In order to understand why the Bahraini rulers were able to do so without fearing serious repercussions, the role of Britain was crucial. Whereas at the mid-19th century, Britain's primary interest in the country was to secure the maritime trade routes to and from India, its role in Bahrain's internal affairs expanded significantly towards the end of the century.^[61] Out of fear that other powers could make a claim over the strategically and economically interesting archipelago, Britain tried to secure its interest by strengthening Bahrain's security apparatus.^[62] Therefore, Britain tolerated a regime – and indeed strengthened it – that had never felt any need to reach out, make concessions and share power with a broad scope of social actors in the country. As we will see in the next chapters, the sheer absence of dialogue between the Bahraini rulers and the opposition led to repeated turmoil in the second half of the twentieth century.

The influence of oil wealth on the ruling coalitions in the Gulf monarchies (~1945-1990)

In Saudi Arabia, the oil boom started in the early 1950s and completely transformed the young kingdom's political economy.^[63] Since no formal administration existed to manage the massive inflow of oil revenue, everything had to be built from scratch. In this process, bureaucratic institutions were designed around the interests of the al-Saud family members.^[64] Furthermore, many political allies from the pre-oil period received privileged positions in the booming oil industry or were granted exclusive trade agencies which they still hold today.^[65] The tremendous business opportunities of the oil era also allowed new families to immerse into the complex patronage networks.^[66] It can therefore be argued that in Saudi Arabia, oil cemented existing coalitions that predated the oil era and allowed new actors to join the complex patronage system.

In Oman, the fragile coalition between the Sultanat, the Imamat and merchants elites was put to the test even before oil was first discovered in the kingdom.^[67] In the 1950s, a conflict broke out between the Sultanat and the Imamat over a disputed territory suspected to hold oil deposits.^[68] Supported by the British, the forces of the Sultanat intervened, forced the rebelling Imam into exile, and reunited the kingdom by realigning the Ibadi leadership of the interior.^[69] In the following years, top positions in the booming oil industry and the growing public sector were filled, in keeping with the pre-oil period, with the Sultanat's historical political allies, especially the influential merchant elites and tribes.^[70] Where instability was still rife – as in the Dhofar province – social and economic reforms, as well as strategic positioning of local leaders into senior government functions decreased tensions.^[71] In short, oil helped the Sultanat cement and extend the pre-oil era ruling coalition and, by doing so, largely contributed to increased stability in the country.^[72]

In Kuwait and Qatar, oil income started to flow during the 1950s and had similar effects as in Saudi

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Arabia. It enabled the rulers not only to decrease their dependency on the merchants, but also to forge new alliances, namely with influential actors in the growing public sector. Like in Saudi Arabia, institutions were designed according to the interests of the ruling families and their coalitional partners from the pre-oil period.^[73] In Kuwait, the dominant merchant elites were given important economic privileges in return for political compliance.^[74] It was also during this period that the al-Sabah leadership – given its memories of foreign powers' unreliability during previous crises – reached out to its Shi'a minority.^[75] Since then, many Shi'a have enjoyed close relations with the al-Sabah clan and benefited from the oil boom in the country.^[76] On the same grounds, al-Sabah rulers also allowed limited political pluralism in the form of a National Assembly to be established in the 1950s.^[77] In Qatar – where merchants were never as powerful as in Kuwait – the large ruling family (estimated to make up over half of the national population) benefited from the oil boom in the post-war period.^[78] In sum, oil wealth allowed leaders in both monarchies to strengthen and extend their ruling coalition by distributing wealth and positions according to political arrangements that often pre-dated the oil period.

Petroleum had similar effects in the UAE, where the oil boom started in the late 1960s. In the sheikhdoms of Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah, fast growing oil exports provided the ruling families with the ability to not only distribute wealth to their citizens – responding to demands of the interwar period – but also to assign lucrative import monopolies to various merchant families.^[79] Many families who during the 1950s supported nationalist movements against the sheikhs became rich during the 1960-1970s and established significant business empires.^[80] Like in the previously discussed cases, this unprecedented economic boom led to the emergence of complex patronage networks that extended the rulers' support base to new social actors, while consolidating the tribal alliances from the pre-oil period.

In Bahrain, the transition to an oil-based economy happened earlier than in the other monarchies and was accompanied by a number of problems dating back to the pre-oil period.^[81] Development and redistributive policies relegated the Shi'a majority to second-class status, causing outrage amongst the Shi'a.^[82] In the 1950s, a series of clashes between government forces and the opposition heated up the already volatile atmosphere between the two sects. The Bahraini government – strongly supported by the British – responded harshly, suppressing all opposition and political activity.^[83] After repeated outbreaks of violence in the 1960s and Britain's announcement to retreat from the Gulf in 1971, the al-Khalifa attempted to imitate the Kuwaiti experience by establishing a National Assembly.^[84] However, this experiment was short-lived and the Assembly dissolved in 1975. In 1979, the Iranian Revolution further increased sectarian tensions in the country and added a new dynamic, in that it provided Bahrain with new powerful foreign supporters: Saudi Arabia and the United States.^[85] While oil-wealth accentuated discriminatory practices, international support continued to strengthen a narrow ruling coalition and gave the al-Khalifa regime few incentives to initiate meaningful reforms.

Ruling coalitions and domestic challenges from the Gulf War to the Arab Spring (~1990-2011)

In Saudi Arabia, the threat posed by the 1990-91 Gulf War incited the al-Saud clan to broaden and strengthen its alliance with the major social actors in the country – be it the Wahhabi community, tribal leaders or business elites.^[86] During the 1990s, oil prices started to drop and the Saudi rulers feared that this could endanger the patronage networks carefully put in place during previous decades.^[87] In addition, the kingdom's Shi'a minority has increasingly raised complaints that they are treated as second-class citizens in a kingdom that embodies a puritanical version of Sunni Islam.^[88] The fact that the majority of Saudi Arabia's Shi'a population lives in the oil-rich eastern provinces makes this a serious concern for the regime. However, the regional character of the problem as well as the massive development programs put in place for the concerned provinces make country-wide mass protest unlikely.^[89] Considering the broad coalition of business elites, religious, tribal and regional leaders, it is not surprising that in 2011, there was very limited ground for mass protest to take root.

In Oman, the two decades since the end of the Cold War were characterized by steady economic development and improved living standards.^[90] On a political level, Sultan Qaboos' ruling coalition that was carefully put in place during the previous two decades has continued to dominate the country's political decision-making process. As in previous decades, new social actors (tribes and families) were co-opted by providing them attractive material benefits or public sector employment opportunities.^[91] However, Oman's economic performance cannot compare to that of Qatar, Kuwait and the UAE; and its oil and gas resources are moderate. With a labor market that can no longer provide sufficient employment opportunities for its very young population, it has become increasingly difficult to uphold the broad coalition of social actors established in the booming 1970s-80s.^[92] With one of the highest

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unemployment rates in the region (15% in 2010), frustration was widespread, especially among young Omanis; and it is therefore not surprising that some protest did emerge during the Arab uprisings in 2011. [93] However, large-scale protest was unlikely due to the fact that a broad coalition of social actors still had a stake in the continuation of Sultan Qaboos' rule.

As for Kuwait, the 1990-91 Gulf War had profound effects on the country. First of all, the economic impact of the astronomical costs of wartime repairs, coupled with declining oil prices in the 1990s, put strong pressure on the al-Sabah leadership. [94] Even though rising oil prices in the early 2000s removed many of these pressures and led to significant economic growth, a moderate opposition persisted and managed to impose political reforms through the channel of the National Assembly in the 2000s. [95] This assembly has remained an important arena in which the different social constituencies compete and bargain to obtain concessions from the regime. [96] As a result, the opposition has refrained from radicalization, as this would potentially endanger their accrued privileges. [97] In view of this historic channel of institutionalized bargaining and contestation, it becomes apparent why the demands during the 2011 protests remained moderate and, in fact, why not more people took to the streets in the first place. It can be argued that the major social actors in the country were integrated into the ruling coalition and, thus, had an interest in the continuation of the regime headed by the al-Sabah family.

While being less directly affected by the Gulf War, the UAE experienced extraordinary economic development in the two decades leading up to the Arab uprisings. As a result of the country's very generous welfare policies, the UAE has been facing a remarkable population imbalance, meaning that between 80% and 85% of the inhabitants are foreigners. [98] Given that Emiratis are usually vastly better off than the expatriate non-nationals, a strong feeling of belonging to a privileged and wealthy minority has contributed to national identity and solidarity. [99] This in turn has allowed the previously established ruling coalitions to be consolidated and strengthened without the emergence of social unrest. [100] Given the widespread support that this broad ruling coalition enjoys, it is not surprising that the UAE did not experience any sort of protest during the Arab uprisings.

Very similar to the UAE, Qatar also experienced extraordinary economic development in the last two decades. [101] On a political level, this facilitated the cementing of the previously established ruling coalition under al-Thani. The al-Thani rulers also set in motion a number of reforms aimed at preventing potential succession disputes of the sort the country has seen in its past, and promoted political participation at the municipal level. [102] Like in the UAE, there is no recent history of social unrest in Qatar. Over half of the sheikhdom's small and very wealthy population is directly related to the ruling family – and thus the ruling coalition – there is simply no social basis upon which mass protests could emerge. Most Qatari citizens clearly have an interest in the continuation of the established order and, as a consequence, it was no surprise that the Arab uprisings have not gained momentum in Qatar.

In Bahrain, the 1990s began with economic difficulties. [103] The political opposition was silenced for much of the 1980s, but the economic crisis of the 1990s initiated the re-emergence of opposition groups calling for the reinstatement of the parliament as well as the release of political prisoners. [104] In the mid-1990s, violent protests erupted in areas primarily inhabited by Shi'a Bahrainis. [105] Coordinated by former British officials contracted by the al-Khalifa government, the regime's response was draconian. [106] However, this only contributed to even more intense protests throughout the 1990s. In 1999, the regime promised far-reaching reforms, which, however, came to a halt soon after being launched. [107] Political persecution and de facto exclusion of Bahraini Shi'a from senior political and economic positions continued, and protests remained a frequent occurrence in Bahrain throughout the 2000s. [108] The events of 2011 can therefore be placed in context with the country's long history of regime contestation. Due to the regime's narrow ruling coalition, protests could easily take root in large, excluded segments of the population that had a strong interest in the fall of the al-Khalifa regime.

The experiences of all six monarchies illustrate that while economic patterns clearly influenced coalition arrangements between rulers and opposing forces, they were not themselves the direct source of political unrest (or the absence thereof). In Qatar, Kuwait and the UAE, the fast economic development of the last decades undoubtedly facilitated the rulers' efforts to strengthen their ruling coalitions. In the three other cases, generally lower economic development made this task more difficult. However, the carefully established broad ruling coalitions in Saudi Arabia and Oman strongly decreased the potential for mass protests, whereas in Bahrain, the exclusion of large social segments from political and economic power heralded continued political instability. In sum, the reasons for the monarchies' varied experiences during the Arab uprisings lie less in the countries' overall economic wealth, but rather in the size of the monarchs' ruling coalitions which translates directly into how political power and economic wealth is distributed.

Conclusion

The analysis above demonstrates that in accordance with the hypothesis, five of the six Gulf Monarchies underwent similar historical trajectories. At particular moments in history, the leaders of Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE were forced to reach out to integrate the major social actors into the ruling coalition and provide them significant economic benefits in return for political loyalty. Bahrain, on the other hand appeared as an outlier, in that the al-Khalifa rulers never reached out to larger segments of the population and development policies further increased discriminatory tendencies in the country. The main reason for this was that the al-Khalifa family could rely on substantial foreign assistance to subdue the opposition at various moments throughout the country's history. Even though the other monarchies also had close ties to foreign powers, only in Bahrain did a foreign power directly interfere in the day-to-day running of the state's affairs.

This factor constitutes a crucial difference between Bahrain and the other cases and helps to understand why Bahrain experienced mass protest in 2011, whereas the other five monarchies did not. While in the other five cases, the monarchs base their rule on broad ruling coalitions that include major social actors in their countries, the al-Khalifa regime in Bahrain never reached beyond the Sunni-minority to forge alliances with the country's Shi'a majority. As a result, it was only in Bahrain that mass protests could take hold due to the existence of a large social base with no political and economic interest in the continuation of the al-Khalifa monarchy. The following table summarizes the central actors in the six monarchies' ruling coalitions as presented in this article:

Summary table : The ruling coalitions in the Gulf monarchies

Country	Ruling coalition
Saudi Arabia	Broad: ruling family, merchant and business elites, religious establishment (Wahhabi community), influential tribes and families
Oman	Broad: ruling family, merchant and business elites, religious establishment (Ibadi community), influential tribes and families
Kuwait	Broad: ruling family, merchant and business elites (Sunni and Shi'a), influential tribes and families
Qatar	Broad: very large ruling family and business elites
United Arab Emirates	Broad: ruling families, business elites and tribal leaders
Bahrain	Narrow: ruling family, (Sunni) merchants and business elites

History seemed to repeat itself in 2011 when foreign powers again intervened in Bahrain to assure the survival of the al-Khalifa regime. However, this analysis of Bahrain's past suggests that there is little doubt that in the future, mass protests will erupt again if the regime fails to reconsider its exclusionary policies against large segments of the Bahraini society.

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[1] Sean L. Yom and Gregory F. Gause III, "Resilient Royals: How Monarchies Hang On," *Journal of Democracy* 23, no. 4 (2012): 74.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Gregory F Gause III, "Kings for all Seasons: How the Middle East Monarchies Survived the Arab Spring," *Brookings Doha Center Analysis Paper*, no. 8 (2013): 3.

[4] Slackman Michael, "Protest in Bahrain Become Test of Wills," *New York Times*, 23 February 2011, A8.

[5] Yom and Gause, *Resilient Royals*, 81.

[6] "Gulf States send forces to Bahrain following protests," BBC, 14 March 2011, accessed 25 December 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12729786>.

[7] For more information on the regime's response and the GCC's intervention, see Marc Lynch, *The Arab Uprising – The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2012), 135-141.

[8] Ibid.

[9] The only paper specifically addressing this question is by Zoltan Barany, "The "Arab Spring" in the Kingdoms," *Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, Research Paper* (2012).

[10] Note that it is disputable whether the Arab uprisings came to a halt in 2011 or continue until today. This article does not discuss this issue further and is limited in scope to the events in 2011.

Follow

[11] This view is overwhelmingly shared by scholars. See for example Yom and Gause, *Resilient Royals*, 80.; Barany, *Arab Spring in the Kingdoms*.; Marina Ottaway and Marwan Muasher, "Arab Monarchies: Chance for Reform, Yet Unmet," *Carnegie Papers* (2011): 14.

[12] For more information on online activism in Bahrain, see Lynch, *Arab Uprising*, 109-112.

[13] Halim Rane and Sumra Salem, "Social media, social movements and the diffusion of ideas in the Arab uprisings," *Journal of International Communication* 18, no. 1 (2012): 102.

[14] These numbers are based on: "Kuwait, *International Religious Freedom Report*," US Department of State, accessed 26 November 2013, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2002/14005.htm>.; "Saudi Arabia's Shia press for rights," BBC Arabic Service, accessed 26 November 2013, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7959531.stm>.

[15] These numbers are based on World Bank Development Indicators data and refer to the countries' GDP per capita in constant 2000 \$US dollar.

[16] Christopher M. Davidson, *Power and Politics in the Persian Gulf Monarchies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 1-2.

[17] Sean L. Yom, "Oil, Coalitions, and Regime Durability: the Origins and Persistence of Popular Rentierism in Kuwait," *Studies in Comparative International Development*, no. 46 (2011): 221.

[18] See for example Barrington Moore, *Social origins of dictatorship and democracy: lord and peasant in the making of the modern world* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966); Samuel P. Huntington, *Political order in changing societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968).

[19] Yom, *Oil, Coalitions, and Regime Durability*, 221.

[20] *Ibid.*

[21] See for example Hussein Mahdavi, "Patterns and Problems of Economic Development in Rentier States: The Case of Iran," in *Studies in Economic History of the Middle East*, ed. M.A. Cook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970); Hazem Beblawi, 'The Rentier State in the Arab World' in *The Arab State*, ed. Giacomo Luciani (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990); Michael Ross, "Does Oil Hinder Democracy?," *World Politics* 53, no. 3 (2001): 325-361.

[22] Yom, *Oil, Coalitions, and Regime Durability*, 221.

[23] Benjamin Smith, *Hard times in the lands of plenty: oil politics in Iran and Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007)

[24] Miriam R. Lowi, *Oil Wealth and the Poverty of Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009)

[25] Yom, *Oil, Coalitions, and Regime Durability*.

[26] *Ibid.*, 222.

[27] Yom and Gause, *Resilient Royals*.

[28] *Ibid.*, 81.

[29] *Ibid.*

[30] Jason Brownlee, "And yet they persist: explaining survival and transition in neopatrimonial regimes," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 37 (2002): 53-56.

[31] According to Yom, the Palavi regime of Iran was the best example of such a regime; whereas Kuwait is presented as the opposite case, in that a broad ruling coalition was established even before oil became abundant. For more information, see Yom, *Oil, Coalitions, and Regime Durability*, 221.

[32] When the term 'coalition' is used in this article, it refers to alliances linking social constituencies (e.g. business and merchant elites, tribes, religious communities, etc.) to the ruling family. This understanding of the term is consistent with the definition employed by the above discussed authors.

[33] According to George and Bennet, process-tracing allows to "identify the intervening causal process [...] between an independent variable (or variables) and the outcome of the dependent variable". See

Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennet, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), 206.

[34] Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, "Saudi Arabia", in *Power and Politics in the Persian Gulf Monarchies*, ed. Christopher Davidson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 63.

[35] Due to a number of military conflicts with Egypt on the one hand, and internal contesters on the other, it was only at the beginning of the 19th century that the al-Saud rule could be permanently upheld thanks to the formation of a powerful army based on alliances with important tribes. For more information, see Guido Steinberg, *Saudi-Arabien: Politik, Geschichte, Religion* (C.H. Beck, 2004), 47.

[36] Steffen Hertog, "Shaping the Saudi State: Human Agency's Shifting Role in Rentier-State Formation," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, no. 39 (2007): 541.

[37] Lowi, *Oil Wealth*, 152.

[38] Rosemarie Said Zahlan, *The making of the modern Gulf States: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 107.

[39] *Ibid.*, 107.

[40] For example in 1891, Britain signed a pact with the Sultanat in which the Sultan agreed not to make deals with any other power than Britain in return for receiving British support. See Zahlan, *Gulf States*, 109.

[41] Marc Valeri, "Oman" in *Power and Politics in the Persian Gulf Monarchies*, ed. Christopher Davidson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 137.

[42] Zahlan, *Gulf States*, 110.

[43] Valeri, *Oman*, 137.

[44] Jill Crystal, *Oil and politics in the Gulf: rulers and merchants in Kuwait and Qatar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 18.

[45] Since the merchants' wealth was mobile, their potential departure posed a constant threat to the rule of the al-Sabah family and assured the merchants a saying in local affairs.

[46] Yom, *Oil, Coalitions, and Regime Durability*, 225.

[47] For example in 1899, the al-Sabah signed a pact placing Kuwait under British military protection. See James Onley, "Britain and the Gulf Shaikhdoms, 1820-1971: The Politics of Protection," *Center for International and Regional Studies, Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar, Occasional Paper*, no. 4 (2009): 10.

[48] In the 1930s, the leading merchants also formed the Majli reform movement – including a legislative assembly – and demanded democratic reforms. See Yom, *Oil, Coalitions, and Regime Durability*, 226.

[49] Andrew B. Loewenstein, "The Veiled Protectorate of Kowait: Liberalized Imperialism and British Efforts to Influence Domestic Policy during the Reign of Sheikh Ahmad al-Jaber, 1938-50," *Middle Eastern Studies* 36, no. 2 (2000): 107-111. Quoted in Yom, *Oil, Coalitions, and Regime Durability*, 227.

[50] Crystal, *Oil and politics in the Gulf*, 113.

[51] Crystal, *Oil and politics in the Gulf*, 114.

[52] Zahlan, *Gulf States*, 85.

[53] Onley, *Britain and the Gulf Shaikhdoms*, 9.

[54] Zahlan, *Gulf States*, 87.

[55] The seven emirates are: Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Ras al-Khaimah, al-Qaiwain and the Emirate of Nejd.

[56] Christopher M. Davidson, *Power and Politics in the Persian Gulf Monarchies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 7.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Zahlan, *Gulf States*, 8.

[59] For example, the merchants complained that Britain restricted their access to foreign markets. For more information, see Davidson, *Power and Politics*, 7.

[60] Zahlan, *Gulf States*, 48.

[61] Jane Kinninmont, "Bahrain" in *Power and Politics in the Persian Gulf Monarchies*, ed. Christopher Davidson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 31-33.; Zahlan, *Gulf States*, 48.

[62] Zahlan, *Gulf States*, 49.; Marc Owen Jones, "The history of British involvement in Bahrain's internal security," *openDemocracy*, 8 August 2013, accessed 25 November 2013, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/opensecurity/marc-owen-jones/history-of-british-involvement-in-bahrains-internal-security>.; Kinninmont, Bahrain, 33.

[63] Ulrichsen, *Saudi Arabia*, 64.

[64] Hertog, *Shaping the Saudi State*, 546.

[65] Hertog, *Shaping the Saudi State*, 547.

[66] Ibid.

[67] The first oil was discovered in 1962 and exploited in 1967. For more information, see Michael Quentin Morton, "The Search for Oil in Oman," *GeoExpro* 10, no. 5 (2013).

[68] Zahlan, *Gulf States*, 111. See also Valerie, *Oman*, 137.

[69] Zahlan, *Gulf States*, 111-112. Since Oman also faced a Marxist-Leninists rebellion in its Dhofar province in the 1960s, the long due nation-building process could only begin in the early 1970s.

[70] Valeri, *Oman*, 141.

[71] Zahlan, *Gulf States*, 114.

[72] Valeri, *Oman*, 142.

[73] Crystal, *Gulf States*, 172.

[74] Yom, *Oil, Coalitions, and Regime Durability*, 229-232.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Even though it has only been granted limited authority over decision-makers, the National Assembly has remained a vibrant platform for dialogue until today. See Yom, *Oil, Coalitions and Regime Durability*, 229-232.

[78] Zahlan, *Gulf States*, 114.

[79] Davidson, *Power and Politics*, 8.

[80] Ibid. See also Frauke Heard-Bey, "The United Arab Emirates: Statehood and Nation-Building in a Traditional Society," *Middle East Journal* 59, no. 3 (2005): 361-372.

[81] Zahlan, *Gulf States*, 51-56.

[82] Yom, *Oil, Coalitions, and Regime Durability*, 223.

[83] Ibid. Note that even though Britain recognized that the opposition's complaints were often valid, it did not want to weaken its ties with the al-Khalifa family; as this could have proved devastating not only for the ruling family's position, but also for Britain's influence in the first oil-rich state.

[84] Zahlan, *Gulf States*, 58-61.

[85] Kinninmont, Bahrain, 54-57. See also Zahlan, *Gulf States*, 62-63.

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[86] For example, a new Consultative Assembly (*Majlis al-Shura*) was established in 1993 that includes influential merchants, technocrats, religious elites, civil servants, retired military personnel and academics. For more information, see Ulrichsen, Saudi Arabia, 70.

[87] Ulrichsen, Saudi Arabia, 79.

[88] *The Economist*, Shooting the sheikhs – Violence against Shia clerics troubles Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, 14 July 2012, accessed 19 December 2013, <http://www.economist.com/node/21558637>.

[89] For more information on Saudi Arabia's development projects in its eastern provinces, see Gause, *Kings for all Seasons*, 25.

[90] Valeri, Oman, 143.

[91] *Ibid.*

[92] *Ibid.*

[93] Unemployment data is taken from the Trading Economics Database, accessed 21 December 2013, <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/>.

[94] Yom, Oil, Coalitions, and Regime Durability, 236.

[95] E.g. the Al-Sabah leadership gave in to popular demands to introduce female suffrage in 2005. For other examples, see Yom, Oil, Coalitions, and Regime Durability, 237.

[96] Yom, Oil, Coalitions, and Regime Durability, 238.

[97] *Ibid.*

[98] Heard-Bey, *The United Arab Emirates*, 361-362.

[99] *Ibid.*

[100] *Ibid.*

[101] This fast economic growth was not only due to the country's vast natural resources, but also because of the successful implementation of an economic diversification policy that led to the emergence of a large financial sector. See Steven Wright, "Qatar," in *Power and Politics in the Persian Gulf Monarchies*, ed. Christopher Davidson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 126.

[102] E.g. since 1998, Qatari citizens (men and women) can elect their municipal governors. For more information, see Wright, Qatar, 123.

[103] Kinninmont, Bahrain, 39.

[104] *Ibid.*

[105] Genevieve Abdo, "The New Sectarianism, The Arab Uprisings and the Rebirth of the Shi'a-Sunni Divide," *The Saban Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings*, Analysis Paper, no. 29 (2013): 11.

[106] Kinninmont, Bahrain, 40.; Owen-Jones, British involvement in Bahrain's internal security. Note that many British citizens and companies continue to perform vital security functions or provided Bahrain's security forces with the latest weapons and spy equipment.

[107] Jane Kinninmont, "Bahrain country review," Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Center (NOREF) Policy Brief (January 2013), <http://www.peacebuilding.no/eng/noref/publications> (21 December 2013).

[108] Yom and Gause, *Resilient Royals*, 82. Examples of such families are the Al Zayani, the Kanoo and Fakhro as well as a limited amount of Shi'a families, such as the Bin Rajab and the al-Saleh.

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