

ISSUE BRIEF

How Monarchies End

As the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region continues to undergo significant political and socio-economic changes, the **Rafik Hariri Center and Middle East Programs** are leading the way in providing a forum for informing and galvanizing the transatlantic community to shape a stable and prosperous region. The center has been at the vanguard of MENA current affairs, policies, and shifts for more than a decade. The center works in, with, and on the MENA region, amplifying regional voices and connecting regional stakeholders to their counterparts in the US and Europe. The mission is to promote peace and security and unlock the region's economic and human potential through the ideas we publish, the solutions we generate, and the communities we influence.

MAY 2023 STEPHEN R. GRAND

“The whole world is in revolt. Soon there will be only five Kings left—the King of England, the King of Spades, The King of Clubs, the King of Hearts, and the King of Diamonds.”—King Farouk of Egypt, 1948¹

Recently, there have been a spate of notable books on “How Democracies Die.” Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt authored a book with that very title in January 2019, then David Runciman’s *How Democracies End*, Anne Applebaum’s *Twilight of Democracy*, Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson’s *The Narrow Corridor: States, Societies, and the Fate of Liberty*, and Adam Przeworski’s *Crises of Democracy* all followed in rapid succession.

But no comparable work has appeared on how monarchies end. Democracies can corrode and crumble, but so can autocracies. Why are there no books being published about how kings and queens, emperors and caliphs, cease to rule—either because their throne is transformed into a more ceremonial post or because they lose power entirely?²

One simple reason for the paucity of publications on monarchies’ end may be that there are so few of them remaining. Well into the nineteenth century, monarchy was the preponderant form of government in the world, with the United Kingdom’s constitutional monarchy and the United States’ experiment in repub-

1. Susan Ratcliffe, ed., *Oxford Essential Quotations*, 4th edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780191826719.001.0001/q-oro-ed4-00004285>.

2. Though the scope is broader than that considered here, a notable exception may be: Andrea Kendall-Taylor and Erica Frantz, “When Dictators Die,” *Journal of Democracy* 27, 4 (2016), 159–171.

lican government serving as the exceptions to the rule. That changed, dramatically, with the advent of the modern era and the liberal ideas that animated it, the Industrial Revolution and the economic changes it brought, and, most crucially, the political upheavals wrought by two world wars. Now monarchy is the exception. Monarchy as a form of governance has largely been consigned to the dustbin of history, with democracies remaining on one side and various other forms of authoritarianism (one-party states, military regimes, personalistic regimes, and oligarchies) on the other.

That is, except for in the Middle East and North Africa. Eight of the twenty-two Arab states possess monarchs who either rule absolutely or still play an important role in governance, at a time when monarchy has largely disappeared from the rest of the globe. Tiny Eswatini (population 1.1 million) and Brunei (470,000) are the only states elsewhere in the world where the monarch still retains undivided power.³

These eight Arab monarchies (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Jordan, and Morocco) may be global outliers, but they happen to be among the most important states in the Middle East and North Africa in geopolitical and economic terms. If one cares about energy prices, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Iran-Sunni Arab relations, or economic integration in the Middle East, the future of monarchical forms of government remains an important question. Saudi Arabia is the key player in determining global oil supply and, hence, prices. The United Arab Emirates has become a regional economic hub and military force. Qatar houses several US military bases. Morocco is a strategically important country in North Africa. And Jordan sits geographically at a critical crossroads in the Levant, making it a perennial player in Middle East peace negotiations.

What is more, these eight monarchies, along with Israel and Egypt, are the United States' strongest allies and partners in the Middle East and North Africa. For decades, US foreign policy in the region has been premised on the assumption of "authoritarian stability"—the belief that these autocrats would prove enduring enough to be a stabilizing force in the region.⁴ As conditions in the region change, US policymakers will need to periodically review whether that assumption still holds.

Arab monarchs themselves must have on their minds the question of monarchy's future. With the world gradually transitioning away from oil and natural gas, with memories of the Arab Spring still fresh—and with their longtime regional secu-

rity partner, the United States, reducing its military footprint in the region—they must wonder what their prospects are going forward. How likely is it that they can continue as monarchs, and for how long? What strategic options are available to them should popular pressure for change continue to build? What is the best strategy for them to pursue in managing popular pressures for change? If push comes to shove, how do they avoid a cataclysmic end to their rule, in the form of a military coup or social revolution?

In comparison to the recent outpouring of work on how democracies die, extremely little exists about how monarchies end. There is a gap in the literature, which impoverishes our understanding not just of domestic developments, but—even more crucially—of geopolitics in the Middle East. Namely, how durable are some of the region's most pivotal states, and how might their internal politics affect their future role in the region's security affairs? Political scientists Juan Linz, Alfred Stepan, and Juli Minoves note a gap in our understanding regarding transitions from monarchy to democracy: "Comparative politics has contributed very little to the general analysis of how monarchies move toward democracy. In particular, the scholarly literature on democratic transitions features scant comparative work on attempts—both failed and successful—to bring about the full democratization of monarchies."⁵ The gap exists because the study of monarchism has become a lost art. Given the scarcity of monarchies, specialists of the Persian Gulf region were, by the 1990s, among the few scholars left to study monarchism as a political form.⁶

This paper seeks to narrow the gap in our understanding as to how monarchies eventually end. It examines past transitions away from monarchism—looking first at the history of monarchism globally, and then the more recent experience of monarchism in the Arab world. It endeavors to understand the trend lines. What has been the history of monarchy, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa? Where has it receded most quickly, where has it proved most enduring, and why? What has typically come after monarchies end, in terms of the paths those countries have subsequently followed? It endeavors to understand the strategic choices monarchs face in responding to popular pressure for change. What options were available to them at different key points in time, which did they choose, and what were the apparent consequences of those decisions?

This paper has as its analytic focus "ruling monarchies"—political regimes in which the monarch plays an active role

3. Based on data from: "The World Factbook," US Central Intelligence Agency, last visited February 13, 2023, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/>; "Freedom in the World," Freedom House, last visited February 13, 2023, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world>.

4. F. Gregory Gause III, "Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring: The Myth of Authoritarian Stability," *Foreign Affairs* 90, 40 (2011), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23039608>.

5. Juan Linz, Alfred Stepan, and Juli Minoves, "Democratic Parliamentary Monarchies," *Journal of Democracy* 25, 2 (2014), <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/democratic-parliamentary-monarchies>.

6. Sean L. Yom and Gregory Gause III, "Resilient Royals: How Arab Monarchies Hang On," *Journal of Democracy* 23, 4 (2012), 74–88, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/487784>.

in governance. There are many forms of authoritarianism in the world, but the paper concentrates on the future of ruling monarchies. Social science literature has categorized monarchies in different ways, which creates some analytic confusion. Many scholars have differentiated between absolute monarchies (in which the monarch is the unquestioned ruler) and constitutional monarchies (in which the monarch plays a more circumscribed role defined by a constitution). Helpfully, in a 2014 article, Alfred Stepan, Juan Linz, and Juli Minoves suggested a three-part typology that distinguishes between a “ruling monarchy,” a “constitutional monarchy,” and what they term a “democratic parliamentary monarchy.” They rightly regard the key variable to be who decides on the formation and termination of the government. In a democratic parliamentary monarchy, it is a freely elected parliament; in a constitutional monarchy, the support of both parliament and the monarch is required; and, in a ruling monarchy, the monarch alone decides.⁷ By this standard, all eight Arab monarchies today are “ruling monarchies,” and that will be the subject of this paper.

1. Kings and Queens in Human History

Monarchy is as old as the first sizable agricultural settlements. Some scholars believe the need to acquire and defend arable land—and, soon thereafter, trade routes to sell the fruits of cultivating that land—led early humans to concentrate authority in a single member of their group. Early kings and queens were regarded either as gods or as having been anointed by gods. The philosopher Yuval Noah Hariri has noted that there were many other conceivable political forms that these agriculture settlers could have chosen, but monarchy was by far the most frequent choice, perhaps because any other choice lay beyond the collective imagination of the time.⁸

The area between the Tigris and Euphrates is known as the cradle of civilization, as it was there that some of the world’s first major agricultural settlements emerged in ancient times. The Sumerian city-state of Ur was ruled by kings (and, at one point, a queen), as was the Akkadian Empire that followed. So, too, Hammurabi’s Babylonia and Assyria (whose capital became the city of Nineveh). To the west, the Hittites, Canaanites, Phoenicians, Philistines, and Israelites had kings, as did Egypt to the southwest (where it was not uncommon for queens to rule).⁹

During classical antiquity, even vaster empires emerged: the Persian under Cyrus and then Darius, the Spartan and the Athenian, the Macedonian under Alexander the Great, and the Roman, among others. With the notable exception of Athens, these were all led by kings, emperors, and, later, caesars.

Several centuries later, the Prophet Muhammad’s followers, in the decade following his death in 632 CE, conquered the entire Arabia peninsula, then spread Islamic rule throughout the Middle East and North Africa, westward into the Iberian Peninsula, and eastward into Central and South Asia. Following the death of Ali, the fourth and final Rashidun caliph, in 661 CE, the Umayyad Dynasty ruled for nearly a century, until it was conquered by the Abbasids in 750 CE and the capital moved from Damascus to Baghdad.¹⁰ Meanwhile, Shia Ismailis established what became known as the Fatimid Dynasty in the early tenth century, eventually ruling over North Africa and significant parts of the Middle East, with the newly created Cairo as capital, until the Kurdish general Saladin defeated them in 1171.

The Mongol leader Genghis Khan destroyed the last vestiges of Abbasid rule when he captured Baghdad in 1258. Subsequent Mongol emperors (or “khans”) went on to establish the largest continental empire in human history.

A half century later, Osman, the leader of an Anatolian principality, began capturing and annexing the territory of a disintegrating Byzantine Empire. In this way, he and the sultans who followed him created the Ottoman Empire, which eventually reached all the way to the outskirts of Vienna. They invoked Islam to rally the faithful, and laid claim to being the rightful successors of the classical Islamic caliphs. The empire lasted nearly six centuries, until defeat in World War I led to its dissolution in 1922.

The Islamic caliphates were far from uniform—they tended to be as diverse as the populations ruled—but they shared certain features. First, they were rarely all-encompassing: after the defeat of the Umayyads, subsequent caliphs ruled only a portion of the Muslim *umma* (or community). Second, they fused political and religious power: each caliph not only represented the faith and the faithful, but also claimed authority over specific geographic communities. Third, the rules of succession were similar. The Rashidun (the first four caliphs) were elected or selected by consensus, but subsequent caliphs acquired the office through claims of hereditary succession—claims that had little grounding in Islamic law, but were nonetheless broadly accepted. Fourth, starting with the Abbasids, they employed a civil bureaucracy to manage day-to-day affairs, alongside a body of Muslim scholars and clerics (the *ulema*) who interpreted Islamic law and practice. Caliphs erected palaces, mosques, and libraries to house both the ceremonial and administrative functions of their rule. Finally, while power was centralized under the caliph, a good deal of autonomy was often left to local officials to administer local affairs. This earlier Islamic legacy was to inform the political developments of the twentieth century in the Middle East and North Africa.

7. Linz, et al., “Democratic Parliamentary Monarchies.”

8. Yuval Noah Hariri, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2015). For a contrasting view, see: David Graeber and David Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021).

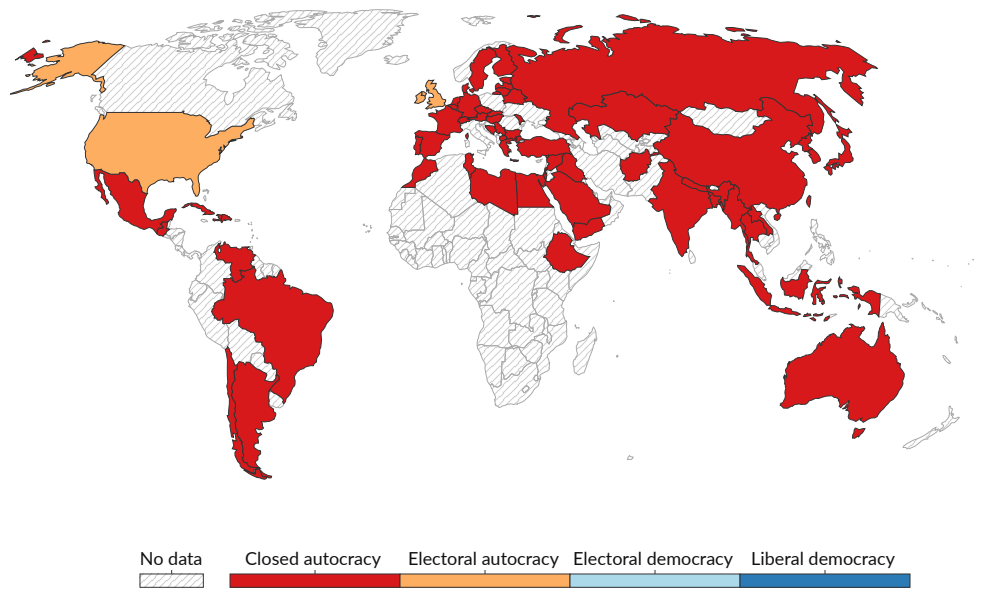
9. The Hebrew bible referred to Egypt’s kings and queens as “pharaohs,” a term the Egyptians themselves did not use, but the name stuck.

10. Of the four “rightly guided” caliphs in Sunni tradition who succeeded Muhammad upon his death, only the fourth, Ali, is recognized as legitimate within Shia tradition.

Political regime, 1800

Based on the criteria of the classification by Lührmann et al. (2018) and the assessment by V-Dem's experts.

Our World
in Data



Source: OWID based on Lührmann et al. (2018); V-Dem (v13)

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Note: The Chart tab uses numeric values, ranging from 0 for closed autocracies to 3 for liberal democracies.

During the Middle Ages, it was European kings and queens who further developed and formalized the institution of the monarchy. They created an extensive administrative structure for managing the affairs of the realm, along with an elaborate feudal chain of vertical obligations and prerogatives between the king or queen, barons and knights, and peasants and serfs. Their royal courts became centers for entertainment and the arts. During this period, European monarchs made the shift from ruling over a defined group of people to a defined territory—a change that laid the groundwork for the modern nation-state.

2. A Democratic Tide

In the early 1800s, kings and queens ruled almost every corner of the “civilized” world. The United Kingdom and the United States, with their experiments in constitutional monarchy and representative democracy, respectively, were the outliers—and even these were quite nascent experiments, and far from fully democratic. Regimes of the World, a new database developed by the political scientists Anna Lührmann, Marcus Tannenber, and Staffan Lindberg, shows in graphic form the political regimes around the world at different points in recent history. Expanding upon data from the Varieties of Democ-

ocracy (V-Dem) project, which employs expert assessments to characterize political systems, it classifies countries over time into four categories: closed autocracies (red—no elections, no individual rights), electoral autocracies (orange—elections, no rights), electoral democracies (light blue—elections, limited rights), and liberal democracies (dark blue—elections, full rights).¹¹ An interactive map shows what the world looked like in terms of regime type in 1800. The United Kingdom, Ireland, and the United States are pictured in orange (as “electoral autocracies”); every other country of the world is pictured in red (as “closed autocracies”).

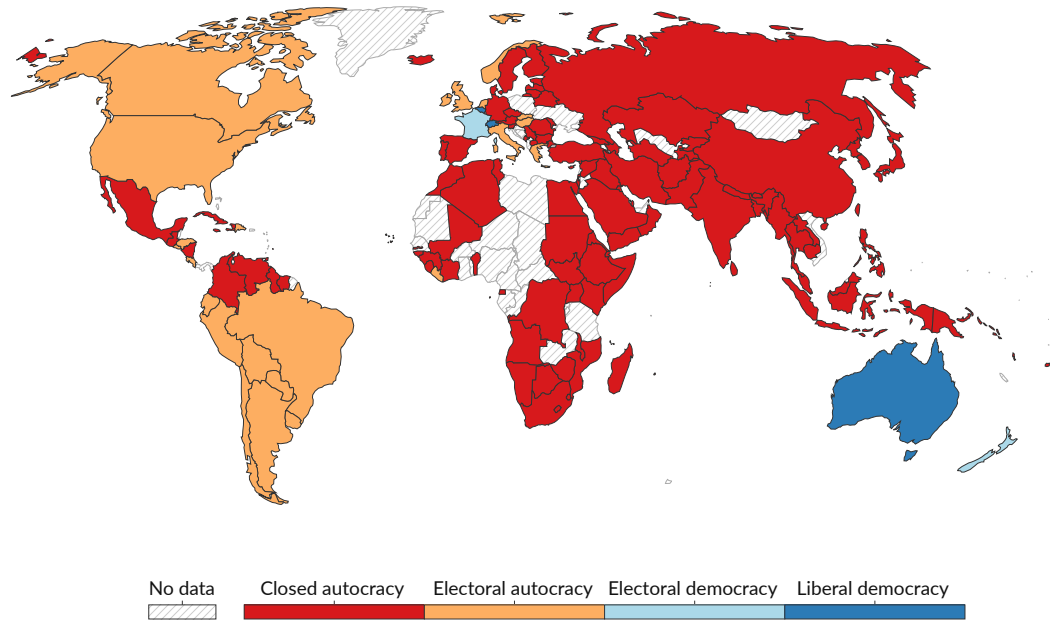
A century later, the franchise was expanded in many European and Latin American countries and beyond, such that Belgium, Switzerland, and Australia are counted as liberal democracies, France and New Zealand as electoral democracies, and a handful of European countries and South America below the Andes as electoral autocracies. These were important changes, but they occurred relatively gradually over the course of a century.

However, forces were at work that would radically transform the political order over the next century and turn the Middle

11. For more on Regimes of the World (RoW) and Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) projects see: Bastian Herre, “The ‘Regimes of the World’ Data: How Do Researchers Measure Democracy?” Our World in Data, December 2, 2021, <https://ourworldindata.org/regimes-of-the-world-data>. The RoW authors explain their methodology as follows: “If these (V-Dem) experts consider a country’s elections to have been both multi-party and free and fair, and the country as having had minimal features of an electoral democracy in general, Regimes of the World classifies it as a democracy. A country is classified as a liberal democracy if the experts also consider the country’s laws to have been transparent; the men and women there as having had access to the justice system; and the country as having had broad features of a liberal democracy overall. If it does not meet one of these conditions, the country is classified as an electoral democracy. A country is classified as an autocracy if it does not meet the above criteria of meaningful, free and fair, multi-party elections. It is classified as an electoral autocracy if the experts consider the elections for the legislature and chief executive—the most powerful politician—to have been multi-party. It is classified as a closed autocracy if either the legislature or chief executive have not been chosen in multi-party elections.”

Political regime, 1900

Based on the criteria of the classification by Lührmann et al. (2018) and the assessment by V-Dem's experts.



Source: OWID based on Lührmann et al. (2018); V-Dem (v13)

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Note: The Chart tab uses numeric values, ranging from 0 for closed autocracies to 3 for liberal democracies.

East into the outlier. In Europe, the Reformation had fragmented religious loyalties. Then, the Enlightenment produced a set of liberal ideas about equality and the rights of men that eventually elevated the individual in popular thinking over older notions about tradition and the divine right of kings. The Industrial Revolution brought economic dislocation and class conflict, creating fertile ground for other ideas about how to organize society. Meanwhile, the rise of nationalism consolidated political loyalties around the nation-state. Finally, the two world wars upended the old political order completely: the Romanovs, Hapsburgs, Hohenzollerns, and Ottomans all lost their thrones in World War I; the British, French, Italians, and Belgians (and Japanese) lost their colonial possessions during or in the years following World War II.

Globally, the picture was similar, even if the forces propelling change were somewhat different. European imperialism, of course, had undermined or eliminated many traditional monarchies elsewhere in the world. Then, the decolonization process, precipitated by the weakening of the European powers in two world wars, brought new elites with new ideas to the fore, while pushing to the side old elite that had been aligned with, or even installed by, the European powers, including local royalty. As part of independence struggles, monarchical structures were disempowered or dismantled entirely in

places as diverse as Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, India, Pakistan, Thailand, Vietnam, and Indonesia.

Writing in the early 1990s, political scientist Samuel Huntington argued that the world had experienced three waves of democratization: one beginning during the nineteenth century and running up to World War I as the idea of democracy spread and the popular franchise was expanded; a second with decolonization following World War II; and a third that began in the mid-1970s on the Iberian Peninsula, then spread to Latin America and Asia, and culminated in Eastern Europe and Africa following the collapse of communism in the 1990s.¹² According to one measure, there were twenty-nine democracies by the first wave's crest, thirty-six by the crest of the second wave, and more than sixty by the third.

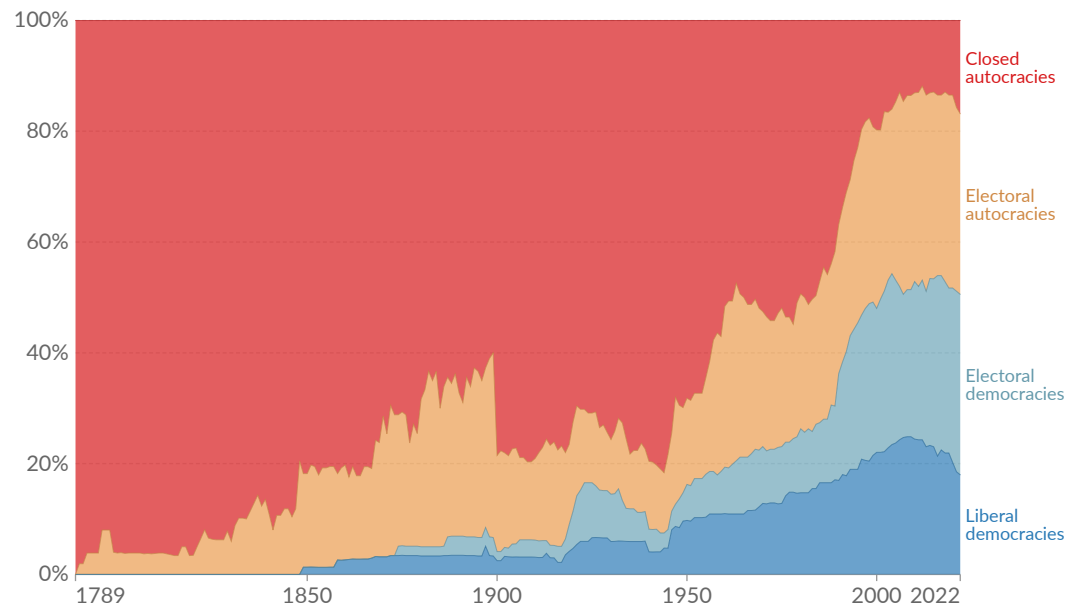
Democratic reversals occurred following each of these waves. Many of the newly democratic regimes that emerged following World War I did not survive either the interwar period or far beyond World War II. The same was true of the newly democratic states created by decolonization in Africa and Asia in the 1960s and 1970s, many of which succumbed to strong-man rule. The most recent democratic wave, triggered by the collapse of communism—which crested around 2000—has also seen significant reversals since. Freedom House grades countries from one to one hundred based on the political and civil rights that

12. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late 20th Century* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993).

Countries that are democracies and autocracies, World

Political regimes based on the criteria of the classification by Lüthmann et al. (2018) and the assessment by V-Dem's experts.

Our World
in Data



Source: OWID based on Lüthmann et al. (2018); V-Dem (v13)

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Note: The share of closed autocracies increases a lot in 1900 because V-Dem covers many more countries since then, often colonies.

they accord their citizens. In every year since 2005, the number of countries whose Freedom House scores declined has exceeded the number of countries whose scores rose.

Huntington considered this an inherent part of the democratization process. Democratization in a few countries in a region had a contagion effect that often led neighboring countries to democratize as well, but not all countries would successfully transition to democracy. The wave metaphor works because each wave brought an initial democratic crest, but that was followed by a trough when not all countries proved able to sustain their democratic gains. With each successive wave, though, democracy advanced.

The data bear this out. Each democratic wave has been followed by reversals, but the trend has been toward a steady increase in the number of democracies relative to non-democracies in the world.

Furthermore, the countries that have experienced the sharpest declines in freedom in recent years have been among non-democracies and those newly attempting to become democratic. The Freedom House data show that it was countries that were categorized as “not free” or “partly free,” rather than “free” countries, that experienced the most significant declines. Of the thirty countries that experienced the largest

decade-long declines in freedom in recent years, twenty-seven were “not free” or “partly free.”

Returning to the Regimes of the World database, the extent of the democratic tide over the last century has been dramatic. North America, most of Central and South America, and almost all of Europe are now either liberal or electoral democracies. Democracy has also made significant inroads in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. In all, Freedom House categorizes 115 of the world’s 195 countries as at least electoral democracies.¹³ And it is possible, as former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright argued in an essay prior to her death, that yet another wave lies ahead.¹⁴

3. Monarchy as Historical Artifact?

At the same time that the number of democracies has been growing, the number of monarchies—most particularly, ruling monarchies—has declined precipitously. Not all former monarchies became democracies—many transformed into other forms of authoritarianism or semi-authoritarianism—but a significant number did. A 2019 article in the *Economist* documented the extent of the absolute decline in the number of monarchies of any kind, ruling or otherwise, since 1900. It noted that there were nearly 160 monarchies in 1900; that number dropped to just forty in 2019.¹⁵ The latter number was even

13. Regimes of the World is a bit more stringent in its categorizations of regime types. It lists only ninety-two as being at least electoral democracies (thirty-two as liberal democracies and sixty as electoral democracies).

14. Madeleine K. Albright, “The Coming Democratic Revival: America’s Opportunity to Lead the Fight Against Authoritarianism,” *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2021.

smaller if one considered only ruling monarchies, because, in most of the forty countries, the role of the monarch has become strictly ceremonial. As mentioned previously, only ten ruling monarchies remain. Eight of these are in the Middle East: the six states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) plus Jordan and Morocco. The only remaining ruling monarchies outside the Middle East are tiny Brunei and Eswatini.

The reasons for this are simple. The *Economist* article explains why in rather dramatic and impolitic, but nonetheless accurate, terms.

If monarchy did not exist, nobody would invent it today. Its legitimacy stems from ancient ritual and childish stories, not from a system based on reason and intended to achieve good governance. It transfers power through a mechanism which promotes congenital defects rather than intelligence. It is sexist, classist, racist and designed specifically to prevent diversity, equality and personal merit from creeping into its inbred ranks.¹⁵

The political scientist Sean Yom adds, “Ruling monarchism disqualifies from power all but a tiny circle of biologically related kin. It is governance by genetics.”¹⁷

Monarchs have become almost as rare as the empires over which several once presided. Nonetheless, the *Economist* article notes that monarchy is a political form with some staying power. Only two of the remaining monarchies—Togo and Nepal—have disappeared from the Earth this century. However, the article attributes this staying power to the reality that so few monarchies wield any real power anymore—again, with the exception of the monarchies of the Middle East and North Africa.

Today’s Arab monarchies in the Middle East and North Africa are relatively recent creations. Ironically, just as monarchy was collapsing in Europe, it was reemerging in a new form in the Middle East—a product of the decline of European imperialism. The Ottoman Empire ruled over most of the Middle East from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth century. As the Ottoman Empire weakened and collapsed, the British and French extended their control throughout the region. They exercised direct rule in parts, while maintaining spheres of influence in others. European colonialism, for better or worse, helped create the institutions and establish the legitimacy for many of the monarchies of the modern Middle East. The British and French drew boundaries where they had not existed before. They centralized power. They helped elevate certain local leaders to positions of authority within these lands.

As has been noted, the two world wars left the European powers militarily and economically exhausted, so much so that they were forced to gradually unwind their colonial holdings. As they retreated from the region, they left local leaders as the sovereign rulers of often newly independent countries. Amid growing anticolonial and nationalist sentiment in the region—a product itself of modernity—Middle Eastern monarchs became the vehicle for national independence movements for many Middle Eastern states. That the region had a long history of kings, emirs, and caliphs no doubt contributed to their acceptance by local populations.

4. The Durability of Arab Monarchies

A conjunction of factors has enabled Arab monarchies to outlast the others. These include abundant oil wealth, the military support of the United States, and these leaders’ perceived legitimacy in the eyes of their citizens.

Oil wealth has allowed the Gulf monarchies to distribute rents to key stakeholders, and thereby maintain social peace. When the Arab Spring protests spread to their countries, for example, the Gulf monarchs announced new subsidy programs to channel more funds to their citizens. The Saudi king promised \$130 billion to increase government salaries, help the unemployed, provide subsidized housing, and support religious institutions. The United Arab Emirates committed \$1.6 billion to water and electricity infrastructure projects in the country’s poorer northern emirates. Bahrain distributed cash gifts of \$3,600 to every Bahraini family. The sultan of Oman gave monthly checks of \$375 to the unemployed.¹⁸ These funds have helped the Gulf monarchies weather the Arab Spring and other political challenges to their rule.

The monarchies of Morocco and Jordan are not endowed with oil wealth, but they have also benefited from the financial largesse of the Gulf States that are. During the Arab Spring, for instance, the Gulf Cooperation Council provided Jordan and Morocco with \$500 billion each in development assistance. These funds allowed them to postpone what would have otherwise been painful economic reforms at a politically fraught moment.

The United States has also provided the region’s monarchs with military protection. In pursuing its own strategic interests in the region, the United States has underwritten the security of the region’s monarchies through military bases, troop deployments, arms sales, and military and development assistance. The implicit US security guarantee has allowed these countries to spend far less than they would otherwise on their

15. “Sovereign Immunity: How Monarchies Survive Modernity,” *Economist*, April 27, 2019, <https://www.economist.com/international/2019/04/27/how-monarchies-survive-modernity>.

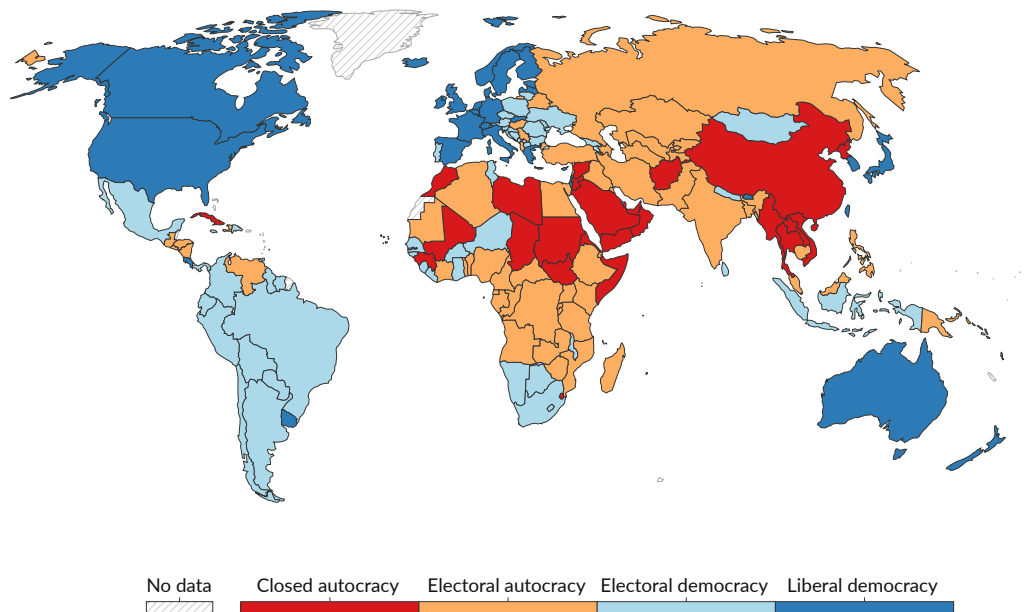
16. *Ibid.*

17. Sean Yom, “Jordan and Morocco: The Palace Gambit,” *Journal of Democracy* 28, 2 (2017), 134–135, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2017.0030>.

18. Yasmina Abouzzohour, “Heavy Lies the Crown: The Survival of Arab Monarchies, 10 Years after the Arab Spring,” *Brookings*, March 28, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/03/08/heavy-lies-the-crown-the-survival-of-arab-monarchies-10-years-after-the-arab-spring>.

Political regime, 2021

Based on the criteria of the classification by Lüthmann et al. (2018) and the assessment by V-Dem's experts.



Source: OWID based on Lüthmann et al. (2018); V-Dem (v13)

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Note: The Chart tab uses numeric values, ranging from 0 for closed autocracies to 3 for liberal democracies.

own defense, and to be more secure than they would otherwise be from opponents at home and abroad.

The region's monarchies have also benefitted from being accorded a degree of legitimacy by their citizens. Many of the region's kings derive their claim to leadership from their country's tribal history. The emir of Qatar, for instance, is from the al-Thani Dynasty, a part of the country's dominant Tamim tribe, which negotiated with the British in the nineteenth century for the tribe's protection from Ottoman rule, leading eventually to the creation of the Qatari state. The emir of Kuwait is a part of the Sabah family that, in the eighteenth century, was selected from within the 'Anizah tribe to rule Kuwait. Some of the region's kings also claim a religious basis for their rule. King Abdullah II of Jordan is a part of the Hashemite Dynasty, which traces its lineage back to the Prophet Muhammad, on which basis his forebearers served as the religious guardians of Mecca and Medina under Ottoman rule. King Muhammad VI of Morocco also lays claim to being a direct descendant of the prophet as part of the Alaouite Dynasty, and to the title long claimed by Moroccan sultans of "Commander of the Faithful." Since the founding of the Saudi state, several of its rulers have employed the title of "Guardian of the Holy Mosques." These tribal and religious credentials help bolster the legitimacy of Arab monarchs' claims to rule.

Still, the durability of these Arab kingdoms, so recently con-

jured into being in many instances, is frequently overstated. Nearly half of the Arab monarchies in place in 1950, it is often forgotten, are no longer standing. In Egypt, the Free Officers toppled King Farouk in a military coup in 1952. In North Yemen, the military unseated newly installed Imam Muhammad al-Badr in 1962. In Iraq, the socialist Ba'ath Party, working in conjunction with a faction of the army, deposed King Faysal II in 1963. "From the 1950s through the 1970s," Sean Yom observes, "the Middle East's ruling monarchies were best known for collapsing."¹⁹ The Omani monarchy also survived a rebellion in the south in the 1960s, only with the help of the British and the Saudis. The kingdoms of Saudi Arabia and Morocco experienced coup attempts, while the Jordanian monarchy endured a civil war. More recently, Bahrain's monarchy weathered the Arab Spring only with a Saudi-led GCC military intervention to help quash anti-government protests. With the benefit of this historical perspective, the future of Arab monarchies appears far less assured.

Arab monarchies have proved more stable, it is true, than most other authoritarian alternatives. The monarchies all survived the Arab Spring—albeit barely in Bahrain's case—while most of the region's military republics (Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, and Libya) were overthrown by popular protests, and Syria nearly joined that list. But, as Yom notes, "they look good only because the rest of the region...looks so bad." The revolts that unseated many of the military republics, moreover, were fueled, in part, by

19. Yom, "Jordan and Morocco," 135.

attempts to pass political power from father to son—to mimic the hereditary succession practiced in monarchies.²⁰

The factors that seem to account for the durability of Arab monarchies are themselves changing. The world is embarked on a transition to “green” energy that will gradually reduce the demand for oil, and hence these regimes’ oil wealth. The United States appears to be decreasing both its military and diplomatic engagement in the Middle East, and Arab monarchies—should their rule be challenged—may not be able to rely on its support as much as in the past. Finally, citizens seem less willing than before to accord their rulers unconditional loyalty. Some scholars have argued that while the revolutions of the Arab Spring failed for the most part, the experience of revolt forever changed the outlook of Arab citizens.²¹ In opinion surveys, majorities of Arab citizens (in countries where such polling is allowed) have consistently indicated that they consider democracy to be the best system of governance for their society—and, consequentially, this support for democracy is even higher among younger and more educated citizens.²²

All this should give Arab monarchs pause, as the trendlines are not promising for them. The world contained 160 ruling monarchies in 1900, but has just ten today. Arab monarchs have enjoyed propitious conditions that helped them remain exceptions to this trend until now, but these conditions are rapidly changing. These monarchs may yet be able to ride out the storm, but the odds are not in their favor. The wise monarch needs to think hard about the future and, if need be, what his (or her) alternatives might be.

5. Thinking Like a Monarch

Monarchies end in a variety of different ways. The most favorable, from the perspective of both the monarch and his or her citizens, may be that a ruling monarch becomes a constitutional monarch, retaining many ceremonial functions but presiding over a parliamentary democracy. Today, seven of Western Europe’s sixteen democracies with populations over one million are structured as constitutional monarchies or, more accurately, as what Linz, Stepan, and Minoves term “democratic parliamentary monarchies,” in that ultimate political decision-making now lies with parliament. The monarchs involved were able to strike deals that allowed them to continue to reign, though not to rule, as ceremonial head of state within a democratic constitutional system. Others proved less dexterous or fortunate, and lost their thrones entirely. In the past, monarchs have been toppled by military coup (Greece and Libya, for example), popular revolution (France, Russia, and Iran), civil war (England), foreign

conquest or annexation (the Mali Empire, Scotland, the former princely states of India and Pakistan), or popular referendum or elections (the Maldives and Tonga).

Much like other political figures, monarchs are strategic actors who seek, above all, to avoid such outcomes and remain in power. They cannot be expected to cede authority willingly, but choose from the menu of strategic choices available to them to maximize their chances of remaining in power and alive. The ordering of their preferences may look as follows: remain in power as a ruling monarch; share power with parliament as a constitutional monarch; play a largely ceremonial role, as what Linz, Stepan and Minoves term a democratic parliamentary monarch; resign and go into exile; or be imprisoned or executed. “No one ever seizes power with the intention of relinquishing it,” George Orwell once observed.²³ So it is with monarchs; they cling tightly to their power and prerogative. Nevertheless, when push comes to shove, they would rather cede some of their power, or go into exile, than lose their life.

When faced with public pressure for change, monarchs possess a variety of strategic options as to how to respond. These range from negotiation and compromise on the one hand to coercion and repression on the other, with the handing out of favors a middle course. Monarchs can promise to sit down at the table with their political opponents and negotiate, seek to buy them off with money, or attack or imprison them.

As with other autocratic leaders, monarchs have found that they need to be responsive to public sentiment in an era of empowered citizens. Like politicians in a democracy, they now need to think in terms of political coalitions to maintain support for their rule. While once this might have meant having the support of the royal family or of key elites, such as military commanders and wealthy business leaders, it now means broad segments of the population as a whole. Each Arab monarchy has built a distinctive support base. For example, in Saudi Arabia, this has included the extensive royal family, the conservative religious establishment (at least up until recently), and regional business leaders. In Morocco, religious leaders and commercial and agricultural elites. And in Jordan, East Bankers, tribal leaders, and, more recently, Palestinian business leaders.²⁴ But all monarchs are feeling pressure to expand their support base further.

Monarchs must calibrate which approach (the promise of negotiation or accommodation, the distribution of subsidies, or the use of repression) will best quiet regime critics while maintaining the support of key constituencies, and thereby their

20. Ibid., 133 and 136.

21. See, for example: Asef Bayat, *Revolutionary Life: The Everyday of the Arab Spring* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021).

22. The exact wording of the question was: “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Democratic systems have their problems, yet they are better than other systems?” Majorities in the ten Arab countries surveyed either “agreed” or “strongly agreed.” See: Michael Robbins, “Democracy in the Middle East & North Africa,” Arab Barometer, July 2022, https://www.arabbarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/ABVII_Governance_Report-EN-1.pdf.

23. George Orwell, 1984 (London: Secker and Warburg, 1949).

24. Yom and Gause, “Resilient Royals,” 86.

hold on power. Negotiation may be welcomed by the critics, but it may alienate a monarch's most conservative supporters, who regard it as a sign of weakness or even capitulation. Repression may effectively silence the critics, but it may also alienate more liberal-minded supporters who find such state-sponsored violence, and the international opprobrium that accompanies it, unacceptable. Doling out subsidies may be the easiest course of action, placating some of the critics while not offending either liberal or conservative supporters—which may be why subsidies are employed so often—but the resources to provide these are not limitless.

From the above analysis, we get a picture of monarchical decision-making that suggests monarchs make strategic choices in the face of domestic political pressures. They decide whether to respond with promises to negotiate or reform, with favors in the form of subsidies, or with a resort to repression—all with an eye to how it will affect their public support. The range of choices available to monarchs may expand or contract depending upon circumstances. For instance, a monarch who continually promises reform but never delivers may find citizens do not regard yet another pledge of reform as credible.

In this manner, the decisions that monarchs make in response to citizen demands for change can create path dependency, wherein past decisions shape future choices. For instance, the more a monarch opts for violence, the more he or she may foreclose the future possibility of peaceful change. Violence may not only harm a monarch's reputation, but may also result in harm to the very people or institutions—opposition leaders, political parties, independent justices, and parliaments—necessary to achieving a more peaceful outcome. The more violent repression is employed as a strategy, the more it may foreclose the possibility of a negotiated transition. Because of this path dependency, we can hypothesize that monarchy will tend to end in one of two diametrically opposed ways: through peaceful transitions to constitutional monarchy or through violent coups.

6. Winning and Losing Strategies

Some scholars single out Denmark and Sweden as real-world examples of places where monarchs successfully navigated these choices, albeit more than a century ago.²⁵ In both countries, the nineteenth century saw important liberal political and constitutional reforms. In both cases, though, these were not initiated by but, rather, were acceded to by conservative monarchs responding to the political demands of a growing liberal opposition.

In Denmark, the June Constitution of 1848 incorporated many liberal reforms; though it proved short lived, it led to the creation of a bicameral parliament. The 1901 election ushered into

power for the first time a left reform party, the country's first parliament-approved government—a moment that Danes refer to as the "Change of System." However, the story did not end there. In 1918, when the population of Central Schleswig voted in a plebiscite, as required by the Treaty of Versailles, to remain a part of Germany rather than reunify with Denmark, Danish King Christian X ordered the prime minister to ignore the results and annex Central Schleswig anyway. When the prime minister refused and resigned in protest, Christian X installed his own conservative government, provoking a constitutional crisis. Danes took to the streets in protest, and the threat of social revolution loomed. Fearful of a Bolshevik takeover and the loss of his crown, Christian X relented and disbanded his handpicked government. The Danish monarchy has not interfered in parliamentary politics since. The public accepted the continuation of the monarchy, albeit in ceremonial form, because the Danish royal family, if not Christian X himself, was widely respected.

Events unfolded in a similar fashion in Sweden. A bicameral parliament was established in 1865–1866 to replace an older body that had provided representation to each of the country's four estates. A half century of struggle followed between the king and parliament over the prerogatives of each, with the country's union with Norway often at its center. In 1905, the government dissolved the union against the king's wishes, and the majority parties in parliament, for the first time, named a conservative government to negotiate terms with Norway. Two years later, the government adopted a set of reforms that universalized the franchise (for men) for the lower chamber and liberalized many of the restrictions on membership in the upper chamber, while introducing a system of proportional representation for electing both. The Liberal Party won the next elections, and the king was forced to ask it to form a government. Nonetheless, in the run-up to World War I, King Gustaf V famously announced in his "Courtyard Speech" that Sweden would increase its defense expenditures. The more pacifist Liberal government, which had not been consulted, resigned in protest. The Liberals returned to government following the war, and introduced amendments to the constitution that granted suffrage to women and opened membership in the upper chamber to all citizens. Sharing Christian X's fear of social revolution in the tumultuous months after the war, Gustaf assented to these changes. The Swedish monarch's role has remained ceremonial ever since, with broad public support for this constitutional arrangement.

Greece is often cited as a counterexample of how monarchical missteps can lead to very different outcomes.²⁶ The great powers made modern Greece a monarchy when they granted it independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1832, selecting Otto, the teenage son of King Ludwig of Bavaria, as king. A mil-

25. Linz, et al., "Democratic Parliamentary Monarchies," 39–40.

26. Ibid.

itary coup forced Otto from power in 1846, and he was allowed to return only after agreeing to adopt a constitution. This was the first in what would be more than a century of episodic military interventions in Greek politics, of kings being forced to abdicate and then being restored to power, and of short periods of nascent parliamentary democracy.

King Constantine II assumed the throne in 1964, at the height of the Cold War. In an act known as the “Apostasia” (the apostasy), the following year he forced the left-leaning Prime Minister Giorgios Papandreu to resign from office after Papandreu also named himself defense minister. Constantine then nominated a series of prime ministers from Papandreu’s party to replace him, all of whom failed to form a government that could endure. To resolve the standoff, elections were called for May 1967, but elements within the military, fearing a leftist victory, staged a coup before they could take place. Constantine agreed to recognize the government on the condition it included civilian ministers. Later that year, he attempted a counter coup, but it was poorly planned and attracted little public support, and he was forced into exile. “The Colonels,” as the military regime became known, governed Greece with a heavy hand for the next seven years. In 1974, they declared Greece a republic, thereby eliminating the role of the monarch, and organized a public referendum, which was widely viewed as rigged, that endorsed the changes. When the regime collapsed, the new democratic government held a second referendum, in which a majority of Greek citizens again voted to end the monarchy. A series of heavy-handed maneuvers had left the king without public support or a throne.

Sean Yom has depicted the Moroccan and Jordanian monarchs as proceeding down a path that in some ways resembles that of Greece. He argues that, since the Arab Spring, the two have altered their strategy “to stop denying or soft-pedaling the historical uniqueness of royal absolutism, and instead to tout it as a strength and advantage.”²⁷ In his view, the aim is to discredit democracy as a viable alternative to monarchy. This has involved “finding ways to show the world—and the people at home—that royal hegemony is the only alternative to decay, instability, and even chaos.”²⁸ They have transferred responsibility, but not the accompanying authority, over important matters of state to other political bodies, knowing that they will fail. The two kingdoms, he argues, are now playing a cynical game, purposely setting up their own political institutions for failure: an Islamist political party in the case of Morocco, and the parliament as a whole in the case of Jordan. Their intent is to show that not only is monarchy still relevant, but that it is the only political system that can save their country.

If this is indeed the Jordanian and Moroccan strategy, it has clear costs. These monarchs may have created for themselves

a credibility problem with their own people. Like the sheep crying wolf in Aesop’s fables, they run the risk that the next time they announce a reform program, their publics will not believe them, so conditioned are they to being promised one thing and delivered another. In their efforts to discredit democracy, these monarchs may be foreclosing their own options for the future, whether that be an attempt at genuine reform or a transition to constitutional monarchy.

7. Looking at the Evidence

In Section 5, we constructed a rudimentary theoretical model of monarchical decision-making in the face of public demands for change. We hypothesized that because of path dependence, monarchies would end in one of two ways: with a peaceful transition to constitutional monarchy or with violent coups. In this section, we look at how this model holds up in the face of the available evidence. We examine actual cases of monarchies that ended, and the fate that befell them.

As mentioned previously, twelve ruling monarchies have ended since 1950 across the world. These twelve cases will be our sample as we examine how monarchies end and what befell them thereafter. The table below lists the countries, the year that monarchy ended, how it ended, and the kind of regime that exists today. The data are drawn from the Democracy-Dictatorship Index developed by economists Christian Bjørnskov and Martin Rode, which seeks to provide an updated quantification of regime types around the world, as well as capture the phases of regime transitions.²⁹ These quantitative data are supplemented by more qualitative data from secondary sources describing how monarchy ended in these select countries.

We observe that of the twelve ruling monarchies that have ended since 1950 across the globe, six—or half—ended by means of a military coup. In five of these six cases, the ruling monarch was ousted by a high-ranking officer (field marshal, general, colonel, or major) in the military; in the sixth case, by a high-level civilian (a former president in Afghanistan). In these six coup cases, four of the monarchs who were deposed went into exile, one was killed in the fighting (King Faisal II of Iraq), and one was placed under house arrest (Haile Selassie of Ethiopia), where he is believed to have been strangled.

Monarchy ended somewhat differently in two other cases, but what came afterward was as brutal and authoritarian. In Iran, the monarch, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, fled the country in the face of a broad-based popular revolution rather than a military coup (and subsequently died in exile of cancer). A theocratic regime ensued, which “combines the ideological bent of totalitarianism with the limited pluralism of authoritari-

27. Yom, “Jordan and Morocco,” 136.

28. *Ibid.*, 136.

29. Christian Bjørnskov and Martin Rode, “Regime Types and Regime Change: A New Dataset on Democracy, Coups, and Political Institutions,” *Review of International Organizations* 15 (2022), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330857237_Regime_types_and_regime_change_A_new_dataset_on_democracy_coups_and_political_institutions.

	Year monarchy ends	Monarchy ends by coup?	Rank of coup leader	What came next?	Status today	Democracy now?
Afghanistan	1973	Coup	Former President/Prime Minister	Civilian dictatorship	Civilian dictatorship	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FALSE
Bhutan	2007	No	N/A	Parliamentary democracy	Parliamentary democracy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRUE
Cambodia	1954	No	N/A	Civilian dictatorship	Civilian dictatorship	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FALSE
Egypt	1952	Coup	General	Military dictatorship	Military dictatorship	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FALSE
Ethiopia	1974	Coup	Major	Military dictatorship	Civilian dictatorship	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FALSE
Iran	1978	Revolution	N/A	Civilian dictatorship	Civilian dictatorship	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FALSE
Iraq	1958	Coup	Colonel	Military dictatorship	Civilian dictatorship	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FALSE
Libya	1969	Coup	Colonel	Military dictatorship	Civilian dictatorship	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FALSE
Maldives	1969	No	N/A	Civilian dictatorship	Presidential Democracy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRUE
Nepal	1990, 2007	No	N/A	Parliamentary democracy	Parliamentary democracy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRUE
Tonga	2010	No	N/A	Parliamentary democracy	Parliamentary democracy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRUE
Yemen	1962	Coup	Field Marshall	Civilian dictatorship	Civilian dictatorship	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FALSE

anism.”³⁰ In Cambodia, King Norodom Sihanouk abdicated in favor of his father, so that he could enter politics free of limitations and dominate it. A 1954 Geneva peace conference had recognized Cambodian independence from France and mandated that elections be held, so Sihanouk undercut democratic forces by running for office himself and then establishing a one-party political system with him as prime minister.

The remaining four countries are all now parliamentary democracies. Some took a long time to get there, and the path was, at times, circuitous. The Maldives, for example, only became a parliamentary democracy in 2019; Tonga in 2011. Nepal transitioned from being a monarchy to a constitutional monarchy in 1991, but in 2002, in the wake of the assassination of the former king in the hands of his son, and with a Maoist insurgency raging in the countryside, the new king suspended parliament and later dismissed his prime minister and cabinet, ostensibly to restore order. Following public protests, parliamentary democracy was restored in 2008. Nearby Bhutan also became a parliamentary democracy in 2008, shortly after the long-serving king abdicated in favor of his son, and following a long process of economic modernization and political liberalization. In all four cases, the last ruling monarch has been able to live out the remainder of his life in his country, spared exile or death. And the monarchs of Bhutan and Tonga continue to serve, albeit in largely ceremonial roles.

In the six cases where monarchy was ended by a violent coup, the violence did not stop there. All six countries went on to experience not just one coup, but several. In other words, they fell into what John B. Londregan and Keith T. Poole have labeled a “coup trap”—a vicious cycle of violent regime changes.³¹ The initial coup seemed to lock these countries into a cycle of violent coups, one from which it was difficult to extricate

themselves. The table below documents whether countries experienced subsequent military coups and how many were successful. It shows that the instances of military coups, successful and unsuccessful, were generally much greater in the cases in which monarchies ended in coups.

Of the two cases deemed exceptions, Iran has not experienced any successful military coups since its revolution, but it has been governed ever since by a repressive and violent theocratic regime. Two attempted coups following the Iranian revolution were suppressed by the regime. Cambodia began to follow the bloody pattern typical of the “coup countries” after Prince Sihanouk’s father died in 1960 and he assumed the title of head of state. While he was on a visit to the Soviet Union in 1970, the National Assembly staged a coup and replaced him as prime minister with Lon Nol, which triggered a civil war that brought the genocidal Khmer Rouge to power. After a decade of Vietnamese occupation, Sihanouk returned as king in 1993, but his son was deposed as prime minister in 1997 by his deputy Hun Sen in a violent coup. In all these cases—the coup cases and the exceptions—political violence only seemed to bring more violence.

On the other hand, of the countries that went down the path of parliamentary democracy, the instances of violent coups were generally much fewer. There were, however, exceptions. As discussed, the king of Nepal dismissed parliament and, later, his entire cabinet in the early 2000s to try to quash a Maoist insurgency in the countryside. The Maldives experienced a series of extraconstitutional coups, successful and unsuccessful, conducted as part of the rivalry between two contending political factions before the country found its way to democracy. Otherwise, the transitions of power in these countries were far more peaceful than in the “coup” countries.

30. Juan Jose Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), 36.

31. John B. Londregan and Keith T. Poole, “Poverty, the Coup Trap, and the Seizure of Executive Power,” *World Politics* 42, 2 (1990), 151–183, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2010462>. The authors argue that economic deprivation makes violent coups more likely.

	Monarchy ends by coup?	More coups in time?	# successful coups, end of monarchy to 2020	# unsuccessful coups	Status today	Democracy now?
Afghanistan	Coup	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRUE	5	1	Civilian dictatorship	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FALSE
Bhutan	No	N/A	0	0	Parliamentary democracy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRUE
Cambodia	No	N/A	2	3	Civilian dictatorship	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FALSE
Egypt	Coup	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRUE	3	0	Military dictatorship	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FALSE
Ethiopia	Coup	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRUE	2	1	Civilian dictatorship	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FALSE
Iran	Revolution	N/A	0	2	Civilian dictatorship	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FALSE
Iraq	Coup	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRUE	4	9	Civilian dictatorship	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FALSE
Libya	Coup	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRUE	1	7	Civilian dictatorship	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FALSE
Maldives	No	N/A	2	2	Presidential Democracy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRUE
Nepal	No	N/A	1	0	Parliamentary democracy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRUE
Tonga	No	N/A	0	0	Parliamentary democracy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRUE
Yemen	Coup	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRUE	4	2	Civilian dictatorship	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FALSE

Hidden within the data is an important statistic regarding the longevity of monarchies. If twelve ruling monarchies ceased to exist since 1950 and ten remain today, that means there were twenty-two in 1950. Hence, in statistical terms, a ruling monarchy in 1950 had a 45.45 percent chance (ten out of twenty-two) of enduring seventy years later.

Leaving that aside, what the data more broadly suggest is that the use of state violence for political ends may have important consequences for political development. Repression, of course, has a time-honored history in the Middle East. The region's rulers have turned to repression frequently to maintain power and avoid reforms that would dilute that power. As Bashar al-Assad demonstrated in Syria, repression can work over the short term, but there has been considerable scholarly debate as to how effective it is as a long-term strategy.³² What these results imply is that the use of state-sponsored violence can prove corrosive over time. Violence can narrow the options available to a monarch. And violence can beget more violence, which can prove detrimental to both the leader and his or her country.

As with any real-world experiment, other variables may have intruded to influence the results. Economic factors, though, do not appear to explain the divergence in these twelve countries' experiences. To the extent the World Bank has historical economic data available regarding these countries, it would suggest that in 1950 all were poor developing countries, with GDP per capita less than a dollar a day.³³ Across the board, none of these countries enjoyed the advantages of wealth.

Geopolitical factors, on the other hand, could have played a role. Countries that occupied less strategically significant territory may have had an advantage over those whose territory

was strategic. The great powers undoubtedly cared more about the fate of Afghanistan or Iran or Egypt than the mountain kingdoms of Nepal and Bhutan or the island chains of the Maldives and Tonga. Their interventions in the affairs of the former countries undoubtedly skewed their political development. Similarly, countries whose experience of colonialism was indirect rule (Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, and Tonga) may have been advantaged relative to those whose experience was more of direct rule (Cambodia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen, but not Afghanistan, Ethiopia, and Iran). Indirect rule may have provided the former greater experience with self-government. Recent research has suggested that "more participatory colonial institutions have a tangible and lasting effect on democratic development after transition to independence."³⁴ Further research would be required to disentangle the effects of these geopolitical factors.

8. Final Recommendations

The eight remaining Arab monarchies have endured up until now thanks to favorable international conditions (support from the United States, bounteous oil revenues or generous foreign assistance, tribal loyalties, and savvy political maneuvering in building domestic support coalitions). That they survived the popular pressures generated by the Arab Spring suggests that, when it comes to authoritarian models of governance, monarchy is a more enduring political form than the personalistic, military republics of the Maghreb and Levant.

Nonetheless, some of the distinctive factors that enabled them to endure up until now are disappearing. The United States appears to be reducing its military footprint and political and economic ambitions in the region. Global demand for oil and

32. For a discussion of the literature, see: Dag Tanneberg, "Political Repression," in Wolfgang Merkel, Raj Kollmorgen, and Hans-Jürgen Wagener, eds., *The Handbook of Political, Social, and Economic Transformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 597–603, <https://academic.com/book/7722>.

33. See a visualization of World Bank historical data on GDP per capita (1960–2018), at: "Historical GDP per Capita by Country," Knoema, last visited February 14, 2023, <https://knoema.com/jesoqmb/historical-gdp-per-capita-by-country-statistics-from-the-world-bank-1960-2018>.

34. Bjørnskov and Rode, "Regime Types and Regime Change."

gas is likely to peak, then decrease, and even disappear at some point in the next 30–50 years. And publics are demanding more of their leaders. Tradition and religious obligation may no longer be enough to retain the loyalty of citizens.

In historical terms, the monarchies of the Arab world have become anomalies. Their form of government, which dates to the very beginnings of human civilization, has largely vanished from the rest of the world. Their titles, royal courts, and lavish perquisites seem relics of a bygone era. In the span of a little more than a century, monarchy has gone from the prevailing form of government to the antiquated exception.

Between 1950 and 2020, a little more than half of the world's remaining ruling monarchies ceased to exist. How these monarchies ended may be instructive for Arab monarchs. On the one side, half were terminated by military coups. On the other side, a third gradually transitioned toward parliamentary democracy. In the first set of cases, the violence continued long after the initial coup, with multiple coups—often successful—following. In the latter set of cases, the transition away from monarchy took place on a more peaceful basis, and violence was generally averted.

For Arab monarchs, there are several apparent lessons to be learned.

- 1. Don't expect monarchic rule to last forever.** This paper has discussed, at length, just how rare ruling monarchies have become. A ruling monarchy in 1950, it turns out, had less than a 50-percent chance of enduring seventy years later. It is unclear what the probability will be of today's ruling monarchies surviving another seventy years, but the odds are unlikely to be higher than in the last seventy.
- 2. Preserve all strategic options.** Given the uncertainty regarding monarchy's durability, monarchs would be wise to hedge against the future. They may prefer to retain the absolute power that they enjoy now, but they should be careful not to foreclose the option of a transition to a constitutional monarchy or a democratic parliamentary monarchy in the future.
- 3. Keep disagreements nonviolent.** Monarchs should avoid a resort to violence to repress regime opponents. This paper has shown how the use of violence can skew political development. It can narrow a monarch's options by closing the door to a peaceful transition of power and leaving violent regime change as the only political alternative.
- 4. Make credible promises.** Along these same lines, monarchs should avoid making false promises of reform to

their citizens if they do not intend to carry them out. Such declarations can undermine public confidence and make it impossible for future promises of reform to be viewed as credible. This, too, can limit the possibilities for a peaceful transition of power down the road.

- 5. Cultivate a responsible opposition party.** One key to a peaceful transition toward constitutional monarchy is having in place a political party(ies) that can credibly implement it. Rather than undermining the development of political parties and opposition political leaders, monarchs should be creating incentives for them to behave responsibly.

Should Arab monarchs fail to manage public demands for change wisely, King Farouk's witty aphorism may yet come true: "Soon there will be only five Kings left—the King of England, the King of Spades, The King of Clubs, the King of Hearts, and the King of Diamonds."

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