

challenges, and both volumes meet these challenges in different ways. I would highly recommend both books for a wide range of audiences.

The Rise and Fall of Arab Presidents for Life. By Roger Owen. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012. 272p. \$24.95. doi:10.1017/S1537592713002648

— Sean L. Yom, *Temple University*

Since 2011, the antiregime insurrections across the Middle East known as the Arab Spring have elicited a large scholarship. Like the scholarship attending other rare moments of regional transformation, such as the collapse of communism in 1989–91, this new cottage industry has varying quality. More than a hundred English-language academic books have already been published on the Arab Spring, but most have been little more than well-detailed narratives. Needed now are more rigorous investigations about not just how but *why* the Arab Spring happened—the origins of social rebellion, the dynamics of economic crisis, and the durability of authoritarian regimes.

Roger Owen's book helps fill this gap, providing fresh ideas with promise but ultimately stumbling in its causal logic. Owen aims to explain why autocratic republics proved far more susceptible to downfall than their monarchical peers during the Arab Spring. Although eight kingdoms are located in the region, cases of regime breakdown engulfed presidential dictatorships run by civilian strongmen who appointed themselves for life while surrounded by large coercive apparatuses. These cases include unarmed uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, violent insurgencies in Libya and then Syria, and internal factionalism in Yemen. While contingent variables like financial crises and systemic forces like international pressures made breakdown more likely, the real explanation for regime collapse, according to the author, stems from a single institutional factor—the struggle to ensure smooth succession within the president's family or clique, which divorced the leadership from institutional bases of potential support.

A *doyen* of modern Middle East history, Owen brings historical depth and comparative perspective to his institutionalist thesis. Early chapters are descriptive, laying out general organizational patterns within the autocratic republics, which include Algeria, Sudan, and Iraq, in addition to the aforementioned five countries. All Middle East state builders faced the same exigencies at the onset of the postcolonial dawn. Geographic boundaries were new and porous, agrarian economies demanded organization and modernization, and political opposition from all quarters was rife and rowdy. Yet monarchs in kingdoms like Jordan, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia had an inherent advantage: Royal incumbents naturally enjoy lifetime tenure, and long-institutionalized succession lines neutralized infighting, enabling these monarchs to seek out new

social allies immediately. Republican elites faced far more precarious circumstances.

Throughout the middle chapters, Owen elucidates the consequences of this institutional burden through brief case studies. However the Republican elites consolidated power—building new mass parties, privileging organs of repression, manipulating ethnic and tribal divisions—leaders were haunted by the question of succession. In appointing themselves for life, presidents sought to pass on power to their sons or close allies. They thus personalized power within an extremely slim ruling clique, which injected eviscerating practices of clientelism and patrimonialism within institutions that would have otherwise linked the regime to mass support, such as ruling parties, the military establishment, and even tribal networks. This situation also sharply divided political society between those who supported such succession and those who wished for more plurality. At the same time, presidents were forced to maintain the vestiges of republicanism by holding periodic elections and plebiscites. Though ostensibly rigged, such efforts meant that the very legitimacy of the regime could be theoretically questioned by citizens. Absolutist kings, by contrast, have no institutional need for such referenda.

The last chapters begin to infer the causal logic. Here, Owen transitions from description to explanation, though in a notably tentative tone. When unexpected events like the Tunisian fruit vendor who self-immolated triggered a contentious wave of protests that diffused across the region, the autocratic republics were inherently more susceptible because they had limited their support networks to very narrow social bases, such as hard-line party cadres, loyalist military officers, and ethnic or tribal clients. Thus, the story ends with the dramatic revolutions and civil wars of the Arab Spring, which bypassed most kingships but devoured most presidencies.

This work significantly engages a long-understudied topic in the literature on political regimes. Only a handful of Middle East comparativists have explored the politics of succession in nonmonarchical dictatorships, and only one—Jason Brownlee—broadened the scope of comparison to include non-Arab cases. Yet recent scholarship on durable authoritarianism indicates that the supply of autocratic rulers who seek lifetime tenure has only diminished marginally over the past two decades, and so this subject deserves further study. Further, Owen's book is a promising portent of more analytic scholarship about the Arab Spring that does not merely recite timelines but rather isolates the dynamic processes driving each regime outcome. It took some years before Sovietologists and Central and Eastern Europeanists retooled themselves as postcommunist experts; Owen's work exposes a similarly gradual shift within the Middle East studies community.

As such, Owen's analysis shines more in presentation than persuasion, as it is devoted more to providing a blunt-edged explanation than a precise causal explanation. For

instance, it is unclear whether the author's argument explains why large-scale insurrections were more likely to occur in these dictatorships or, rather, why these dictatorships seemed so inept in handling public unrest. The former claim is doubtful because the monarchies of the Arab world also lack support among their citizenry; indeed, one saw revolutionary mobilization (Bahrain) and two more experienced two-year periods of unprecedented, sustained, urban protest (Morocco, Jordan). The latter notion has more purchase, but then the argument evokes extreme path dependency that is not logically justified by the author: Endemic insecurity at the onset of state building engendered weakly institutionalized regimes that were destined to disintegrate. Owen rejects cultural explanations for the convergence of Arab state builders upon a common institutional pattern, but provides no other reasoning for it besides the historical truth that it happened.

Neither does Owen consider rival hypotheses. One begs attention. Oil, or more broadly hydrocarbon wealth, may explain the weakness of autocratic republics. The literature on rentier states, though aging, still furnishes the useful reminder that the resources possessed by dictators prefigure the survival strategies at their disposal. The richest oil states were kingdoms like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and they defused the first signs of protest with the promise of greater economic redistribution and more generous social welfarism. But so, too, did republican Algeria utilize its hydrocarbon wellspring to head off early demonstrations. Poorer kingdoms with more modest budgetary reserves were precisely those that could not purchase peace, namely, Bahrain, Jordan, and Morocco. Above all, most of the autocratic republics that fell during the Arab Spring all lacked profuse oil and gas rents; Libya had some but grossly misallocated it. The point here is not to swap institutionalism for rentierism as an explanatory logic, but rather highlight the need to systematically weight other potential hypotheses.

Yet in all fairness, these critiques underscore more the contemporary nature of the Arab Spring than this work's lack of diligence. *The Rise and Fall of Arab Presidents for Life* is much like other early forays into ongoing historical moments, useful for insight but lacking in rigor. This is to be expected, and future work on authoritarianism and Middle East politics would do well to build upon the narratives and arguments presented here.

The Triumph of Israel's Radical Right. By Ami Pedahzur.
New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. 296p. \$29.95.
doi:10.1017/S153759271300265X

— Eyal Chowers, *Tel-Aviv University*

The Zionist revolution sought to turn a people dispersed across the globe into a nation and to reshape the Jew into a political being—one who enjoys full and equal rights unconditionally and who is a citizen responsible for the

character and conduct of his or her state. While this revolution is in many ways a success against all odds and has helped to revise Jewish conceptions of freedom in history and notions of what can be achieved through radical collective action, the current political predicament of the state of Israel is puzzling. Because of its own deeds, its future is highly uncertain. Rather than preserve its integrity as a Jewish and democratic state (an uneasy balancing act in itself), since the 1967 war the state has embarked on settlement activities in the territories it has occupied that will force it either to forgo its character as a Jewish nation-state and establish one state between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea or to relinquish its democratic-liberal principles.

Ami Pedahzur's *The Triumph of Israel's Radical Right* explains how Israel arrived at its current crossroads. It meticulously and lucidly analyzes the ascent of the Israeli Right, step by step, after 1967 and up to the present. Pedahzur traces the humble beginnings of the settlement movement under hesitant and confused Labor governments, the expansion of the settlements by Menahem Begin and Ariel Sharon in the 1980s, and the seeds of racist language introduced by Rabbi Meir Kahane and later by the religious party Shas. The book demonstrates the marriage between resistance to settlement evacuation and hateful and inciting speech leading to the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and shows how these two features of the new Right have been intertwined ever since. This book joins Oded Haklai's *Palestinian Ethnonationalism in Israel* (2011), Motti Inbari's *Messianic Religious Zionism Confronts Israeli Territorial Compromises* (2012), and other recent, fresh works in trying to explain the changing landscape of Israeli politics.

Space will not permit me to mention all of the events, processes, organizations, and individuals discussed by Pedahzur. His analysis, however, underscores two factors: the settlers' "network" and the idea of "nativism."

First, he suggests that, rather than understanding the ascent of the Right in Israel in terms of parties and parliamentary politics, we should think in terms of a flexible political network—"a loose and dynamic composite of political actors whose worldview on various issues overlaps and who frequently come together for the purpose of shaping policies in the spirit of their shared ideology" (p. 9). The network includes social movements, settlers' organizations, individual activists, bureaucrats in government agencies and semigovernmental bodies, Knesset members and ministers, Jewish-American financiers, security forces personnel, and more. Pedahzur demonstrates the network's effectiveness in expanding Jewish settlements in terms of both the territory controlled by Jews and the number of settlers. The network's members are intensely committed to their cause, legally and financially sophisticated, masters at co-opting officials in the Israeli system and penetrating the system, and able mobilizers of masses of people.