

# Institution Building in the Middle East

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## **Abstract**

“When will Middle Eastern countries democratize?” is the normative question that guided the literature on regime change in the Arab world during the 1990s. Since significant political changes but no systemic transitions have occurred, this question needs reformulation: what accounts for the persistence of Arab authoritarianism? Escaping thus from the teleological tunnel permits the identification of two major developments. The first is an oscillation between controlled political liberalizations and deliberalizations, and the second consists of five areas of change within regimes: legitimation, elites, institution building, co-optation, and regimes’ reactions to external influences. The second trend is particularly crucial for understanding the durability of authoritarianism in the Arab world.

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