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The Institution of Monarchy as a Factor of Stability in Contemporary Arab States. A Comparative Analysis of Jordan, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia[1]

This paper examines how monarchies in Jordan, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia function as stabilising institutions. Using qualitative comparative system analysis, combined with behavioural and media analysis elements, it identifies three key sources of legitimacy—traditional, charismatic, and legal—that support regime resilience. Traditional legitimacy is rooted in tribal ancestry and reinforced by Islamic authority and patronage networks. Charismatic legitimacy comes from the states' founders and current monarchs' crisis management and public image. Legal legitimacy stems from constitutional frameworks that institutionalise governance, political discourse, and succession. The study highlights the role of rentierism in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, where welfare policies reduce popular discontent, whilst in Jordan, where resources are less abundant, emphasis is placed on constitutional reform and symbolic leadership. Despite differing capacities, all three monarchies demonstrate adaptability through institutional evolution and image-building strategies. The findings provide a framework for understanding the durability of Arab monarchies and offer insights for scholars and policymakers analysing regime stability in the wider Middle Eastern context.

Key words: monarchy; stability; Middle East; regime; Jordan; Saudi Arabia; Kuwait

Introduction

Based on examples of Jordan, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, the article considers the mechanisms through which the institution of monarchy acts as a stability factor in contemporary Arab states. The stability of the state depends on the effectiveness and legitimacy of its political system, as legitimacy involves the capacity of the system to engender and maintain the belief that the exist-

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ing political institutions are most appropriate for society (Lipset 1960, p. 77). The main goal of this deliberation is to answer how heterogenic forms of legitimisation, the institutionalisation of power, and its self-limitation provide stability to Arab monarchies.

The reasoning behind selecting these three states is that they are, to some extent, representative of various aspects of the evolutionary pathways of Arab statehood and current developments in the region. The State of Kuwait is connected with one family, the Al-Sabah, which originated from the Bedouin tribe of Al Utub (the same as the Bahrain ruling family). Kuwait serves as a representative example of other Arab monarchies such as Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (which, as a single state, is not a monarchy), which also originated from tribal shaykhdoms. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia originated from the alliance between the ruler of the dwelling of ad-Diriyya and a Muslim Hanbali cleric, Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab. The catalyst that helped to create the state was religion - the establishment of the Wahhabi community was among the key drivers in the establishment of the Saudi state. The role of religion in state-building represents similar dynamics to those at work at the birth of the Arab state in the 7th century and later the establishment of Oman. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan have the shortest state history. However, it is important to take into consideration the fact that the ruling family traces its roots from the Prophet Muhammad, similar to the kings of Morocco (which lies outside the Middle East region). The Hashemite Kingdom, in contrast to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, is not a rentier state, and the government cannot mitigate social unrest by using revenues (similar to the constraints for the government of Morocco).

Finally, the article considers an example of the monarchy with the lowest level of stability, namely the State of Bahrain, to further enhance the understanding of stability factors and their importance, especially in a crisis.

Monarchies in the Middle East have proven to be more resilient in the face of crises than republics such as Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, and Syria. This tendency can be visualised with the World Bank's Political Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism index (World Bank Group 2024a)[2], where Arab monarchies scored higher compared to republics. They were assessed as more stable in 2000, 2014 and 2023 – the average value for monarchies in 2000 was 0,46 compared to an average of -0,26 for republics. Also, in 2014 and 2023, monarchies scored -0,12 and 0,12 compared to -2,06 and -1,82 for republics. Moreover, the stability level after the Arab Spring deteriorated more in republics than in monarchies.

Undoubtedly, monarchies have shown greater resilience during the Arab Spring, which does not necessarily mean that there were no protests, but that the form of government (regime) had proven stable and no changes of the head of state (monarch) took place as a result of popular discontent. Instead, resilience means here the capacity of a country's political system to withstand internal or external shocks. In this context, (political) stability may be characterised as a state of the durability of the government and its effective action, as well as the existence of public order and lack of civil disorder.[3]

[2] Perceptions of the likelihood of political instability and/or politically-motivated violence, including terrorism, where -2,5 is most likely and 2,5 is least likely.

[3] Protests in themselves are not a sign of disorder, even if they are a sign of widespread discontent.

Several studies discussed the stability or instability of states in the Middle East. However, they usually considered the region as a whole without paying enough attention to the differences between governmental systems, including the distinction between republics and monarchies. Cecilia Emma Sottilotta (2013), for instance, pointed out that analytical understandings of Arab autocratic regimes' stability were often based on the assessment of their government longevity – an approach that Sottilotta considered too simplistic. The states analysed by Sottilotta, however, were all republican autocratic regimes. Therefore, it is difficult to ascertain that the author's conclusion applies equally to the region's monarchical regimes analysed in the current paper. Some literature is outdated due to significant events taking place in the region in the last two decades; for instance, Kjetil Selvik and Stig Stenslie (2011) analysed the Arab states in times of crisis and provided insights on how states influenced their societies. However, their analysis does not reflect the impact of the Arab Spring and later developments in the region.

There are several publications (in some parts outdated) taking into consideration particular states. Stig Stenslie (2012) conducted an analysis of regime stability in Saudi Arabia. Bartosz Wróblewski (2017) indicated that Arab monarchies did not adopt the idea of people suzerainty and examined certain actions undertaken by King Hussein II in that context (this analysis, however, did not take into account the Arab Spring and over 20 years of King Abdullah II's rule), pointing out that Arab monarchies are more stable than republics.

While the higher level of regime stability of Arab monarchies appears to be recognised in the literature, there is a gap in terms of the comprehensive understanding of mechanisms and characteristics through which the institution of monarchy enhances political stability in the context of Arab states, including the common factors across these countries. Academic debate lacks an analysis of generalisable processes within the region's monarchies that facilitate or hinder regime stability, limiting the supportive role of theory for ongoing monitoring of political developments in the region. While previous studies have identified multiple factors underpinning monarchical resilience, their relative importance and interconnectedness often remains unclear. The article builds upon earlier discussions, analysis, and the authors' research by synthesising stability factors, namely legitimacy, regime adaptability, and economic welfare, into one analytical framework.

In order to capture the underlying dynamics producing greater stability of Arab monarchies, the paper considers, first, the historically driven intimate connection between monarchs and the state, with insight into the composition of societies of examined countries. Second, the article studies the factors of stability, starting with legitimacy. In this context, different forms of legitimacy are discussed, including historical prestige, connection to religion, tribal allegiance and legal framework – particularly how the latter was shaped and adapted. Furthermore, the strategic creation of an idealised image of a monarch in state propaganda is discussed here as an activity aiming at bolstering monarchs' right to rule and enhancing societal acceptance of that rule.

Following the discussion on legitimacy, this paper deliberates on the issue of rentierism and welfare distribution in connection to countries' political life. The answers to this question about the conditions driving this divergence, which appears to have constituted a pattern across the Middle East, are necessary for anybody considering developments in the region in the near and medium term.

Table 1. Political Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism: Estimate

Monarchies						
Year	**Bahrain**	**Jordan**	**Kuwait**	**Qatar**	**Saudi Arabia**	**Average**
2000	0,1	0,0	0,8	1,2	0,2	0,46
2014	-0,9	-0,5	0,1	1,0	-0,3	-0,12
2023	-0,4	-0,2	0,4	1,0	-0,2	0,12
Republics						
Year	**Egypt**	**Libya**	**Syria**	**Tunisia**	**Yemen**	**Average**
2000	0,0	-0,3	-0,2	0,3	-1,1	-0,26
2014	-1,6	-2,4	-2,7	-0,9	-2,7	-2,06
2023	-0,9	-2,2	-2,8	-0,6	-2,6	-1,82

Source: World Bank Group (2024b)

All highlighted elements – different types of legitimacy or welfare distribution - are cross-cutting and contribute to stability. However, in a time of crisis, they might prove insufficient. Crisis requires governments to have flexibility and adaptability. Thus, this paper considers monarchy adaptability, including institutional adaptability, as the most decisive stability factor. Monarchs who successfully navigate political crises by reforming institutions and ensuring livelihood, rather than solely relying on repression, traditional legitimacy or economic distribution, are better positioned to endure.

Historical background: emergence of Arab monarchies

The history of Arab monarchies is a foundation for the stability of these regimes, both because of and despite this history is relatively short. It can be argued that the Arab monarchies and their monarchs remain co-constitutive, with the dynasties maintaining a central position in state- and nation-building projects.

The origins of modern Saudi Arabia reach the mid-18th century when Muslim scholar Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab arrived at the settlement of ad-Diriyah ruled by Muhammad bin Saud. Their alliance became a cornerstone of the modern Kingdom, as the Al Saud family became leaders of a religious movement popularly known as Wahhabism and conquered most of the Arabian Peninsula in the name of extending the Wahhabi community. However, it took three attempts for Saudi rulers to establish a stable and long-lasting state. The third one started in 1902 with the recapture of Riyadh by Abdulaziz bin Abdul Rahman,[4] which ended with the establishment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1931.

[4] Known also as Ibn Saud.

The history of modern Kuwait has roots in the 18th century as well. The territory was then a centre of pearl harvesting and trade controlled by the Hanafi tribe. This situation was disrupted by the arrival of the Al Utub tribe, which later achieved a dominant status over tribes inhabiting this area earlier. As a consequence, the Al Sabah family from the Al Utub tribe captured the leadership over the settlement. Kuwait prospered based on trade flowing through the Persian Gulf and Mesopotamia and pearl diving. Politically, the country operated as a shaykhdom within the Ottoman Empire until 1914 and then as an emirate under British protectorate until 1961, when it gained independence.

The history of Jordan's current state begins in 1920 when Abdullah I bin Hussein from the Hashemite family, the second son of the Sharif of Mecca, invaded British territories east of Jordan, claiming the rights of his elder brother Faisal, the overthrown king of Syria. The British did not act against Abdullah, their ally in the war with the Ottoman Empire. Instead, they divided Palestine into two regions: Palestine (west of the Jordan River) and Transjordan (east of the Jordan River) and agreed that Abdullah would be the amir of the latter.

The British created the Emirate of Transjordan with Abdullah as its amir to avoid directly governing the sparsely populated region, mostly by nomadic Bedouin tribes as well as some settled groups of Arabs, Circassians, and Chechens. As the "highest shaykh" (Aruri 1972, pp. 16–21, 37), the amir was able to subordinate both the settled population and Bedouin tribes.

In 1946, Transjordan transformed into the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, a date recognised as a moment of gaining independence. As an aftermath of the first Arab-Israeli war, Jordan incorporated the Palestinian territory of the West Bank. That changed Jordanian society, as from that time, most of Jordan's citizens were Palestinians who lived in the West Bank or had moved into the territories east of the Jordan River. Many Palestinians considered the King of Jordan to be partly responsible for the failure of Palestinian statehood. The unification of the East and West Bank created strong Palestinian opposition (Wróblewski 2011a, pp. 116–118, 125; Aruri 1972, p. 37).

The kings and amirs

The history of discussed states has been closely tied to their ruling families. The most prominent dynasty is the Hashemites, descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. As rulers of Hijaz, they were responsible for protecting the holy sites of Islam in Mecca and Medina and enabling the pilgrimage of Hajj and Umrah. Their domination over holy cities ended during the reign of King Hussein bin Ali, whose kingdom was conquered by Ibn Saud the ruler of Najd, who later became the King of Saudi Arabia (Vassiliev 2000, pp. 261–264).

However, Hussein bin Ali's son Abdullah I became the first Amir of Transjordan and later the first King of Jordan. He extended Hashemite custodianship over the Al Aqsa Mosque, the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, and other West and East Bank Islamic sites. Abdullah I was assassinated by a Palestinian at the steps of Al-Ahsa mosque in 1951. His successor was King Talal bin Abdullah, who was responsible for adopting the constitution that, with several amendments, continues to be the basis for the political life in Jordan today, establishing a constitutional monarchy with a bicameral, partly elected parliament and a strong head of state.

The last two kings are the most important ones for creating modern Jordan. The reign of Talal's son Hussein (from 1952 to 1999) has established Jordan as it is today. He had created a new narrative about the heritage of Jordan and succeeded in creating a notion that monarchy and state are co-constitutive: the Hashemites are Jordan, and Jordan is the Hashemites. Hussein was a very charismatic leader, never afraid of entering the crowd and meeting the people. He gained popularity by not supporting the United States-led coalition against Saddam Hussein's regime during the first Gulf War (Anderson 2002, pp. 1–2; Wróblewski 2011b, p. 270–275). Despite controversies, like suppression of democratic movements, he remains the most popular king for Jordanians. Even political opposition appears to share this sentiment.[5]

The current ruling King Abdullah II bin Hussein ascended the throne in 1999 after his father's death. King Abdullah II is the 41st generation direct descendant of the Prophet Mohammad. Like his father, he studied at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in the United Kingdom. After returning to Jordan, he enlisted in the Jordan Armed Forces-Arab Army, serving in different branches of armed forces as an officer, starting from the rank of first lieutenant and becoming Major General in 1998. He ended his military career as the Commander of Royal Jordanian Special Forces. In addition, Jordanian Crown Prince Hussein bin Abdullah also graduated from Sandhurst Academy and is a major in the Jordan Armed Forces-Arab Army.

The Al Saud family's ancestry comes from Mani al-Muraydi, a camel breeder from Oman, from the historically important Banu Hanifa tribe. One of his descendants was Muhammad bin Saud, the first Al Saud ruler (Zdanowski 2004a, p. 22–23). However, the actual creator of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was Abdulaziz bin Abdul Rahman Al Saud, who captured Riyadh in 1902 and conquered Mecca in 1924. He established the Kingdom in 1931, and his sons have ruled Saudi Arabia until this day.

An important element of Ibn Saud's legacy was his 44 sons and their families enjoying equal rights to the throne. That enforced succession system requires consensus within the royal family, with the oldest suitable half-brother inheriting the throne. Importantly, Abdalaziz bound his family via numerous marriages with prominent Bedouin families or the Ash-Shaikh family, who are descendants of Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab. Until 2017, the heir of the throne was a son of Abdulaziz from a different mother than the king. The succession pattern has been disrupted by Salman, the sixth son of Abdulaziz, on the Saudi throne. Rather than appointing his younger brother or one of his brothers' sons, he designated his youngest son, Muhammad bin Salman, who, barring unexpected developments, will likely become king of Saudi Arabia in the future. Taking into account the vast royal family in Saudi Arabia, a more vertical line of succession, similar to the practice in Bahrain and Qatar, might prove a stabilising factor for the Kingdom.

The Al Sabah family derives its ancestry from the Al Utub tribe, the same as the Bahrain royal family. The first ruler was Shaikh Sabah I, who probably ruled Kuwait between 1718 and 1762 (Al-Diwan Al-Amiri State of Kuwait, 2013) or 1756-1762 (Casey 2007, p. 144). The most important ruler from the point of view of state-building was Mubarak the Great, who was able to regulate the status of the shaykhdom with Ottoman authorities. He also took steps toward gaining independence from the Sublime Porte by signing a secret agreement with the British

[5] Interview with the Secretary General of Islamic Action Front Murad Al-Adayleh, 06.02.2020.

in 1899. The agreement resulted in the recognition of Kuwait as a sovereign shaykhdom under the British protectorate after the accession of the Ottoman Empire to the First World War as an ally of the Central Powers (Zdanowski 2004b, p. 182–183). Concerning the creation of modern Kuwait, an important figure is Amir Abdullah al Salim Al Sabah, who ruled between 1950-1965. He instigated a modern political and state system, with the constitution, political rights and the end of the British protectorate (Al-Nakib 2006, p. 161–163).

Similarly to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait does not have primogeniture. Emirs are appointed by consensus within the family from two lines originating from Shaykh Mubarak the Great – the older Al-Jaber and the younger Al-Salim line (Kechichian 2008, p. 106). However, the last three emirs of Kuwait were all representatives of the Al-Jaber line.

The royal families in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia are important influential stakeholders acting both in government and in business. Their impact could be seen in forcing King Saud to abdicate and leave Saudi Arabia in 1964 (Vassiliev 2000, pp. 366–367). Also, in Kuwait, the royal family forced Amir Saad to resign from the throne in 2006 (Fattah 2006a). Finally, the Amir was formally removed from the throne by the National Assembly (Fattah 2006b).

Recently, the role of the royal family in Saudi Arabia might be diminishing, as proven by very limited discontent following the nomination of Muhammad bin Salman as an heir to the throne. Even Allegiance Institution, which was meant to be a body responsible for choosing the best candidates for future rulers, appears to be reduced to certifying the king's choices (Brown 2017). Many members of the Al Saud family depend on the King as they receive state salaries varying from 2 to 270 thousand USD. It is estimated that about 5% of the state budget was spent on the royal family's needs. Moreover, many princes have built wealth through state land or corruption linked to state contracts (Stenslie 2012, p. 118). The weakening position of the royal family is also reflected in the power of the King to discipline unruly princes. After the nomination of Muhammad bin Salman as an heir, some princes and connected businessmen were placed in home detention with corruption accusations. They were later forced to give up part of their wealth (Arab News 2019). The local press portrayed the King and Crown Prince as determined to root out corruption.

The people

The discussion on regime stability requires consideration of the complex national and state identities of inhabitants of the discussed monarchies. According to the 2022 census, Saudi Arabia is inhabited by more than 32,1 million people, of whom 58,4% were Saudi citizens (Saudi Census 2023). Among Saudi citizens, 90% are Arabs and 10% consist of people of Afro-Asian origin. 85-90% are Sunni and 10-12% are Shia. The rest of society (non-Saudis) comprises of expatriates of different faiths (CIA Factbook 2022a).

Kuwait is home to over 3 million people, but only 30.4% are Kuwaiti citizens. Almost 70% of the population are immigrants – other Arabs (27.4%), Asians (40.3%), and Africans (1%). 74.6% of inhabitants are Muslim (Sunni and Shia), and 18.2% are Christian (CIA Factbook 2022b).

Jordan is inhabited by more than 10.9 million people (CIA Factbook 2021), and 98% of them are Arabs (Sharp 2013, p. 4). Other data suggest that 50 to 70% of Jordanian citizens have a Palestinian background (Nanes 2010, p. 171). Data on self-identified nationality indicates that 69.3% of inhabitants are Jordanians, 13.3% Syrians, 6.7% Palestinians, 6.7% Egyptians, 1.4% Iraqi and 2.6% other (CIA Factbook 2021), including politically significant Circassian and Chechen minorities.

It is important to underline that these data are not contradictory. Besides Circassian and Chechen, all the above-mentioned nationalities are Arab nationalities. Jordan and other countries face the same identity problems. The first articles of Jordan's and Kuwait's constitutions state that their citizens are part of the Arab Nation. The question of whether Jordanian, Palestinian or Arab identity is dominant remains valid. An important factor in Jordanian society is religious affiliation. 97,1% of citizens are Muslim, predominantly Sunnis. Christians comprise only 2,1% of the country's population (CIA Factbook 2021). A significant part of the population are Bedouins, whose number is estimated at 1,3 million (Joshua Project). Not all of them remained nomadic. Most Jordanians live in cities. The country has a high level of urbanisation, exceeding 91% of the population (CIA Factbook 2021).

Kuwait has the strongest sense of national community, resulting from the settled life of Bedouins in Kuwait and the limited geographical area of the emirate. When asked about nationality, people in Kuwait answer that, first of all, they are Kuwaitis, then Arabs.[6]

An insightful illustration of the complex identities in the region is the tendency to express state-national affiliation through clothing and particular different styles of scarves[7]. Jordanians wear red-and-white *shemagh,* which was introduced as a part of the Desert Patrol uniforms in 1931. Due to its symbolic connection with the army, the scarf became a symbol marking out "real" Transjordanians (or later Jordanians), distinguishing them from Palestinian-origin Jordanians (Massad 2001, p. 100, 121). The same Saudi or Kuwaiti *shemagh* distinguishes Saudis or Kuwaitis from other Arabs or non-citizen populations.

Legitimacy

Relying on Lipset's definition, which describes that the state's stability depends on its political system's effectiveness and legitimacy, answering the question of how monarchy stabilises the state requires considering how its power is legitimised.

Rulers in the region utilise various types of legitimacy. The key element is tradition. The creation of all three states is related to the ruling family. All ruling families derive their historical or contemporary ancestry from Bedouin tribes, which is connected to the cultivation of different formats of such Bedouin traditions as majlis and shura (consultation). As tribal bonds have been weakened due to migration to the cities, a tribal genealogy remains an important factor in Saudi Arabia and some tribal leaders have become royal courtiers or local mediators, bound to

[6] Based on interviews with a group of Kuwaiti citizens, February 2020.

[7] *Shemagh*, *keffiyeh* or *hattah* – traditional Arab headdress fashioned from a square scarf.

the royal family with subsidies or family ties (Nadav – al-Jasir 2015, p. 180, 183, 186–187). It is notable that for a long time, the National Guard - the "praetorians" of the Saudi royal family – had been recruited only from the Bedouin[8].

Similarly, during the process of creating the state of Jordan, Abdullah I had to secure the loyalty of Bedouin tribes. Thanks to his victories, support from Great Britain and dispensing wealth among tribal shaykhs, Abdullah I was able to create an image of a superior shaykh. To this day, the Hashemites have continued the policy of maintaining good relations with tribal shaykhs by visiting Bedouins in their communities, as well as promoting their leaders into politics and administration (Aruri 1972, p. 37; Alon 2007, p. 115; Alon 2016, pp. 162–165). However, in recent years, there was a degree of discontent among tribes in Jordan, while some tribe leaders were involved in the so-called "Hamza affair" (Laub – Akour, 2021). It is difficult to determine if that represents only a minor crack in the support base as a result of a worsened economic situation or if this constitutes a more structural long-term trend. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that tribal leaders will maintain loyalty to Hashemites, as the monarch is a guarantee of tribe members' privileged position in the army, security services and state administration.

In this context, an important factor in the legitimation of power is the eudaimonious legitimacy, which is connected to securing the needs of the subjects. In Bedouin tradition, the shaykh divided goods among tribe members. Since the beginning of crude oil extraction in the region, wealth distribution and ensuring prosperity have been one of the major factors for the stability of power (Zdanowski 2004b). This is also important because the functions performed earlier by the tribe have been taken up by the state, consequently placing the ruler in the position of a leader, common to all tribes. These dynamics are visible in Kuwait, where loyalty was shifted from the tribe to the state as a wealth provider. However, this does not mean Bedouin's loyalty to the government was absolute, as some Bedouin parliament members were responsible for the 2012 protests (al-Sharekh – Freer 2022, p. 27–28).

The second element, common for the region, is religion – Islam, which imposes an obligation of obedience to the state authority. It is worth underlining that the Prophet Muhammad was not only a religious leader but also a laic authority. That is why all activities related to promoting Islam, supporting Muslims or protecting holy sites are legitimising the monarchical power. This is visible in the example of Saudi Arabia, where the king is titled the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, and in Jordan, where the kings are holders of the custody of holy sites in Jerusalem. Another element linked to religion in the Jordanian monarchy is the ancestry of the Hashemite family from the Prophet Muhammad and their historical rulership over Mecca (Zdanowski 2004a, pp. 306–309). In Saudi Arabia, the legacy of alliance with Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab and the leadership over the Wahhabi community adds to the religious dimension of monarchical power legitimacy. This alliance continues today through family ties of the Al Saud family with the prominent family of Ash Shaikh and their presence in religious leadership

[8] What was both an element of co-opting tribal opposition to the ruling family as well as a channel for rewarding Bedouin tribes for their loyalty. (Nadav – al-Jasir 2015, p. 198-199).

within the Ulema[9] in Saudi Arabia. The current Saudi Grand Mufti is Abdulaziz bin Abdullah Ash Shaikh. In Kuwait, the religious element is relatively less important, although the Amir has to be a Muslim.

Charismatic legitimisation also plays a significant role in the region's monarchical regimes, providing an important foundation for and at the same time, building on the state-building and stabilising functions of the ruler. It was the charisma and abilities of modern monarchs' ancestors that contributed significantly to the creation of contemporary Arab states. At the same time, the stability of the state depends on the ruler's conduct and ability to navigate between different interest groups. The charisma and flexibility of rulers play a particularly important role in Jordan, where limited economically significant natural resources do not allow the monarch to "bribe society" or engage in exuberant wealth distribution.

The legal legitimacy, similarly, is an important factor in regime stability. In all monarchies, the processes of institutionalisation and self-limitation of power have taken place over the decades. Currently, all three states have constitutional acts guiding the functioning of the government.[10] All three constitutions declare the separation of powers. However, the Basic Law of Government positions the king as the highest authority and rulers of Jordan and Kuwait are vested with both legislative powers in cooperation with parliament and regulatory power in cooperation with the government. In Jordan and Kuwait, the prime minister is nominated by the monarch, and in Saudi Arabia, the King (or Crown Prince as contemporary) exercises the function of the prime minister. Apart from Saudi Arabia, these states have elected parliaments. The judiciary is exercised by independent courts, although monarchs nominate judges. New laws in Jordan and Kuwait need to be constitutionally sound, and their constitutionality is overseen by special constitutional courts.

Besides regulating the monarchical system, these acts regulate the issue of the ruling family and succession, strengthening the legitimacy of future monarchs. For example, the succession is regulated by additional, specific laws, like the Allegiance Institution Law in Saudi Arabia, whose goal was to ensure smooth and peaceful succession within the Saudi royal family[11].

Establishing constitutional and institutional frameworks with self-limitation of power has proven to be a factor in legitimising and stabilising the rulership of monarchs. Adopting constitutional frameworks was used as a stabilising measure in crises in response to popular discontent. The constitutions of Jordan and Kuwait were established in the 1950s and 1960s, when the republican ideology of Arab socialism was most popular. Later, following Iraq's invasion, the Amir of Kuwait was compelled to seek accommodation with the opposition and reinstate the suspended National Assembly. The War in the Persian Gulf had a similar effect in Saudi Arabia, where discontent relating to the deployment of large Western forces within Saudi borders prompted King Fahd to announce the Basic Law on Governance, along with additional laws that, to some extent, limited the king's powers. Additionally, the king of Jordan, in response to the Arab Spring, announced liberal reforms to the country's constitution.

[9] Islamic scholars.

[10] Saudi Arabia has an uncodified constitution.

[11] The number of Saudi family members is estimated from 4,5 up to 25 thousand members (Stenslie 2012, p. 26).

Image building as an element of legitimisation of monarchs and stability building

As mentioned in the previous chapter, one of the key elements of stability is legitimisation, accompanied by the effectiveness of the political system. Effectiveness means actual performance, the extent to which the system satisfies the basic functions of government in a fashion that most of the population, and specifically powerful groups, understand these basic functions (Lipset 1960, pp. 77–83). The monarchy has to convince citizens that these functions are indeed performed and their needs met, partly through propaganda and building the monarch's image. Therefore, when discussing the topic of stability, it is necessary to look into this image, which aims both to prove the legitimacy of rulers as well as to show their political effectiveness in governing the state, maintaining the security of the state and citizens, and meeting people's needs.

The most intensive process could be observed in Jordan, where the monarchy has limited financial resources and has to maintain regime stability by other means. Abdullah II is often presented in uniform as a military commander, in connection the King's military career before acceding to the throne. Presenting the King in a uniform creates a notion that the king is a strong leader able to defend the country and strengthen national identity. The King's biography certainly helps to enhance this image, going beyond visual representations. For instance, in 1998, he led a special forces assault on a hideout of a gunman who killed eight people in Amman, earning him the respect of many Jordanians (Wagner 2005, p. 79, 81).

Moreover, the King of Jordan is often presented in a suit as a politician. It contradicts other Middle Eastern monarchies, where rulers are never shown in a suit or Western clothes. Rather, rulers of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia are presented only wearing traditional Arab clothing, the *thawb*[12] and the *bisht*[13]. In contrast, Hashemite royal images with *thawb* and *bisht* are very rare. In Jordan, the aim is also to show the King as an important political figure, respected both domestically and internationally. That is why the King is often shown with other heads of state, and when performing state duties. To complete his Jordanian national image, the King often wears a red-and-white *shemagh* on his head.

Other monarchs are also presented in state propaganda, as well as in media, during meetings with foreign officials or performing state obligations, presumably to create a notion of being charismatic, important and responsible actors domestically and on the world stage, similar to the case in Jordan. That is the official image, which might not be seen as genuine within the population. While the King of Jordan and the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia[14] continued to be perceived as charismatic, the charisma of the Kuwaiti Amir was put in doubt.[15] However, the perception of all the rulers is also linked to the notion of hereditary charisma, which is passed on to them by their ancestors. In the case of Abdullah II from his father Hussein, in the case of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia from previous amirs and kings, starting from historically important figures

[12] Long kind of robe or tunic commonly worn in the Arabian Peninsula.

[13] Prestigious cloak worn for special occasions.

[14] Muhammad bin Saud's example is particularly relevant as a hair to the Saudi throne and the prime minister, he is commonly perceived as ruling the state on behalf of his father.

[15] Based on interviews with groups of Jordanian, Kuwaiti, Saudi citizens and Saudi non-citizen residents, February 2020.

(Mubarak the Great) or state founders (Abdulaziz bin Abdul Rahman). This also contributes to the traditionalisation and legalisation of power, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Official imagery also positions the monarchs in the Islamic context. All monarchs are presented as pious men, praying or performing a pilgrimage. They are shown as founders and guardians of mosques (and thus, the faith). In the case of Jordan, this is particularly important as the ancestry of the Hashemite family is derived from the Prophet Muhammad. It is worth of mentioning that Hashemites do not limit their religious activism to Islam. They have also positioned themselves as protectors of the Christian minority and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem and made donations for the restoration of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and Christ's Tomb (Official website of King Abdallah II).

Another important part of image-building - here more of the royal family as a whole rather than exclusively of the monarch - is charity work. The royal families have created many charitable foundations. Examples include: Jordanian King Hussein Foundation, which focuses on promoting education and leadership, economic empowerment and participatory decision-making; King Hussein Cancer Foundation, established by King Abdullah II, which fights cancer in Jordan and across the region; Saudi Arabian King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Program for Charity Works; Misk Foundation working on Saudi youth empowerment established by prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz; and Sabah Al-Salem Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah Foundation support education, scientific research established by Amir of Kuwait, Shaikh Sabah. It is necessary to emphasise that the virtue and practice of charity are also strongly related to Islam as one of the obligations of a Muslim.[16]

An element of the monarch's image-building in Jordan, which is untypical for the region, is the strong integration of the royal family in the King's image. Abdullah II is often presented accompanied by his son Al Hussein, his wife Queen Rania and other members of his close family, including in informal scenes. The image here is of a simple father playing with kids, not a king, something not observed in other analysed monarchies. Importantly, such imagery of the King and his family is not an innovation of Abdullah II, as it was introduced by his father, King Hussein. The same pattern is used in the case of Al Hussein. Additionally, the Crown Prince, through his mother, is half Palestinian, which may be exploited in state propaganda in the future. Looking at officially published private photos of the aforementioned members of the Hashemite family, one could think that they are a typical family from Europe or America - people enjoying their passions and time, not royals from the Middle East. The Jordanian royal family image can be compared here to that of the British Royal Family. This image could be addressed both to the Western community and the modern Jordanian middle class to make the royal family feel closer to them.

The rentier state

Two of the discussed states are oil monarchies, which have profound implications for the capability to maintain the level of citizens' satisfaction with their standard of living, thus affecting

[16] Charity or almsgiving (zakat) is one of five Muslim obligations called the Five Pillars of Islam.

regime stability and state resilience to crises. The dynamics and impact of national wealth distribution vary between these states. Due to the state oil revenues, Kuwaiti citizens are provided social benefits and no taxation. Based on multiple interviews and observations, one may get the impression that the emirate's citizens are absorbed primarily by the enjoyment of daily life, such as shopping, meeting with friends, and eating.[17] They establish their enterprises or are economically secure thanks to well-paid state posts.[18]

A different situation can be observed in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, one of the world's two largest crude oil producers. Despite enormous revenues, the state cannot guarantee the same level of welfare as Kuwait. The government's share in the labour market is proportionally smaller than in Kuwait. That is why, in the first decade of the 21st century, the Saudi government launched the Nitaqat programme to promote employment of Saudi citizens within the private sector. The programme required companies to meet a specific quota of Saudi nationals. For instance, companies employing more than 100 workers must have at least 30% Saudis (Setup In Saud). Between 2018 and the first quarter of 2022, the proportion of Saudis employed in the private sector increased from 29,7% to 48,7% (Saudi General Statistic Authority 2022 & 2023). This seems to have influenced levels of dissatisfaction among Saudi nationals, as unemployment, especially among youth, has been one of the main indicators of the Arab Spring (Sottilotta 2013). The next phase of efforts to boost Saudi participation in private-sector employment involved taxing expatriates' family members. In 2020, foreign residents were required to pay 400 SAR for each non-working family member (Hassan 2021). This led to a dramatic situation for many foreigners. Numerous expatriates living in Riyadh and Jeddah reported having already sent their families abroad, for example, to Egypt. This resentment was compounded as many immigrants had previously lost their jobs to better-paid Saudis, who are perceived to work on average less than their foreign counterparts.

Oil revenues allow states to subsidise fuel, water and energy to lower citizens' living costs. Only in 2022, Saudi Arabia spent USD 129 billion on lowering fuel prices (Black et al. 2023). In Kuwait, total state subsidies reached 5,9 billion Kuwaiti Dinars (Izaak 2024) or USD 19 billion. During the Arab Spring, both Saudi and Kuwaiti governments reacted to discontent among their citizens with increased social transfers. Kuwaiti citizens received free food rations and a monthly pay of 1.000 Dinars (appr 3500 USD) for 13 months (Izaak 2011).

Jordan, which has no oil revenues, had to introduce constitutional reforms during the Arab Spring to calm the discontent. However, this does not mean that there are no social transfers in place. Since 2019, subsidies for energy and bread for the poorest households have been introduced. By 2023, total spending on this programme reached JOD 240 million (USD 339 million). (Hickey – Steyn 2024)

[17] Based on interviews with a group of Kuwaiti citizens in February 2020.

[18] 77,4% of Kuwaitis are employed in the government sector (State of Kuwait Central Statistical Bureau, 2022).

Political life

None of the discussed countries is a democracy. In the Freedom House ranking, Kuwait is ranked as a partially free state with a score of 38 out of 100. Jordan and Saudi Arabia are scored as not free, although Jordan is much closer to Kuwait, with a score of 33, compared to Saudi Arabia, with a score of 8 (Freedom House). Jordan and Kuwait could be described as liberal monarchies with some political rights and civil liberties, limited freedom of the press (both are ranked with a freedom score of 44 out of 100) (Reporters Without Borders), and political discourse within functioning parliaments. In Kuwait, the establishment and operation of organised political parties is illegal; therefore, parliament deputies are gathered in political factions or blocs. Interestingly, political life operates mainly in the form of informal private meetings called diwaniya. In both countries, people are relatively open and willing to speak about politics, especially in Kuwait. In Jordan, disappointment and a lack of perspectives for a better future can be felt.

Overall, Kuwaiti or Jordanian citizens cannot be described as inactive or lacking influence. During the Arab Spring, widespread protests in both countries caused changes to government composition. Nonetheless, political life is not particularly active or well-organised. Even during the Arab Spring, the demonstrations never reached more than ten thousand participants (Malantowicz 2015, p. 398). If the population of Jordan or the city of Amman is considered, these numbers do not appear to be impressive.

Nevertheless, protests, while small in numbers, combined with the feeling of dissatisfaction in society, led King Abdullah II to put in place limited constitutional reforms. The typical reaction of the Jordan monarch to a crisis is the reconstruction and appointment of a new prime minister. Abdullah II did it 15 times, sometimes reappointing the same person after a few years.

Both National Assemblies have important constitutional prerogatives, especially concerning the legislative process. While they have no creative functions, assemblies may negatively impact the composition of the council of ministers through a non-confidence vote. The Kuwaiti National Assembly takes an active role in the succession process by approving the heir to the throne designated by the Amir, where the Assembly has the right to oppose the designee. Moreover, according to the Succession Law, the Assembly has the right to remove the Amir if he is not fit to perform his duties. However, the parliaments in Jordan and Kuwait are not effective in exercising even the limited powers that they acquired due to political fragmentation or the power of monarchs to dissolve the assembly, which, for instance, occurred in Kuwait on 10 May 2024, where the National Assembly have been dissolved and suspended for four years (Kuwait News Agency 2024), which is incompatible with constitutional provisions obliging Amir to hold elections for the new Assembly within a period not exceeding two months from the date of dissolution. It has to be kept in mind that this was not the first time when Amir suspended the National Assembly – its functioning was interrupted in 1976-81 and 1986-92. In both cases, parliament was reconvened to mitigate crises: first, the fallout of the Iranian revolution, and second, the Iraqi occupation (Boghardt 2006, pp. 44–46, 109, 141–144, 160–161; Zdanowski 2004b, p. 186).

In Jordan, the relative weakness and fragmentation of the National Assembly are a consequence of the voting system, which promotes less populated areas, occupied primarily by the

Bedouin population, as well as by Chechen, Circassian and Christian minorities, who are seen as the Hashemites' support base.

Both the King of Jordan and the Amir of Kuwait exercise their powers through ministers. This, combined with the operation of National Assemblies, distributes responsibilities within the political system, thus shifting some political responsibility away from the monarchs.

Moreover, in Kuwait and Jordan, some criticism of monarchs and royal families exists, although not officially. A good example is the "Hamzah affair" in Jordan, when Prince Hamza - the King's half-brother and former heir to the throne - accused the government of corruption (BBC 2021). In 2019, a former minister, Amjad Hazza al-Majali, demanded that the King return land and money stolen through corruption (Middle East Eye 2019). King Abdallah was also linked to Pandora Papers, the documents that show how King Abdullah II created a network of offshore companies in tax havens to amass $100 million, including three mansions in Malibu worth $68 million. King's lawyers had to explain that mansions were bought from King's resources, and companies were used for security reasons (Al Jazeera 2021). In Jordan, the media have not taken up this story nor presented it as an attack on the monarch's person. In Kuwait, there was criticism of the authorities due to an unfavourable deal with Saudi Arabia.

In Saudi Arabia, there is no freedom of speech or press; thus, there is little political discourse. For example, the people interviewed by the author avoided topics related to state powers, the ruling family and the rule of law. Many opponents of the Saudi government live in exile to preserve their freedom or life. The consequences of criticising the royal family can be seen in the case of the detention of blogger Raif Badawi or the assassination of Jamal Khashoggi in 2018, which has been linked to the person of Muhammad bin Salman. The Saudi press was informing about the death and investigation, but connecting the atrocity with the Crown Prince was condemned, and he was instead presented to be a person aiming to solve the case.

The lack of public freedoms has caused Saudis to be politically inactive, as they see no possibility of influencing state affairs. This is highlighted by the fact that there is no parliament in the form of an elected body. The Shura Council is an advisory body appointed by the king. The importance of the Council is mainly based on its members, who originate from various influential groups, such as business or religious authorities. The long-lasting speaker of the Shura Council represents the Ash Sheikh family. The existence of the Council allows for some debate, as its role is to draft or revise legislation. However, the legislative power lies firmly in the hands of the king.

Religion remains an important factor limiting the power of all the discussed monarchs. It is important that rulers cannot take actions that are incompatible with Islam. It is therefore a significant element limiting the power of the monarch. This means that religious circles constitute formal and informal influence groups. However, considering the fact that people in key religious positions, like the Grand Mufti in Saudi Arabia, are appointed by the king, the religious establishment is also dependent on the monarch. Consequently, this leads to a situation where religious authorities legitimise the actions and rulership of the king. However, it is worth noting that recent changes in customs that occurred in Saudi Arabia under the rule of King Salman (i.e. limiting the power of the religious police or allowing women to drive cars) may be a sign of the decreasing influence of religious groups.

Importantly, establishing and maintaining a parliament or at least an advisory council is not only an element of adjusting the monarchical regime to modern state structures. The institution of a council also refers to Islamic and Bedouin traditions, part of which is the role of consultation, in reference to Muhammad, who had a habit of consulting his companions. The monarchs, thus, can be seen as maintaining these political traditions of meeting and consulting the people or at least the key groups of influence.

Instability in monarchies

While Arab monarchies have shown greater resilience than republics, both from a historical point of view and in the context of contemporary events, monarchies are far from being invulnerable to shocks. Several monarchical regimes – Egypt, Libya and Iraq – have historically collapsed. Those that survived have had to face internal threats rising from nationalist, republican and socialist ideologies such as Nasserism or Ba'athism or, in the case of Jordan, the activities of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, which led to a 1970–71 civil war (known as Black September). Oman's government faced the Dhofar Rebellion between 1963 and 1976, and Bahrain's situation was also restless. The particularly impactful source of instability within monarchies was Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990.

A high degree of social disorder, while not presenting an existential challenge to the Saudi regime, was linked to sectarian divisions between Sunni and Shia in eastern Saudi Arabia. The events were enflamed by the Iranian revolution in 1979, which led to the Shia uprising (Qatif Uprising – 1979), with 24 people killed. Also, in the wake of the Arab Spring, these divisions triggered protests. The Saudi government has reacted with repression toward the Shia minority, as practising Shiism is banned in the Kingdom. Continuous sectarian tensions cause violence but do not cause political instability, as the Shia in Saudi Arabia are a minority, mainly inhabiting the Eastern Region.

The aforementioned instances of disorder did not create significant instability or a challenge to the governing regimes. A more interesting case is that of the State of Bahrain. Bahrain is the least stable monarchy in the region, scoring on par with the most stable Arab republic, Tunisia, where protests forced the head of state to resign. The protests in Bahrain were suppressed after Saudi military intervention and later financial aid. It is hard to determine to what extent Saudi aid saved the Bahrain government from being overthrown.

The case of Bahrain

The State of Bahrain does not differ much from other Gulf monarchies regarding its history, political system, and socio-economic structure. The island was conquered in 1783 by Ahmad bin Muhammad Al Khalifa from the Al Utub tribe (the same as in Kuwait), which ended almost 200 years of Persian domination. From 1820, Bahrain was a British protectorate. That period ended with independence in 1971. The Amir Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa prorogued a constitution in 1973, which was suspended in 1975. Before the suspension, the government enacted a special

law that allowed a long period of repression against the opposition, which resulted in the 1994 uprising called the Uprising of Dignity. The uprising ended with the accession to the throne of Amir Hamad bin Isa with his reform programme, which resulted in adopting a new constitution on 15 February 2002 (which also raised the status of the state from shaykhdom to kingdom).

Similarly to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, the royal family plays an important part in the Kingdom's business and political life, performing important state functions. The family's size is estimated at thousands of members. Succession is based on the principle of primogeniture, introduced in the 1973 constitution after family consensus. Still, the pro-western king and his son, the Crown Prince, seem to be marginalised by more conservative family members, holding important security posts within the state administration (Kechichian 2015, p. 9–12).

The Bahraini society does not differ much from Kuwait or Saudi Arabia. It comprises Bahraini (citizens) 47.4%, Asian 43.4%, other Arab 4.9% and others. 74.2% of the population is Muslim. (CIA Factbook 2025). The main difference between Bahrain and other Gulf monarchies is the sectarian composition – the Shia are the majority, estimated at 60% of the citizenry. By contrast, in most Middle Eastern Arab monarchies, Sunni Islam is predominant.

Monarch's legitimacy is based on the same principles as in the three states discussed in this paper, and Bahrain is most similar to Kuwait. The ruling family derives its ancestry from the Bedouin tribe. This background is connected to cultivating different Bedouin traditions, such as hosting majlis or visiting majlises of important families. Islam also plays a role and the king has to be a Muslim. Charismatic legitimisation, built up by state propaganda, also contributes to providing a foundation for the monarch's right to rule. At the same time, the stability of the state depends on the specific ruler's conduct and his ability to navigate between different interest groups. Also, legal legitimacy is an important factor in regime stability. In Bahrain, the processes of institutionalisation and self-limitation have also taken place over the decades, like through the adoption of constitutional acts.

The political life in Bahrain is restricted. Although the country has an elected lower chamber of parliament, the political parties are banned. The composition disproportionally divides voter regions between Sunni and Shia-inhabited neighbourhoods, a gerrymandering strategy observed in Jordan, as discussed earlier. The power of the parliament as a representative body is undermined by the king's authority to appoint members to the upper house. Political division generally follows the Sunni-Shia sectarian division, although the opposition to the regime, while mainly Shia, also includes other sectors of the population. Not all Sunnis are loyalists, and not all Shia are aligned with the opposition. Popular discontent goes beyond sectarianism and is aimed at repression, corruption, and the naturalisation of noncitizens, including the inclusion of to-be-naturalised foreigners in the security services.

The Kingdom is a post-petroleum state, depending on a diversified economy, although oil revenues comprise an important part of the state budget (Cordesman et al. 2016, p. 153–154). Bahrain is a welfare state that grants citizens access to social services. However, Bahraini citizens' living conditions do not reflect a relatively high GDP. For example, in a 2011 poll, 41% of Bahrainis indicated that they did not have the money they needed for shelter (Vittori 2019). The labour market is strongly influenced by migrant workers, which leads to consistently low salary levels. The situation is similar to the economic problems experienced by Saudi citizens

before introducing the Saudization programme. The situation is further complicated by interference from Iran, which is aiming at destabilising the island state (mostly via influence on the Shia community), as Bahrain is an important base for the American military.

Bahrain's monarchical stability is influenced by complex factors, including strong sectarian divisions, lack of proper social policy in relation to economic limitations, and external political interference (which are not significant issues in Jordan, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia). However, similarities to other monarchies might be observed. The uprising of dignity ended with the accession to the throne of a new amir, who offered a reform programme. The 2002 constitution was preceded by the National Action Charter – a reform program approved via a public referendum in 2001 with 98% of votes (Busafan-Rosiny 2015, p. 6). High acceptance showed not only citizens' desire for change but also approval for the Bahraini monarchy to some extent. However, the constitution proved to be less progressive than the National Action Charter.

The next period of tensions started on 14 February 2011, after the resignation of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt and the ninth anniversary of the adoption of the constitution in Bahrain. The main demands of the 2011 protests were liberalisation, democratisation and the dismissal of long-serving Prime Minister Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, uncle of King Hamad. Calls for establishing a republic were on the margins of the protests. The protests were suppressed with repression, although before the crackdown, the opposition had positively responded to the national dialogue undertaken by Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa.

Since 2020, Bahrain's stability index has risen from -0,6 to -0,4, and the country is, therefore, better rated than any Arab republic (World Bank Group 2024b). One of the reasons may be the new leadership introduced by a new prime minister – the Crown Prince – who replaced the late prime minister Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, his father's uncle.

To sum up, Bahrain's monarchy did not engender in a broad part of society the belief that it was an appropriate institution for the society. That undermined the legitimacy of its political system and adversely affected its stability. Still, even in a country experiencing a higher level of tensions, such as Bahrain, a monarchy, especially one enjoying a straight line of succession, remains an element enhancing political stability. Monarchical governance allowed Bahrain to maintain higher stability than republics that are characterised by similar concerns such as sectarianism or foreign interference. The Bahraini monarchy has proven to have extensive institutional adaptability. That was visible when the accession to the throne was accompanied by the introduction of constitutions in 1973 and 2002. This adaptability should be explored further to increase stability, alongside actions like the possibility of "nationalisation" of the labour market, which could boost the stability similarly to what happened in other monarchies.

Conclusion

There is no one simple explanation for why Arab monarchies managed to navigate relatively smoothly through crises that occurred in the Middle East over the past two decades. Stabilisation of the state through mechanisms such as legal or charismatic legitimisation is used in monarchies

and republics, both those with democratic and authoritarian systems. Monarchical systems, however, have several advantages, including the anchorage to the history of state creation, unique social bonds based on tribal traditions and the capacity for self-limitation of power. Moreover, this paper underscores that monarchical stability is not merely a product of legitimacy or wealth but is also critically dependent on institutional adaptability.

In contradiction to other non-monarchical Arab states, all Middle Eastern royal families build upon their role as state creators. The abovementioned countries have been bound with rulers from the current royal families since state creation. A characteristic that cannot be neglected is the religious aspects, which give a certain degree of legitimacy to the kings of Jordan and Saudi Arabia. This is an element of legitimacy that no Arab republican authority can utilise.

Furthermore, non-monarchical states do not benefit from unique social bonds based on tribal traditions. In many countries, these traditions have even been destabilising factors, such as in Libya or Yemen. In the monarchies analysed in this paper, all ruling families built upon their tribal ancestry, customs, and family connections and were able to tie tribal leadership and tribe members with them and with the state. They have adopted traditional social bonds and created a unique legitimacy element, such as "shaykh of shaykhs" in Jordan or tribal leaders in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, boasting wide family connections with the most important families and tribes in their countries. However, the future support of tribes for the monarchy and the stabilising effect of this support are not guaranteed forever. The future of this aspect will depend on the government's policy toward Bedouins. Nevertheless, this factor should still be taken into account when assessing the current situation and envisaging future developments in these states.

Monarchs were able to adapt to the current situation and sometimes anticipate future risks by creating legal frameworks and institutions. These aspects have proven important in the context of significant crises occurring in the Arab world over the last three decades and earlier in history. Although in times of prosperity, some of these changes have been less pronounced, as exemplified by marginalising the role of Allegiance Institution in Saudi Arabia or the suspension of the National Assembly in Kuwait – both institutions designated to limit monarchs' powers to some extent, may still play a role in de-escalating future crises, as they did in the past.

Several factors are country-specific, such as the role of a monarch as the guarantor of stability. Jordan, as a country bordering Iraq, Syria, Israel and the Palestinian territories, may be seen as an island of stability in the region.

To sum up, the article discussed different types of stability factors in Arab monarchies, both common and country-specific, to capture how heterogenic forms of legitimisation, institutionalisation of power and self-limitation of power have contributed to the role of the institution of monarchy acting as a factor of stability in contemporary Arab states. It appears that Arab monarchies have been capable of creating long-term stability, which has ensured regime survival.

This paper argued that monarchical stability is built upon legitimacy, economic distribution and ensuring stability (translating into safety and security for a big part of countries' populations) in an unstable region. As monarchies have proven to be relatively successful in their policies, it should not be surprising that people accept them and support them. Keeping in mind Seymour

Martin Lipset's definition[19], all three described monarchies have engendered and maintained the belief that their existing political institutions are appropriate for the people.

When crises occur, the stability rests primarily on adaptability - including institutional adaptability – a dynamic supported by the case of Bahrain, where the government allowed social forces to "let off steam". Policymakers should focus on institutional modernisation strategies and adaptability, thus maintaining traditional legitimacy while adapting to political, economic and societal shifts. This is important not only in the regional but also in the global context, as the majority of these states are major crude oil and natural gas producers and are located in a region critical for global security.

Offering an appropriate, structured understanding of the factors influencing the stability of regimes in the Middle East could be relevant to the debate on resilience. This would provide insights for scholars and policymakers, or intelligence agencies worldwide, as they attempt to analyse the past, current, and future developments in these countries. Future research should pay greater attention to the role of external pressures, such as globalisation and shifting geopolitical alliances, in shaping monarchical strategies for survival.

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[19] The stability of the state depends on the effectiveness and legitimacy of its political system, as legitimacy involves the capacity of the system to engender and maintain the belief that the existing political institutions are most appropriate for society (Lipset, 1960, p. 77).

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