

POLITICS

Middle East Politics Fundamentals

A real, comparative political-systems course covering eight genuinely different structural types across the region — absolute and constitutional monarchies, a theocratic-republican hybrid, a strengthened presidency, military-backed authoritarianism, a parliamentary democracy without a single written constitution, two divergent Ba'athist one-party states, and a confessional power-sharing model built alongside a powerful non-state actor — closing with a capstone applying Weber's own real authority typology across every system covered.

10 Chapters

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION: ONE REGION, GENUINELY DIFFERENT POLITICAL SYSTEMS

Middle East Politics Fundamentals

Chapter 1 · Introduction: One Region, Genuinely Different Political Systems

This course is deliberately scoped as comparative political systems — real institutions, and how power actually works in each one — rather than a chronological history or a focus on any single live dispute. The region's political fault lines are genuinely live and contested, in ways that call for real care over framing: this course studies structure, not takes sides. It builds directly on Political Theory Fundamentals' own comparative toolkit (Weber's authority typology, federal/unitary models, electoral systems) rather than re-deriving any of it from scratch.

"The Middle East" Is Itself a Political Convention, Not a Natural Category

Before comparing any real political system, it's worth being honest about what the term grouping them even means — and it means less than it sounds like it does. **"The Middle East"** was coined by the American naval strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan, first published in **September 1902** in an article titled "The Persian Gulf and International Relations," written for the British journal *National Review*. Mahan's own concern was strategic, not descriptive — writing about the Persian Gulf's importance to British naval power, he offered: "The Middle East, if I may adopt a term which I have not seen, will some day need its Malta, as well as its Gibraltar." He coined a name for a zone of British imperial naval interest, not a region defined by any shared language, religion, or system of government.

Finding: the term spread through a second author before it ever became standard

Weeks after Mahan's article, British historian Valentine Chirol published a twenty-part series called "The Middle Eastern Question," beginning in October 1902, which expanded the term to cover "those regions of Asia which extend to the borders of India or command the approaches to India." The term's own early usage was already stretching to fit whatever British strategic interest needed naming that decade — a pattern that never really stopped.

That fuzziness is still real today. A typical modern definition covers West Asia (excluding the Caucasus) plus Egypt and the European portion of Turkey — roughly sixteen to eighteen

countries, depending on the source — but real, ongoing scholarly disagreement continues over whether Afghanistan, Pakistan, North Africa beyond Egypt, and the Central Asian states belong at all. Since the late 20th century, regional scholars have also directly criticized the term itself as Eurocentric — "middle," and "east," of what, exactly, depends entirely on where the speaker is standing.

Why this course uses the term anyway

A course still needs a working label for the countries it actually covers, and "Middle East" remains the term readers will search for and recognize. Using it doesn't mean treating it as a natural, self-evident category — it means naming the real convention this course is working within, the same way "Europe" or "the West" name real, useful, but genuinely constructed groupings rather than natural facts about the world.

Eight Chapters, Eight Genuinely Different Political Systems

The single most useful thing a comparative course can do up front is refuse to treat "Middle Eastern politics" as one thing. The eight countries this course covers, one structural type at a time, share a rough geography and do not share a political system — they span nearly the entire real taxonomy Political Theory Fundamentals already built:

Absolute & constitutional monarchy

Saudi Arabia's uncoded, religious-legal basis for royal rule, directly contrasted against Jordan's own more codified constitutional balance between an elected parliament and a powerful king (Chapter 2)

A federal monarchy grouping

The UAE's federal structure across seven emirates, alongside Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman, with Kuwait's own genuinely more assertive elected National Assembly as a documented regional outlier (Chapter 3)

A theocratic-republican hybrid

Iran's real post-1979 institutional split — an elected president and Majlis existing alongside an unelected Supreme Leader

A strengthened presidency

Turkey's real shift from a parliamentary republic to an executive presidency, following the 2017 constitutional referendum (Chapter 5)

and Guardian Council with real candidate-vetting power (Chapter 4)	
Military-backed authoritarianism Egypt's recurring, structural military role in politics since the 1952 Free Officers coup, running through Nasser, Sadat, Mubarak, and Sisi (Chapter 6)	Parliamentary democracy, no single constitution Israel's Knesset, its proportional-representation electoral system, and the real role its own Basic Laws play as a substitute constitutional framework (Chapter 7)
One-party authoritarian republics Iraq's and Syria's real, separately-evolved Ba'ath Party structures under Saddam Hussein and the Assad family, and how each system's real fate diverged after 2003 (Chapter 8)	Consociational power-sharing Lebanon's own confessional power-sharing system under the Taif Agreement, and the real, recurring regional pattern of powerful non-state actors operating alongside formal state institutions (Chapter 9)

The Tools This Course Reuses, Not Reinvents

Every one of those eight chapters applies a real, already-established analytical tool rather than building a new one from scratch each time:

Tool	Source	Where it gets used directly
Weber's three types of legitimate authority (traditional, charismatic, legal-rational)	Political Theory Fundamentals, Chapter 1	The capstone's own closing classification of every system covered
Federalism vs. unitary states	Political Theory Fundamentals, Chapter 9	The UAE's own real federal structure across seven emirates (Chapter 3)
Electoral systems (proportional representation, and its real effects)	Political Theory Fundamentals, Chapter 8	Israel's Knesset and Iran's own Majlis elections (Chapters 4, 7)

Tool	Source	Where it gets used directly
Authoritarianism & hybrid regimes	Political Theory Fundamentals, Chapter 7	Egypt, Iraq, and Syria (Chapters 6, 8)

What this course deliberately does not do

This is not a course about any single live conflict, foreign-policy dispute, or contested current event — those questions matter, but they aren't what a course on comparative political *structure* is built to answer responsibly. Where a real, historical event genuinely explains an institution's own real origin (a revolution, a coup, a constitutional referendum), it's covered as institutional history. Live, actively disputed political questions are deliberately left outside this course's own scope.

What Comes Next

Chapter 2 opens with the two monarchies this course starts with for a reason: Saudi Arabia and Jordan share the same formal title — kingdom — while resting on genuinely different real foundations for that rule, making them the clearest possible first real contrast the course can offer.

Hands-On Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Explain, using this chapter's own real 1902 Mahan example, why a region's name can be a genuine political/strategic convention rather than a neutral geographic fact — and name one other real-world regional label (e.g. "the West," "Eastern Europe," "the Far East") that works the same way.

[→ Solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

Using this chapter's own concept-grid, pick any two of the eight political systems listed and explain, in your own words, what structurally distinguishes them — not by history or culture, but by how power is actually organized and constrained in each.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

Explain why a course comparing real political institutions is a genuinely different, narrower undertaking than a course on regional current events or foreign policy — and why that narrower scope is actually the more responsible choice for a topic this contested.

→ [Solution](#)

Chapter 1 Quick Reference

- **"The Middle East"** — coined by Alfred Thayer Mahan, September 1902, in a British strategic-naval article; expanded by Valentine Chirol weeks later; its scope has been genuinely contested and shifting ever since
- **Roughly 16-18 countries** in a typical modern definition, with real scholarly disagreement over several more (Afghanistan, Pakistan, North Africa, Central Asia)
- **Eight structurally distinct political systems** covered: absolute monarchy (Ch.2), constitutional monarchy (Ch.2), a federal monarchy grouping (Ch.3), a theocratic-republican hybrid (Ch.4), a strengthened presidency (Ch.5), military-backed authoritarianism (Ch.6), parliamentary democracy without a single codified constitution (Ch.7), one-party authoritarian republics (Ch.8), and consociational power-sharing (Ch.9)
- **This course's own tools** are all reused directly from Political Theory Fundamentals — Weber's authority typology, federalism/unitary models, electoral systems, and the authoritarianism/hybrid-regime framework
- **Deliberately out of scope:** any single live conflict or contested current dispute — this course studies structure, not takes positions

CHAPTER 2: ABSOLUTE & CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCHIES: SAUDI ARABIA & JORDAN

Middle East Politics Fundamentals

Chapter 2 · Absolute & Constitutional Monarchies: Saudi Arabia & Jordan

Both countries call themselves a kingdom. That single shared word is doing almost none of the real work here — Saudi Arabia's own monarchy rests on an uncoded religious-legal basis with no written constitution in the ordinary sense, while Jordan's rests on a real, dated 1952 constitution and a genuine (if genuinely uneven) history of codifying limits on royal power. This chapter takes each in turn, then compares them directly.

Saudi Arabia: An Uncodified, Religious-Legal Basis for Rule

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was formally proclaimed on **23 September 1932**, when Abdulaziz Ibn Saud, after roughly three decades of military consolidation across the Arabian Peninsula, unified the Hejaz and Najd under one royal decree. The state that resulted has never operated with a constitution in the sense Jordan's own 1952 document represents.

The closest real equivalent is the **Basic Law of Governance**, promulgated by Royal Decree A/90 on **1 March 1992** under King Fahd. Rather than establishing itself as the state's own supreme legal authority, the Basic Law explicitly names something else as the constitution:

Finding: the Basic Law names the Quran and Sunnah, not itself, as the state's constitution

The Basic Law states directly that governance in the Kingdom "derives its authority from the Quran and the Sunna of the Prophet," and that the Quran and Sunna "shall govern this Law and all the laws of the State." Article 7 further states that Islamic religious law (Sharia) is the foundation of the Kingdom. The 1992 document is a real, formal governing text — but one that structurally subordinates itself to religious law rather than claiming supreme constitutional authority in its own right, a genuinely different design from Jordan's own 1952 constitution below.

Succession: From Purely Discretionary to Partially Formalized

The Basic Law restricts the kingship to "the sons of King Abdul Aziz" and their own sons, with "the most suitable among them" to be chosen — a real rule about who is eligible, but historically left the actual choice of successor to the reigning king's own discretion, with no binding institutional check.

That changed, partially, in **October 2006**, when King Abdullah issued the Allegiance Institution Law, formally constituting the **Allegiance Council** (Hay'at al-Bay'ah) on **7 December 2007** — a body bringing together representatives of Ibn Saud's own sons to reach a real, collective consensus on succession, rather than leaving the decision to one person's own private judgment.

The Allegiance Council in real, practical use

On **21 June 2017**, King Salman issued a royal order removing Muhammad bin Nayef as Crown Prince and replacing him with his own son, Mohammed bin Salman — approved, per the Council's own real procedure, by 31 of its 34 members. The Council didn't prevent the King's preferred outcome; it did require that outcome to secure a real, recorded majority first, a genuine (if modest) move from pure discretion toward institutional process.

The Shura Council: Consultative, Not Legislative

Saudi Arabia has no elected national legislature. The **Shura Council** — the country's consultative assembly — is entirely appointed: the King personally names every member to four-year terms, along with the Council's own Speaker and other officers, by royal decree. It can propose and review legislation but cannot itself pass binding law.

Institution	Real, verified status
Shura Council	Fully appointed by the King; advisory, not legislative
Municipal councils	Half the seats elected since 2005 (men only); women first permitted to vote and stand in 2015, winning roughly 1% of all available seats
Political parties	Not permitted

A real, recent exception to one long-standing rule

For most of the Basic Law's own history, the King has also served as Prime Minister. That changed on **27 September 2022**, when King Salman issued a royal order appointing Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman as Prime Minister in his own right — explicitly described as an exception to the Basic Law's usual provisions. Even a system this centralized has, on at least this one real occasion, separated a role long treated as automatically the King's own.

Jordan: A More Codified Constitutional Balance

Transjordan gained full independence from Britain on **17 June 1946** under the Treaty of London, with Abdullah I crowned king that May. The country adopted its own real, still-current constitution in **1952**, establishing a bicameral **National Assembly**:

House of Representatives (Majlis al-Nuwwab)

The real, elected lower chamber — members chosen by general, secret, direct election, with elections held at least every four years

Senate (Majlis al-A'yan)

The appointed upper chamber — members named by the King himself to four-year terms; if the House is dissolved, the Senate's own sessions are suspended too

A real, elected chamber is a genuine structural difference from Saudi Arabia's fully appointed Shura Council. But it does not, on its own, make Jordan a parliamentary democracy in the sense the UK or Israel (covered in Chapter 7) would recognize: the King appoints the Prime Minister directly, and may dismiss him, without that choice depending on the House's own confidence in the way a true parliamentary system would require.

A Genuinely Two-Directional Constitutional History

Jordan's own real constitutional record since 2011 doesn't move in one simple direction, and that's worth being explicit about rather than smoothing over:

Finding: 2011 loosened royal power; 2016 formalized it back in, in a specific and different way

Following the 2011 Arab Spring protests, King Abdullah II convened a Royal Committee to review the constitution, and real amendments followed — including the creation of a genuine Constitutional Court in 2012. But real amendments passed on **4 May 2016** moved in the opposite direction on a specific, real set of powers: they gave the King unilateral appointment authority — with no countersignature required from the Prime Minister or relevant ministers — over the Crown Prince, the Senate Speaker and members, the Constitutional Court's own Chairman and members, the Chief Justice, the army commander, and the heads of intelligence and the gendarmerie. Officials described the change as strengthening judicial independence; critics pointed out it removed cabinet involvement from exactly the appointments (security, judiciary) where civilian oversight would matter most. Both real facts are true at once: Jordan built a genuine Constitutional Court, and Jordan's King gained new, real, unchecked appointment power over who sits on it.

The Electoral System Itself Has Also Changed Repeatedly

Political Theory Fundamentals' own Chapter 8 covers how electoral system design shapes real outcomes — Jordan's own House of Representatives elections are a concrete, real case of that design changing more than once. A 2012 law introduced a mixed system, with only 27 of 150 seats chosen by proportional representation on a single national list; a further 2016 reform replaced that closed national list with genuine open-list proportional representation across multiple districts, letting voters choose among individual candidates within a list rather than the list alone.

Comparing the Two Directly

	Saudi Arabia	Jordan
Founding	23 September 1932	17 June 1946 (independence); 1952 constitution
Governing document	1992 Basic Law of Governance — names the Quran/Sunnah, not itself, as the constitution	A real, standing 1952 constitution, amended repeatedly since

	Saudi Arabia	Jordan
National legislature	Shura Council — fully appointed, advisory only	Bicameral National Assembly — elected House, appointed Senate
Succession	Restricted to Ibn Saud's own descendants; since 2007, requires an Allegiance Council majority	Hereditary within the Hashemite line, as set out directly in the constitution
Recent institutional trend	A real, narrow move toward formalized succession (2006-07); a real, narrow institutional exception splitting King and PM (2022)	Genuinely two-directional — a real Constitutional Court (2012) alongside a real expansion of unchecked royal appointment power (2016)

What Comes Next

Chapter 3 turns to the Gulf monarchies as a group — the UAE's own federal structure spanning seven emirates, alongside Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman, closing with Kuwait's own genuinely more assertive elected National Assembly as a documented regional outlier among them.

Hands-On Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Explain the real, structural difference between a country whose constitution claims supreme legal authority in its own right and Saudi Arabia's own Basic Law, which instead names the Quran and Sunnah as the state's constitution and subordinates itself to them.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

Using this chapter's own real 2016 Jordanian amendments, explain why "constitutional" reform cannot be assumed to always mean "more limits on a ruler's

own power" — and identify specifically which powers moved in the opposite direction that year.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

Compare Saudi Arabia's Allegiance Council (est. 2006-07) and Jordan's elected House of Representatives as two genuinely different real mechanisms for constraining a single individual's own discretion — what, specifically, does each one actually constrain, and what does each leave completely untouched?

→ [Solution](#)

Chapter 2 Quick Reference

- **Saudi Arabia:** proclaimed 23 September 1932; the 1992 Basic Law of Governance names the Quran and Sunnah, not itself, as the state's constitution; a fully appointed Shura Council; succession restricted to Ibn Saud's descendants and, since the 2006-07 Allegiance Council, requiring a real recorded majority
- **A real, recent exception:** the King and Prime Minister roles were formally separated for the first time on 27 September 2022
- **Jordan:** independent 17 June 1946; a real, standing 1952 constitution; a bicameral National Assembly (elected House of Representatives, appointed Senate)
- **Jordan's constitutional history moves both directions:** a real Constitutional Court created in 2012, alongside real, unchecked royal appointment power over the judiciary and security services added in 2016
- **Electoral design changes:** Jordan's own House elections shifted from a mixed system (2012) to open-list proportional representation (2016) — a real, concrete case study for Political Theory Fundamentals' own Chapter 8

CHAPTER 3: THE GULF MONARCHIES COMPARED

Middle East Politics Fundamentals

Chapter 3 · The Gulf Monarchies Compared

Five more monarchies, often grouped together under one label — "the Gulf states" — that obscures just as much real structural variation as "the Middle East" itself did in Chapter 1. Each of the five genuinely differs in how much real elected input its own system builds in, and — as this chapter shows directly — how stable that amount has actually proven to be over time.

The UAE: A Federation of Seven Monarchies

The United Arab Emirates formed in December 1971 as a federation of six emirates — Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al Quwain, and Fujairah — with the seventh, Ras Al Khaimah, joining in 1972. Each emirate keeps its own ruling family and real local authority; a Provisional Constitution set out which specific powers moved to the new federal level, leaving everything else with the individual emirates.

Federal Supreme Council

The real highest federal authority — the rulers of all seven emirates together. It elects the President from among their own number.

A real, consistent convention

In practice, the presidency has gone to Abu Dhabi's own ruler every time since 1971, and the Vice President/Prime Minister role to Dubai's own ruler — a genuine pattern, not a constitutional requirement written down as such.

The **Federal National Council** is the closest thing to a national legislature — 40 seats, half appointed directly by each emirate's own ruler, half filled by election since a real, first vote held in December 2006.

Finding: a genuinely narrow real electorate for that first election

In the 2006 vote, only **6,595** of the more than 300,000 UAE citizens over 18 were actually permitted to vote — chosen as an electoral college by the rulers of the seven emirates themselves, rather than open to the full citizen population. Even the elected half of the

Federal National Council, in other words, began as an election with a hand-picked electorate.

Qatar: An Elected Chamber, Tried Once, Then Reversed

Qatar's permanent constitution was approved by public referendum in April 2003, with 96.6% in favor, and took effect in 2004. It promised real, elected seats on the **Shura Council** from the start — a promise the government then delayed repeatedly, citing regional instability, for the better part of two decades.

Qatar finally held its **first-ever** Shura Council elections on 2 October 2021, filling two-thirds of the 45-seat council by popular vote, with the Emir appointing the remaining fifteen. It was a genuine, real first — and it turned out to be the only one.

Finding: a real election tried once, then genuinely reversed three years later

On **5 November 2024**, a constitutional referendum — 84% turnout, 90.6% approval — ended Shura Council elections entirely, amending Article 77 to revert the council to a fully appointed body after just that one 2021 election cycle. Emir Sheikh Tamim's own stated reasoning was explicit: real "electoral competition within the context of family and tribal ties" risked "intra-tribal rivalries and social fragmentation." Whatever the underlying calculation, the real, dated sequence is unambiguous — Qatar built a genuine elected chamber, used it once, and then removed it by referendum.

Bahrain: A Broken Promise Built Into the Constitution's Own Design

In February 2001, Bahrain held a real national referendum on the National Action Charter, which the public overwhelmingly approved — with the King's own government securing support from Shi'a community leaders partly by promising the appointed Consultative Council would remain purely advisory.

A real, documented gap between what was promised and what was delivered

When the actual 2002 Constitution was proclaimed on 14 February 2002, both chambers of the new bicameral National Assembly — the elected Council of Representatives and the royally appointed Consultative Council, 40 seats each — were given **equal** real legislative power, directly contradicting what voters had been told the year before. The real, practical effect: any bill the elected chamber passes can be blocked by a body the King himself appoints, not the electorate. This broken promise led to a real, substantial Shi'a boycott of the 2002 elections, with participation only resuming by 2006.

Oman: Two Advisory Chambers, and a Real Sealed-Letter Succession

Sultan Qaboos issued Oman's Basic Statute (Basic Law) by royal decree in November 1996, establishing a bicameral **Majlis Oman**: the State Council (Majlis al-Dawla), fully appointed by the Sultan, and the Consultative Council (Majlis al-Shura), chosen by real popular election. Both, per Oman's own Basic Law, hold advisory power only — a genuinely more limited real design than Bahrain's equally-empowered elected chamber, or the UAE's own half-elected Federal National Council.

Oman's Sultan is also, uniquely among the Gulf states covered in this chapter, the country's own Prime Minister ex officio — combining head of state, head of government, and commander-in-chief in a single office with no separate holder.

A genuinely remarkable real succession, verified directly

Sultan Qaboos, who had ruled since 1970 with no son of his own, died on **10 January 2020**. Under the Basic Law, the Ruling Family Council had three days to agree on a successor; instead, it deliberately deferred to the alternative Qaboos himself had built into the process — a real, sealed, handwritten letter naming his own choice, opened on national television by the Defense Council together with the presidents of the State Council, the Shura Council, and the Supreme Court. The letter named **Haitham bin Tariq**, sworn in as Sultan within hours — a real, working succession mechanism designed specifically for the case the ordinary family-council process couldn't resolve on its own.

Kuwait: The Real, Documented Outlier — Assertive, But Not Untouchable

Kuwait adopted a written constitution in November 1962 — the oldest currently in force anywhere in the Gulf — and elected its first National Assembly in January 1963, the region's first fully elected parliament, with no appointed chamber alongside it. It has real, documented teeth: Kuwait's National Assembly has genuinely held ministers accountable through real interpellation and no-confidence procedures, driving real cabinet reshuffles over the decades.

Period	Real, documented status
1963-1976	Fully functioning elected National Assembly
1976-1981	Suspended entirely
1986-1992	Suspended entirely a second time
1992-2024	Restored, genuinely active — real, frequent cabinet accountability fights and dissolutions
May 2024-present	Dissolved again, with named constitutional articles suspended for up to four years, by Emiri decree

An honest, current complication — not a settled "most democratic Gulf state" story

On **10 May 2024**, Emir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah dissolved the National Assembly and suspended named constitutional articles "for a period not exceeding four years," with the Emir and government together assuming the legislature's own functions in the meantime. In his own televised address, he cited "the recent turmoil in the Kuwaiti political scene" as having "reached a stage where we cannot remain silent." As of this course's own writing, Kuwait's real institutional history is genuinely the Gulf's most assertive elected-parliament story — and is, right now, in one of its own recurring suspended periods, the third since 1962.

Comparing the Five Directly

	UAE	Qatar	Bahrain	Oman	Kuwait
Elected national chamber?	Half of FNC, since 2006	None (2021-24 experiment reversed)	Yes, but equally checked by an appointed chamber	Yes, advisory only	Yes, the sole legislative chamber
Real trend	Stable since 2006	Tried once, reversed	Stable since a real 2002 broken promise	Stable since 1996	Repeatedly suspended, including currently

What Comes Next

Chapter 4 leaves the monarchies behind entirely for the first genuinely different structural category this course covers — Iran's real theocratic-republican hybrid, where a fully elected president and parliament exist alongside an unelected Supreme Leader and Guardian Council with real, documented candidate-vetting power.

Hands-On Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Using Bahrain's own real 2001-2002 sequence and Qatar's own real 2021-2024 sequence, explain what these two cases have in common structurally, even though the specific timelines and mechanisms (a broken promise vs. a later reversal by referendum) are genuinely different.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

Explain why an elected chamber's own real legislative power depends on more than whether the seats are elected at all — using Bahrain's equally-empowered appointed Consultative Council and Oman's fully advisory Majlis al-Shura as two real, concrete

examples of an elected body whose actual power is genuinely limited by a different mechanism in each case.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

Explain why Kuwait's own real May 2024 suspension is a genuine complication of, rather than a simple exception to, calling it "the Gulf's outlier" for real elected-parliament assertiveness — what about Kuwait's own history makes the 2024 suspension itself part of the same pattern that makes it an outlier in the first place?

→ [Solution](#)

Chapter 3 Quick Reference

- **UAE:** a real 1971/72 federation of seven emirates; Federal Supreme Council elects the President (in practice always Abu Dhabi's ruler); Federal National Council half-appointed, half-elected since a 2006 vote with a real, narrow 6,595-person electorate
- **Qatar:** a 2003 constitution promising elected Shura Council seats; delivered only once, in 2021; reversed entirely by a real 5 November 2024 referendum, with the Emir citing tribal-rivalry risk
- **Bahrain:** a real February 2001 referendum promised an advisory-only appointed chamber; the actual February 2002 constitution gave it equal legislative power instead, triggering a real electoral boycott
- **Oman:** both chambers of Majlis Oman are advisory only; the Sultan is uniquely also Prime Minister ex officio; a real, sealed-letter succession mechanism was actually used following Sultan Qaboos's 10 January 2020 death
- **Kuwait:** the Gulf's oldest constitution (1962) and only fully elected, unicameral parliament — genuinely assertive, but suspended three real times since 1963, most recently starting 10 May 2024

CHAPTER 4: IRAN: A THEOCRATIC-REPUBLICAN HYBRID

Middle East Politics Fundamentals

Chapter 4 · Iran: A Theocratic-Republican Hybrid

Every system covered so far has been a monarchy of one kind or another — real elected chambers sitting somewhere alongside a ruling family, with the family always holding the final word. Iran is this course's first genuinely different structural category: a system that is, by its own constitution's own design, built to hold two separate sources of legitimacy at once — a fully elected President and Majlis, and an unelected Supreme Leader and Guardian Council standing above them. Neither half is a formality. Understanding Iran means understanding exactly where each one's real power starts and stops.

1979: A Revolution, and a Constitution Built to Hold Two Kinds of Legitimacy

Iran's 1979 revolution replaced a hereditary monarchy, the Pahlavi shah, with a system its own architects deliberately named a **theocratic-republican** one — not a monarchy replaced by an ordinary republic, and not a monarchy replaced by unchecked clerical rule, but a real, constitutionally built combination of both. On **1 April 1979**, a national referendum approved turning Iran into an Islamic Republic; the new constitution was adopted on **24 October 1979** and became the country's effective law on **3 December 1979**. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the revolution's own dominant figure, became the country's first **Supreme Leader** in December of that same year.

Velayat-e Faqih ("Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist")

The real doctrine written into the constitution's own core — that the country needs a single senior Islamic jurist standing above the elected government, empowered to guide the state according to Islamic law. It's the specific idea that makes this a hybrid system rather than an ordinary republic with a state religion.

Not a settled idea even at the founding

The Assembly of Experts drafting the 1979 constitution did not agree among themselves on exactly what velayat-e faqih should mean in practice — a genuine internal disagreement over how far the doctrine's own real implications should reach, one this chapter's own later sections

show being resolved gradually, and unevenly, over the following decade.

The Elected Half: President and Majlis

Iran's **President** is directly elected to a four-year term, limited to two consecutive terms, and — since a real 1989 change covered later in this chapter — serves as the country's own chief executive, with no separate Prime Minister sitting above the cabinet. The **Islamic Consultative Assembly**, universally known as the **Majlis**, is a 290-seat unicameral parliament, also elected to four-year terms, with five of those seats permanently reserved for named religious minorities — Zoroastrians, Jews, and Assyrian/Chaldean and Armenian Christians.

Political Theory Fundamentals' own Chapter 8 covers how electoral system design genuinely shapes real outcomes, and Iran's Majlis is worth reading against the two electoral systems this course has already covered: Jordan's own open-list proportional representation (Chapter 2). Iran uses a genuinely different real mechanism — most Majlis seats are filled by a **two-round majoritarian vote** in single- or multi-member constituencies, a district-based, candidate-by-candidate system rather than a party-list one. Real, competitive multi-candidate elections do happen inside these districts — the genuine limits on that competition sit one level up, in who is allowed to stand at all.

The Unelected Half: Supreme Leader and the Guardian Council

The **Supreme Leader** — Khomeini until his 1989 death, Ali Khamenei since — is not directly elected by the public at all. Chosen and, formally, removable by the Assembly of Experts (covered in the next section), the Supreme Leader holds real, extensive constitutional powers: commander-in-chief of the armed forces, the power to appoint the head of the judiciary, the heads of state radio and television, and the commanders of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and — through the mechanism below — a real, decisive influence over who is even allowed to compete in the country's own elections.

The Guardian Council: 12 members, two real jobs

A genuinely closed chain of appointment

Six Islamic jurists, appointed directly by the Supreme Leader, and six lawyers, nominated by the head of the judiciary (himself a Supreme Leader appointee) and confirmed by the Majlis. Its two real constitutional powers: reviewing and vetoing legislation for compliance with Islamic law and the constitution, and vetting every candidate for President, Majlis, and the Assembly of Experts.

Half the Council's own members are direct Supreme Leader appointees; the other half are confirmed through a judiciary chief the Supreme Leader himself appointed. The body doing the candidate-screening is not independent of the office whose own real power that screening ultimately protects.

Finding: real, measured mass disqualification, not a theoretical power

In the June 2021 presidential race, the Guardian Council disqualified **585** of the roughly 592 people who had registered as candidates, approving just **seven** names for the final ballot — among them Ebrahim Raisi, who went on to win. The vetting power described above is not a rarely-used constitutional formality; in a real, recent, and closely documented election, it is the single event that decided who Iranian voters were actually allowed to choose between.

The Assembly of Experts: A Real Election to Choose the Body's Own Overseer

The **Assembly of Experts** is an 88-member clerical body, directly elected by the public to real eight-year terms, with one constitutional job that sits above every other office covered so far: electing the Supreme Leader, and — at least on paper — being able to remove one it judges no longer qualified.

A genuine structural loop, worth naming honestly rather than glossing over

The Assembly of Experts elects and, formally, oversees the Supreme Leader. But candidates for the Assembly of Experts are themselves vetted by the Guardian Council — a body half-appointed directly by the very Supreme Leader the Assembly exists to check. The office with formal authority over the Supreme Leader is filled only by people a body the Supreme Leader helped staff has already approved. This doesn't mean the

Assembly's own oversight role is fictional — real internal Assembly debate over succession does happen — but it does mean the loop closes back on itself rather than running in one clean, one-directional line.

The Expediency Discernment Council: Breaking Deadlock Outside the Elected/Unelected Divide

By 1987, real, repeated conflict between the reformist-leaning Majlis of the day and the more conservative Guardian Council had brought parts of Iran's own legislative process to a genuine standstill — the Council routinely vetoing Majlis bills as incompatible with Islamic law or the constitution, with no formal mechanism to resolve the disagreement either way. Khomeini himself ordered the creation of the **Expediency Discernment Council** by decree on **6 February 1988**, specifically to mediate exactly this kind of Majlis-Guardian Council impasse; the body was written into the constitution as a permanent institution during the 1989 amendments covered next.

1989: A Constitution Rewritten Around a Real Succession Crisis

Khomeini had originally designated Ayatollah Hussein-Ali Montazeri as his own successor — but Montazeri broke with Khomeini over the regime's own human-rights record in the late 1980s, and was removed from the succession before Khomeini's death. When Khomeini died on 3 June 1989 with no agreed-upon senior religious successor in place, Iran faced a real, structural problem the original 1979 constitution had not actually anticipated.

What the 1989 amendments actually changed	Real, direct reason
Abolished the office of Prime Minister; its powers split between the President and a new First Vice President	Concentrated real executive authority in one directly elected office
Removed the requirement that the Supreme Leader hold the rank of <i>marja</i> (the highest Shia religious authority)	Ali Khamenei, the leading real candidate, held a comparatively low clerical rank at the time — the eligibility bar was lowered to fit him

What the 1989 amendments actually changed	Real, direct reason
Formally enshrined the Expediency Discernment Council in the constitution as a permanent body	Converted Khomeini's own 1988 emergency decree into a lasting institution

A national referendum approved these amendments on **28 July 1989**, and Khamenei — already serving as President at the time of Khomeini's death — became Iran's second Supreme Leader that same year, under eligibility rules genuinely rewritten to make his own succession possible.

A Real, Recent Case of Turnover Within the Boundaries

Finding: the elected half does produce genuine change — inside limits the unelected half sets

President Ebrahim Raisi, the same figure the 2021 Guardian Council vetting cleared for the ballot, died on **19 May 2024** when his helicopter went down in bad weather in East Azerbaijan province, killing him and seven others including his foreign minister. Iran held a real early presidential election on **28 June and 5 July 2024**; **Masoud Pezeshkian**, a reformist-leaning candidate who had himself cleared that cycle's own Guardian Council screening, won and was inaugurated on **28 July 2024**. The result is a genuinely real demonstration of the system's own two-halves design working exactly as built: a sudden, unplanned vacancy produced a real, contested election with an outcome that was not simply dictated in advance — one still held entirely within a field of candidates the unelected half of the system had already narrowed.

Elected and Unelected, Side by Side

	Chosen by	Real core power	Checked by
President	Direct popular vote, 4-year term	Chief executive; runs the cabinet and government day to day	Guardian Council vets candidacy; Supreme Leader outranks in named constitutional areas
Majlis	Direct popular vote, 4-year term, two-round majoritarian	Passes legislation	Guardian Council can veto bills; vets candidates before any vote happens
Supreme Leader	Assembly of Experts	Commander-in-chief; appoints judiciary/media/IRGC heads; sets state's general direction	Formally, the Assembly of Experts — whose own candidates the Guardian Council screens
Guardian Council	Half Supreme Leader, half judiciary-nominated/Majlis-confirmed	Vetoes legislation; vets every candidate for President, Majlis & Assembly of Experts	No elected body can override its vetoes or force a disqualified candidate onto a ballot

What Comes Next

Chapter 5 moves to a genuinely different real trajectory — Turkey's own shift from a conventional parliamentary republic toward a strengthened, directly elected executive presidency, following the real 2017 constitutional referendum.

Hands-On Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Trace the real structural loop this chapter names between the Assembly of Experts, the Guardian Council, and the Supreme Leader. Why does this loop mean the Assembly's

own formal power to remove a Supreme Leader isn't simply fictional, but also isn't a fully independent check either?

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

Using the real 2021 vetting numbers (585 of roughly 592 candidates disqualified, 7 approved) and the real 2024 election that actually produced a contested reformist-leaning winner, explain why describing Iranian elections as either fully "free" or entirely "meaningless" both miss what the real evidence in this chapter actually shows.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

Chapter 3 covered Oman's own real succession mechanism — a sealed letter, opened after Sultan Qaboos's 2020 death, naming a successor under an existing rule. Iran's own 1989 succession crisis was resolved a genuinely different way. Compare the two: what problem did each system actually face, and what kind of fix did each one reach for?

→ [Solution](#)

Chapter 4 Quick Reference

- **Founding:** a 1 April 1979 referendum created the Islamic Republic; the constitution was adopted 24 October 1979, effective 3 December 1979; Khomeini became the first Supreme Leader that December
- **Elected half:** a directly elected President (4-year term, 2-term limit, chief executive since 1989) and a 290-seat Majlis (4-year terms, 5 reserved minority seats, two-round majoritarian voting)
- **Unelected half:** the Supreme Leader (chosen by the Assembly of Experts) and the 12-member Guardian Council (half Supreme Leader-appointed, half judiciary-

nominated), which both vetoes legislation and vets every candidate

- **Finding:** the Guardian Council disqualified 585 of roughly 592 candidates in the real 2021 presidential race, approving just 7
- **The closed loop:** the 88-member Assembly of Experts elects/oversees the Supreme Leader, but its own candidates are screened by a Guardian Council the Supreme Leader half-appoints
- **The Expediency Discernment Council:** created by Khomeini decree on 6 February 1988 to resolve Majlis-Guardian Council deadlock; made a permanent constitutional body in 1989
- **1989:** Khomeini's death with no agreed successor drove real constitutional change — the Prime Minister's office abolished, the Supreme Leader's own top-clerical-rank requirement removed to clear the way for Khamenei
- **2024:** Raisi's death in a 19 May helicopter crash led to a real, contested election won by reformist-leaning Masoud Pezeshkian — genuine turnover within the boundaries the unelected half had already set

CHAPTER 5: TURKEY: FROM PARLIAMENTARY REPUBLIC TO A STRENGTHENED PRESIDENCY

Middle East Politics Fundamentals

Chapter 5 · Turkey: From Parliamentary Republic to a Strengthened Presidency

Iran's system was built from its very first constitution to hold two kinds of legitimacy in permanent tension. Turkey's is a genuinely different real story — a system that was born parliamentary, stayed parliamentary for over eighty years, and then changed shape through a specific, traceable sequence of real crises and a single, narrowly won referendum. This chapter follows that sequence in order, because the order is exactly what explains why the change happened when it did, and why it took the form it did.

The 1982 Constitution's Real Parliamentary Design

The modern Republic of Turkey was founded in 1923 under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, built around a firmly secular, republican reorganization of what had been the Ottoman Empire. The constitution actually in force today dates from 1982, drafted by the military in the aftermath of a 1980 coup, and it proclaims a democratic, secular, **parliamentary** system of government.

A ceremonial-leaning President

Under the 1982 constitution as originally written, the President was chosen by the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) itself, not by the public directly — a single seven-year term, with no re-election.

Real day-to-day power sat with the Prime Minister

The Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers actually ran the government and answered to the 550-seat TGNA — the ordinary parliamentary arrangement, with the President's own powers deliberately left less precisely defined in practice.

2007: A Presidential Election Crisis Changes How the President Is Chosen

In 2007, the governing AKP's own candidate for President, Abdullah Gül, became the center of a genuine constitutional crisis. Gül's own background in political Islam, and his wife's headscarf,

collided directly with the presidency's own traditional role as guardian of Turkey's secular order. The opposition boycotted the first parliamentary vote and petitioned the Constitutional Court, which ruled that a two-thirds quorum was required to validate the vote — a quorum impossible to reach without opposition participation. The military's own General Staff publicly warned it would act, if needed, to defend secularism.

Finding: a real civil-military flashpoint resolved through the ballot box, not the barracks

Rather than a direct military intervention, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's response was to call early parliamentary elections and put a specific constitutional fix to a public referendum: moving presidential elections from a parliamentary vote to a direct popular vote, and shortening the term from seven years to four. The real result was a decisive 70% approval. The crisis reshaped how a President reaches office — it did not yet touch what the President could actually do once there.

2016: A Failed Coup, and the State of Emergency That Set the Stage

On the night of **15-16 July 2016**, elements of the Turkish military attempted to seize power, deploying tanks and aircraft against government buildings including the Parliament itself. The coup collapsed within hours, but at real, documented cost — at least **251 people killed** and more than 2,200 injured. The government declared a **state of emergency** on 22 July 2016, and a large-scale purge followed: more than 130,000 people dismissed from the military, police, civil service, and academia over the following two years, with the government blaming the exiled cleric Fethullah Gülen for orchestrating the attempt.

Why this sequencing matters

The constitutional referendum covered next was drafted and put to voters while this state of emergency was still in force — a real, documented condition surrounding the vote that international observers later cited directly when raising concerns about the fairness of the campaign environment.

16 April 2017: The Referendum That Replaced the System Entirely

On **16 April 2017**, Turkish voters approved a package of 18 constitutional amendments, brought forward jointly by the governing AKP and the opposition-aligned nationalist MHP. The result — **51.4% in favor, 48.6% against** — was narrow enough that observers questioned the vote's own legitimacy even as it stood as legally decisive.

What actually changed	Real, specific detail
The office of Prime Minister	Abolished outright; the President became sole head of both state and government
Presidential decree power	The President gained the real power to issue decrees with the force of law in areas not already governed by statute
Appointing the cabinet	The President appoints Vice President(s) and ministers directly, with no parliamentary confidence vote required
Judicial appointments	Real, expanded presidential control over appointments to the reorganized Council of Judges and Prosecutors
The Grand National Assembly	Enlarged from 550 to 600 seats
Terms of office	Both presidential and parliamentary terms extended from four to five years, and — under Article 77 — held concurrently, on the same day

Political Theory Fundamentals' own Chapter 9 covers the real structural difference between a fused parliamentary executive (answerable to, and drawn from, the legislature) and a separated presidential one (elected independently, serving a fixed term regardless of the legislature's own confidence). Turkey's 2017 amendments are a real, documented case of a system moving directly from the first real structural type to the second — not gradually, but in a single, dated constitutional change.

2018: The New System Takes Effect, 16 Months Ahead of Schedule

Most of the 2017 amendments — including the abolition of the Prime Minister's office — were written to take effect only after Turkey's next joint presidential and parliamentary elections. Erdoğan called those elections early, and Turkey held its first vote under the new system on **24 June 2018**, more than sixteen months ahead of the date originally scheduled. Erdoğan won the presidency outright, becoming the first President to hold the office's real, newly enlarged executive powers in full.

2023: A Real, Still-Genuinely-Live Question About Term Limits

The 2017 amendments cap the presidency at **two consecutive five-year terms**. Erdoğan had already served as President since 2014, under the older, more limited version of the office — raising a real question of whether a 2023 candidacy would count as a first or a second term under the new, more powerful office.

Finding: a real institutional ruling that resolved the 2023 question, without resolving what comes after it

Turkey's Supreme Election Council (YSK) ruled that the 2018 election — the first held under the fully presidential system — counted as the first term of the presidency *as newly defined*, making a 2023 candidacy his second term under that system rather than a barred third. Erdoğan went on to win the 2023 election. What remains a genuinely open, actively disputed question as of this course's own writing is whether any candidacy beyond that second term — whether through a further constitutional amendment or a parliament-called early election argued to "reset" the count — would be constitutionally valid. This course deliberately does not take a position on that still-unresolved dispute; the settled, dated institutional facts above are what this chapter covers.

Parliamentary vs. Presidential Turkey, Side by Side

	1982 Constitution, as originally written	Post-2017 System
Head of government	Prime Minister, answerable to the TGNA	President, no separate Prime Minister at all
How the President is chosen	Elected by the TGNA (until the 2007 referendum moved this to direct popular vote)	Direct popular vote, concurrent with parliamentary elections
Presidential term	7 years, no re-election (later 4 years, per the 2007 referendum)	5 years, maximum two consecutive terms
TGNA seats	550	600
Legislative decree power	Held by the Council of Ministers, collectively	The President alone, within named limits

What Comes Next

Chapter 6 turns to a third genuinely different real pattern — Egypt's own recurring, structural role for the military in national politics, running from the 1952 Free Officers coup through Nasser, Sadat, Mubarak, and Sisi.

Hands-On Exercises

EXERCISE 1

This chapter covers three separate real crises before the 2017 referendum itself: the 2007 presidential-election crisis, and the 2016 coup attempt. Explain what each one actually changed on its own, and why neither one, by itself, produced the full shift to a presidential system.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

Using Political Theory Fundamentals' own fused-vs-separated executive distinction (Chapter 9), explain specifically what changed about the relationship between Turkey's executive and its legislature once the office of Prime Minister was abolished in 2017 — not just that the office disappeared, but what kind of accountability disappeared along with it.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

Explain why the YSK's 2018-as-term-one ruling settled the specific question of Erdoğan's 2023 candidacy without settling the broader, still-open question of what happens after his second term under the new system — what exactly is the difference between the question that ruling answered and the question it left open?

→ [Solution](#)

Chapter 5 Quick Reference

- **1982 Constitution:** a parliamentary system — a President elected by the TGNA (7-year term, no re-election) alongside a Prime Minister and Council of Ministers answerable to the 550-seat TGNA
- **2007:** Abdullah Gül's blocked candidacy, the Constitutional Court's two-thirds-quorum ruling, and a real military warning were resolved by a referendum moving presidential elections to a direct popular vote (4-year term, 70% approval) — how the President is chosen changed; what the office could do did not, yet
- **2016:** a failed 15-16 July coup attempt (251+ killed) led to a state of emergency and a large-scale purge — the real backdrop against which the 2017 referendum was held
- **16 April 2017:** a narrow 51.4%-48.6% referendum abolished the Prime Minister's office entirely, gave the President direct decree power and expanded judicial-appointment control, enlarged the TGNA to 600 seats, and set 5-year concurrent presidential/parliamentary terms
- **24 June 2018:** a snap election, held 16 months early, brought the new system into force; Erdoğan became the first President under the fully executive presidency

- **2023:** the YSK ruled 2018 was "term one" of the new system, making Erdoğan's 2023 win a legitimate second term — with what happens after that term left as a genuinely open, actively disputed question this course does not take a position on

CHAPTER 6: EGYPT: MILITARY-BACKED AUTHORITARIANISM**Middle East Politics Fundamentals**

Chapter 6 · Egypt: Military-Backed Authoritarianism

Iran built two competing sources of legitimacy into a single constitution. Turkey moved, at one dated moment, from one clear structural type to another. Egypt's real pattern is different again — the same single institution, the military, has been the actual decisive power broker across seven real decades, regardless of which constitution was technically in force or who held the title of President at the time. This chapter follows that one institution's own recurring role directly, from a 1952 coup through to the present day.

1952: The Free Officers Coup Ends the Monarchy

On **23 July 1952**, a group of army officers calling themselves the Free Officers Movement seized power from King Farouk, ending a monarchy widely seen as both corrupt and too closely tied to British influence. The coup was largely bloodless; Farouk was forced into exile, and the monarchy was formally abolished the following year, with Egypt declared a republic in **1953**.

Muhammad Naguib: the real public face

A senior, respected general, Naguib became Egypt's first President in 1953 — the coup's own figurehead leader in its earliest, most public phase.

Gamal Abdel Nasser: the real power behind him

A younger officer who had organized much of the Free Officers Movement from behind the scenes, Nasser removed Naguib from power in **1954** and became Egypt's real, dominant leader — the first, but far from the last, time in this chapter that formal office and real power belonged to two different people.

Nasser (1956-1970): One-Party Rule and Pan-Arab Ambition

Nasser governed through a single legal party, the Arab Socialist Union, and pursued a real, ambitious pan-Arab foreign policy — nationalizing the Suez Canal in 1956, triggering the real Suez Crisis, and positioning Egypt as the leading voice of Arab nationalism. That ambition suffered a severe real setback in the 1967 Six-Day War, in which Egypt lost the Sinai Peninsula to Israel. Nasser died in office in **1970**, having never faced a genuinely competitive election at any point in his eighteen years in power.

Sadat (1970-1981): Reorientation, and a Real Assassination

Anwar Sadat, Nasser's successor, redirected Egypt's foreign policy away from the Soviet Union and toward the United States, and launched the 1973 October War against Israel — a real military setback that nonetheless restored enough Egyptian standing to make the peace process that followed politically possible. Sadat negotiated the real 1978 Camp David Accords with Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, the two sharing the Nobel Peace Prize that same year, and signed a formal peace treaty on **26 March 1979** — making Egypt the first Arab state to recognize Israel, at the real cost of its own expulsion from the Arab League.

A real, direct consequence of that same peace treaty

On **6 October 1981**, Sadat was assassinated by members of Egyptian Islamic Jihad during Cairo's annual October War victory parade — the assassins' own stated grievance was specifically the peace treaty with Israel, which they viewed as an unforgivable betrayal.

Mubarak (1981-2011): Three Decades Under Near-Continuous Emergency Law

Hosni Mubarak, Sadat's Vice President, assumed the presidency immediately and governed Egypt for the next **thirty years** — almost the entire period under an Emergency Law that had already been in force, with only brief interruption, since 1967 and continuously since Mubarak himself took office. The law gave security forces sweeping powers to detain people indefinitely without charge and to suppress public gatherings.

Finding: a real, brief liberalization, followed by a real, fast reversal

On **7 September 2005**, Egypt held its first multi-candidate presidential election — Mubarak won overwhelmingly, with real, official turnout of only about 23%. That same election cycle, the Muslim Brotherhood — running as independents, since it remained a formally banned organization — won 88 of 444 contested parliamentary seats, nearly five times its previous total. The government's own real response was a crackdown: the runner-up presidential candidate, Ayman Nour, was imprisoned, and Muslim Brotherhood members faced ongoing arrests. The pattern — a genuine electoral opening, followed by a real, fast reversal once it produces an inconvenient result — is one this course has already seen twice, in Qatar's 2021-24 Shura Council reversal and Bahrain's own 2001-02 broken promise (Chapter 3).

2011: Revolution, and the Military Steps In Directly

Mass protests beginning 25 January 2011 forced Mubarak's resignation after eighteen days, on **11 February 2011**, ending his real thirty-year rule. Power passed directly to the **Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF)** — the military openly and formally running the country itself for a real, documented seventeen-month interim period, rather than through any civilian intermediary.

A real, measured fact about that interim period

More civilians were tried before military courts during SCAF's own seventeen months of direct rule than during the entirety of Mubarak's thirty-year presidency — a striking, real indicator of how directly and openly the military exercised power once it held the office outright, rather than governing from behind a civilian face.

Morsi (2012-2013): A Genuinely Free Election, and a Real, Fast Reversal

In June 2012, Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party won Egypt's presidency in what is widely recognized as the country's first genuinely free, competitive presidential election. His presidency saw real, if limited, steps toward broader political freedom — but also real, growing domestic opposition to his own government's own

conduct. On **3 July 2013**, following mass protests, the military — led by General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi — removed Morsi from office in a coup.

A real, documented, severe human cost

On **14 August 2013**, security forces violently dispersed pro-Morsi sit-ins at Rabaa al-Adawiya and elsewhere in Cairo. Human Rights Watch documented a minimum of **904 deaths**, describing the dispersal as amounting to crimes against humanity — one of the single deadliest incidents of state violence against protesters anywhere in the region's own recent, real, documented history.

Sisi (2014-Present): Consolidation, and a Real Constitutional Extension

Sisi won the presidency outright in 2014 and was re-elected in March 2018 with more than 97% of the vote, running virtually unopposed. In **2019**, Egypt's parliament passed, and a public referendum held on **20-22 April 2019** approved — with 88.83% in favor on a 44.33% turnout — a set of constitutional amendments extending Sisi's own then-current term from four to six years and allowing him to stand for a further six-year term in 2024, a real, specific legal path potentially keeping him in office until **2030**.

The Military's Real Economic Footprint — An Honestly Disputed Number

Finding: even the size of the military's own real economic role is genuinely contested

Sisi himself has stated that the military accounts for only around **1.5-2% of Egypt's GDP**. Independent research, including a widely cited Carnegie Endowment study, argues the real figure is significantly understated by that measure — since it captures direct military-owned output but not the military's real broader economic reach through joint ventures, control over roughly 90-95% of Egypt's own state land, and its documented role as a competitor to private developers in the real estate sector it also regulates. Both figures

are real, cited claims from named, real sources; this course does not adjudicate between them, but the sheer size of the gap is itself the finding worth taking seriously.

Political Theory Fundamentals' own Chapter 7 covers the real distinction between straightforward authoritarianism and "competitive authoritarianism" — a system that holds real, contested elections, but ones the ruling apparatus has already shaped the outcome of well before voting day. Egypt's own post-2013 elections, and Mubarak's 2005 vote before them, both fit that real pattern directly: genuine candidates and genuine ballots, inside a competition whose real boundaries the military-linked state had already set.

Seven Real Leaders, One Recurring Institution

Leader	How real power was gained	How it ended
Naguib (1953-54)	Figurehead of the 1952 coup	Removed by Nasser, 1954
Nasser (1954-70)	Real organizer of the 1952 coup	Died in office, 1970
Sadat (1970-81)	Nasser's own Vice President, succeeded on his death	Assassinated, 1981
Mubarak (1981-2011)	Sadat's own Vice President, succeeded immediately	Resigned under mass protest, 2011
SCAF (2011-12)	Direct military assumption of power after Mubarak's fall	Handed power to an elected civilian president
Morsi (2012-13)	Egypt's first genuinely free presidential election	Removed by military coup, 2013
Sisi (2014-present)	Led the 2013 coup; won the 2014 election that followed	Still in office, term legally extendable to 2030

What Comes Next

Chapter 7 turns to a genuinely different real structure — Israel's parliamentary democracy, built entirely on the Knesset, proportional representation, and a set of Basic Laws standing in for any single written constitution.

Hands-On Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Using the seven-row table above, identify the two moments where power passed from one leader to the next through an election rather than death, succession, or a coup. What does it say about this chapter's own real theme that only two of the seven transitions happened this way?

[→ Solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

Compare Mubarak's real 2005 election-then-crackdown sequence directly against Qatar's 2021-24 Shura Council reversal and Bahrain's 2001-02 broken promise (both Chapter 3). What is genuinely the same about all three real cases, and what is genuinely different about the specific mechanism each government used to walk the opening back?

[→ Solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

Explain why the real, wide gap between Sisi's own 1.5-2% GDP figure and the independent research cited in this chapter is itself a meaningful finding, even without this course taking a side on which number is more accurate.

[→ Solution](#)

Chapter 6 Quick Reference

- **1952:** the Free Officers coup (23 July) ended the monarchy; Naguib was the public figurehead, Nasser the real power, who removed Naguib outright by 1954
- **Nasser (1956-70):** one-party rule via the Arab Socialist Union; the 1956 Suez Crisis and the 1967 defeat; died in office with no competitive election ever held
- **Sadat (1970-81):** the 1979 Egypt-Israel peace treaty following Camp David; assassinated 6 October 1981 by Islamic Jihad, specifically over that same treaty
- **Mubarak (1981-2011):** near-continuous Emergency Law; the real 2005 first multi-candidate election (23% turnout) immediately followed by a crackdown on the runner-up and the Muslim Brotherhood
- **2011:** Mubarak resigned after 18 days of protest; the military (SCAF) ruled directly for 17 months, trying more civilians in military courts than the previous 30 years combined
- **Morsi (2012-13):** Egypt's first genuinely free presidential election; removed by a Sisi-led coup on 3 July 2013; the 14 August 2013 Rabaa dispersal killed at least 904 people per Human Rights Watch
- **Sisi (2014-present):** won 2014 and 2018 (97%+, unopposed); a 2019 referendum (88.83% approval) extended his term and legally opened the door to remaining in office until 2030
- **Finding:** Sisi's own claimed 1.5-2% military-GDP share is directly disputed by independent research citing the military's real control over 90-95% of Egypt's state land and its broader economic reach

CHAPTER 7: ISRAEL: PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY WITHOUT A SINGLE WRITTEN CONSTITUTION

Middle East Politics Fundamentals

Chapter 7 · Israel: Parliamentary Democracy Without a Single Written Constitution

Every system covered so far has had a single, dated founding document to point to — Iran's 1979 constitution, Turkey's 1982 one, even Egypt's own repeatedly rewritten republican constitutions. Israel presents a genuinely different real puzzle: a functioning parliamentary democracy, now well into its eighth decade, that has never actually finished writing one. What it has instead — and what this chapter follows in detail — is a real, deliberate, ongoing substitute.

1948-1950: Independence, and a Real Decision Not to Decide

Israel's own 1948 Declaration of Independence called for a constitution to be adopted by **1 October 1948**. That deadline passed without one, and it kept passing — real, deep disagreement between secular and religious political factions over what a written constitution should even say made agreement on a single text genuinely impossible in the state's own earliest years.

Finding: a real, self-aware compromise, not an accidental gap

In June 1950, MK Yizhar Harari proposed what became known as the **Harari Decision** — often described, even by Israelis themselves, as "the decision not to decide." Its actual text charged the Knesset's Constitution, Law, and Justice Committee with preparing a constitution built not as one document, but "of chapters, each comprising a single Basic Law unto itself" — to be assembled gradually, law by law, until the project was one day complete. Seventy-five years later, that project remains real, ongoing, and genuinely unfinished.

The Basic Laws: Quasi-Constitutional Chapters, Enacted One at a Time

Since 1950, the Knesset has passed roughly a dozen and a half **Basic Laws**, each covering one institution or principle rather than the whole system at once — Basic Law: The Knesset, Basic Law: The Government, Basic Law: The Judiciary, the two 1992 human-rights laws covered below, and the real, more recent and genuinely contested Basic Law: Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People (2018).

Not legally identical to an ordinary law

A Basic Law is passed through the same Knesset as any other statute, but is understood — and, since 1995, treated by the courts — as holding a higher, quasi-constitutional status that ordinary legislation cannot simply override.

Still genuinely a work in progress

No single moment has ever formally declared the Basic Laws collectively "complete" as a finished constitution — new ones can still be added, and existing ones amended, through the Knesset's own ordinary legislative process.

The Knesset: 120 Seats, One Single National Constituency

The **Knesset** has 120 members, elected through closed-list proportional representation using the D'Hondt method — with one real, distinctive design feature this course hasn't seen before: the **entire country counts as a single electoral district**. There are no separate constituencies of the kind Jordan (Chapter 2) or Iran's own Majlis (Chapter 4) use — every vote nationwide is counted against the same single 120-seat pool.

Period	Real electoral threshold
1949-1992	1%
1992-2003	1.5%
2003-2014	2%
2015-present	3.25%

Political Theory Fundamentals' own Chapter 8 covers how a national-list proportional system, especially at a genuinely low threshold, tends to produce a real, highly fragmented multi-party legislature — precisely because a small party can win seats with only a modest nationwide vote

share, rather than needing to win a plurality anywhere in particular. Israel's own repeated raising of the threshold, three times since 1992, is a direct, real, documented attempt to counteract exactly that fragmenting tendency — with only partial success, as the next section shows.

Coalition Government: A Structural Consequence of the Design

No single party has ever won an outright 61-seat majority in the Knesset's own history. Every Israeli government has therefore been a **coalition** — and the real bargaining leverage this gives even small parties, whose support a governing majority genuinely needs, is a direct, structural consequence of the electoral system covered above, not a separate accident of Israeli political culture.

Finding: a real, recent, and genuinely severe instability episode

Between **April 2019 and November 2022**, Israel held five separate Knesset elections — in April 2019, September 2019, March 2020, March 2021, and November 2022 — because no resulting coalition proved durable. The government formed in June 2021 was genuinely notable in its own right: a broad, ideologically varied coalition that included, for the first time in Israeli history, an Arab Israeli political party as a governing partner — and it still collapsed after only about a year in office, triggering the fifth election in the sequence.

1992 and 1995: A Real "Constitutional Revolution"

On **17 March 1992**, the Knesset passed **Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty**, alongside a companion Basic Law: Freedom of Occupation — the country's first real Basic Laws squarely addressing individual rights. Their real significance became fully clear three years later.

In its November 1995 ruling in **United Mizrahi Bank v. Migdal Cooperative Village**, the Supreme Court — under President Meir Shamgar and, notably, Vice President Aharon Barak — held that Basic Laws sit above ordinary legislation, and that the Court itself therefore holds the real power to strike down an ordinary law that conflicts with one. Barak himself described the ruling as a genuine "**constitutional revolution**" — the moment Israel's own patchwork of

Basic Laws first functioned, in the courts' own practice, as a real, enforceable constitutional ceiling on everyday legislation.

2023-2024: A Real, Historic Test of That Same Revolution

A real, dated, and genuinely first-of-its-kind ruling — presented here as institutional history, not a verdict on the underlying reform debate

In July 2023, the Knesset passed an amendment to Basic Law: The Judiciary abolishing the courts' own "reasonableness" standard for reviewing government decisions — part of a broader, real, and deeply contested judicial-reform program that triggered months of mass public protest. On **1 January 2024**, all fifteen Supreme Court justices sat together for the first time in the Court's own history, and ruled 8-7 to strike the amendment down. This was itself a genuine first: never before had Israel's Supreme Court struck down any part of a Basic Law — the constitutional equivalent, roughly, of a court striking down a constitutional amendment rather than an ordinary statute. This chapter records that ruling as a real, dated institutional event; it takes no position on the underlying, still genuinely contested question of how far judicial review over the Knesset's own Basic Laws should extend.

Four Systems, Four Different Constitutional Foundations

	Founding document	Real status today
Iran	A single 1979 constitution	Amended once, in 1989; otherwise stable
Turkey	A single 1982 constitution	Substantially amended in 2007 and 2017
Egypt	Several full constitutions since 1953	Most recently rewritten in 2014, amended 2019
Israel	No single constitution at all	A real, ongoing, unfinished sequence of individually enacted Basic Laws since 1950

What Comes Next

Chapter 8 turns to Iraq and Syria — two real, separately-evolved Ba'ath Party one-party states, and how each country's own real fate diverged sharply after 2003.

Hands-On Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Explain, in your own words, what the Harari Decision actually resolved in 1950 — and what it deliberately left unresolved. Why is "a decision not to decide" a fair description of what it did?

[→ Solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

Using the electoral-threshold table and the real 2019-2022 election sequence, explain why raising the threshold three times since 1992 did not prevent the coalition instability of those years — what does the threshold actually control, and what does it leave untouched?

[→ Solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

Explain why the 1995 United Mizrahi Bank ruling and the 1 January 2024 reasonableness-law ruling are directly connected events, twenty-nine years apart, rather than two unrelated Supreme Court decisions — what real legal foundation does the second ruling depend on that the first one established?

[→ Solution](#)

Chapter 7 Quick Reference

- **1948-1950:** Israel's own 1 October 1948 constitution deadline passed unmet; the June 1950 Harari Decision resolved the impasse by building a constitution gradually, one Basic Law at a time, rather than adopting one document at once
- **Basic Laws:** roughly a dozen and a half enacted since 1950, each covering one institution or principle, understood as quasi-constitutional but never formally declared "complete"
- **The Knesset:** 120 seats, closed-list proportional representation, D'Hondt method, the entire country as one single national constituency — a real threshold raised three times: 1% (1949-92), 1.5% (1992-2003), 2% (2003-14), 3.25% (2015-present)
- **Coalition government:** no party has ever won an outright majority; five real elections were held between April 2019 and November 2022 alone, including a June 2021 coalition notable for including an Arab Israeli party for the first time, which still collapsed within a year
- **1992/1995:** Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty, and the Supreme Court's own November 1995 United Mizrahi Bank ruling establishing real judicial review of ordinary legislation against Basic Laws — Aharon Barak's own named "constitutional revolution"
- **1 January 2024:** for the first time in its history, the Supreme Court struck down part of a Basic Law itself, voiding the 2023 "reasonableness law" amendment 8-7, with all fifteen justices sitting together for the first time ever

CHAPTER 8: IRAQ & SYRIA: BA'ATHIST ONE-PARTY STATES, TWO DIVERGENT PATHS

Middle East Politics Fundamentals

Chapter 8 · Iraq & Syria: Ba'athist One-Party States, Two Divergent Paths

This chapter is genuinely different from every other one in this course, because it starts with a single shared origin. Iraq and Syria did not develop two separately invented one-party systems that happened to resemble each other — they began as branches of the exact same political party, founded in the same city, before a real, dated split sent each branch down its own real, separately governed path. Watching where those paths eventually led, decades apart, is the whole point of this chapter.

1947: One Party, One Founding, One Later Split

The **Ba'ath Party** was founded at its first congress in Damascus on **7 April 1947**, by Michel Aflaq, Salah al-Din al-Bitar, and followers of Zaki al-Arsuzi — a real, pan-Arab nationalist and socialist movement, with real branches eventually established across several Arab countries, though it only actually took power in two: Iraq and Syria.

1966: the moment the single party stopped being single

In 1966, a more radical military faction inside the party staged an internal purge, forcing out Aflaq and Bitar — the party's own original founders — from its leadership entirely. This split the Ba'ath Party permanently into two genuinely separate national organizations, the Iraqi Ba'ath and the Syrian Ba'ath, which from that point on operated completely independently of one another, despite sharing the same name and the same original 1947 founding.

Syria Gets There First: 1963 and 1970

Syria's own Ba'ath branch took power first, in a March 1963 coup. The figure who would come to define the party's own rule there, however, was not among the original 1963 plotters — **Hafez al-Assad**, an Alawite officer serving as defense minister, orchestrated his own bloodless coup on **13 November 1970**, the real, formally named "Corrective Movement," ousting the

existing Ba'ath leadership from within the party itself. Assad became President in 1971 and would remain in office for the next **29 years**.

Iraq's Ba'ath Rise: 1968, and a Real, Filmed Purge

Iraq's own Ba'ath Party took power five years later, in the **17 July 1968 Revolution**, installing Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr as President with his younger cousin, Saddam Hussein, as deputy. Saddam spent the following decade consolidating real, personal control over the party's own internal security apparatus before forcing al-Bakr out and becoming President himself in July 1979.

Finding: a real, deliberately filmed act of consolidation

On **22 July 1979** — six days after becoming President — Saddam convened some 400 senior party members at a hall in Baghdad, had 68 of them pulled from the room one at a time, tried and sentenced within minutes, and 22 executed that same day; several hundred more were condemned to die by the following week. The event was filmed and distributed within the party as an unambiguous demonstration of loyalty and consequence — a real, documented method for a new leader to consolidate absolute personal control over a one-party state's own ruling apparatus.

Two Family Successions, and a Real, Shared Mechanism

When Hafez al-Assad died on **10 June 2000**, Syria's own People's Assembly approved a real constitutional amendment that same evening, lowering the minimum presidential age from 40 to **34** — the exact age of his son, Bashar al-Assad, at the time. Bashar was confirmed as President shortly afterward, beginning what would become a real, 24-year continuation of Assad family rule.

A real, striking structural echo of Iran's own 1989 succession

Chapter 4 covered Iran's own 1989 constitutional amendments, which removed the requirement that a Supreme Leader hold Iran's highest clerical rank — specifically to clear the way for Ali Khamenei, the real available candidate, once Khomeini died with no properly qualified successor named. Syria's own 2000 age amendment is a genuinely

parallel case: a formal eligibility rule, rewritten within hours of a leader's death, specifically to fit the one particular person available to succeed him. Two entirely different countries, governed by entirely different ideologies, independently reached for the identical real solution to the identical real problem.

2003: Iraq's Ba'ath State Ends by External Force

Following the March 2003 US-led invasion, Saddam Hussein was captured in December 2003 and later executed in December 2006. The occupying **Coalition Provisional Authority**, led by Paul Bremer, issued **CPA Order Number 1** on **16 May 2003** — Bremer's own first official act, written within three days of his arrival — formally banning the Ba'ath Party and barring its most senior members from public-sector employment, a policy known as **de-Ba'athification**. CPA Order Number 2, issued just a week later on 23 May 2003, went further still, disbanding the entire Iraqi army outright.

A real, widely cited, and genuinely contested consequence

Removing hundreds of thousands of former Ba'ath officials and disbanding the army in the same month is widely and directly credited, by many real historians and policymakers, with fueling the insurgency that followed — a large, suddenly unemployed, and disproportionately Sunni body of trained officials and soldiers, many with no personal loyalty to Saddam's own rule beyond needing a job under the only government that had existed, was removed from the state all at once. This course records the policy and its widely cited consequence as real historical fact, without adjudicating every counterfactual about whether a different approach would have produced a better outcome.

Iraq's own post-2003 political system was rebuilt around a real 2005 constitution establishing a federal parliamentary republic — one built, in real practice though not in the constitution's own written text, around an informal power-sharing convention: the Prime Minister a Shia Arab, the Speaker of Parliament a Sunni Arab, and the President a Kurd. Chapter 9's own coverage of Lebanon takes this same real idea — an unwritten convention distributing top offices among religious or ethnic communities — considerably further.

Syria's Ba'ath State Persists — For Another Two Real Decades

Bashar al-Assad's own government continued largely unbroken until real, large-scale protests began in 2011 as part of the wider regional Arab Spring, escalating into a full civil war that lasted more than a decade, with a real, documented and internationally condemned use of chemical weapons and a human cost measured in the hundreds of thousands of lives and millions of refugees.

Finding: a real, dated, and genuinely decisive ending

On **8 December 2024**, a rebel offensive led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham captured Damascus, ending the Assad family's real 54-year hold on the Syrian presidency (1971-2024) and the Ba'ath Party's own 61-year rule in Syria specifically (1963-2024). Bashar al-Assad fled to Russia, which granted him asylum. Unlike Iraq's own abrupt, externally imposed 2003 ending, Syria's Ba'ath state took thirteen real years of internal civil war to finally collapse.

One Origin, Two Real Endings

	Iraq	Syria
Ba'ath Party took power	17 July 1968	8 March 1963
Family/personal consolidation	Saddam Hussein, via a real, filmed 1979 internal purge	Hafez al-Assad (1970), succeeded by son Bashar (2000) via a same-day age amendment
How the state actually ended	External military invasion (2003), followed by formal de-Ba'athification orders	13 years of internal civil war (2011-2024), ending in a rebel military offensive
Real years of Ba'ath rule	1968-2003 (35 years)	1963-2024 (61 years)

What Comes Next

Chapter 9 turns to Lebanon — a real, formal power-sharing system under the Taif Agreement, distributing the country's own top offices among specific religious communities by explicit written convention, and the broader real regional pattern of powerful non-state actors operating alongside a country's own formal state institutions.

Hands-On Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Explain what the 1966 party split actually did and did not change. After 1966, did Iraq and Syria still share anything real and meaningful, or had they become two completely unrelated one-party systems that simply happened to share a name?

[→ Solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

Compare Bashar al-Assad's real 2000 age-amendment succession directly against Iran's own 1989 marja-requirement removal (Chapter 4). What real problem did each system face, and why did both independently reach for the identical kind of fix — rewriting an eligibility rule rather than simply ignoring it or picking a different successor?

[→ Solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

Iraq's Ba'ath state ended abruptly in 2003; Syria's own Ba'ath state took another 21 years, and a 13-year civil war, to end. Using what this chapter covers about how each state actually ended, explain what real, structural difference between the two endings this difference in timeline actually reflects.

[→ Solution](#)

Chapter 8 Quick Reference

- **1947:** the Ba'ath Party founded in Damascus (7 April) by Michel Aflaq, Salah al-Din al-Bitar, and Zaki al-Arsuzi's followers; a 1966 internal purge of the founders split it permanently into separate Iraqi and Syrian branches
- **Syria:** the Ba'ath took power on 8 March 1963; Hafez al-Assad's real 13 November 1970 "Corrective Movement" made him President from 1971
- **Iraq:** the Ba'ath took power on 17 July 1968 (al-Bakr, then Saddam Hussein from 1979); Saddam's own real, filmed 22 July 1979 purge (68 pulled out, 22 executed that day) consolidated his personal rule
- **2000:** Bashar al-Assad succeeded his father the same evening Hafez died, via a real constitutional age amendment (40 to 34) — a direct structural echo of Iran's own 1989 marja-removal (Chapter 4)
- **2003:** the US-led invasion, Saddam's capture, and the real CPA Order Number 1 (16 May) banning the Ba'ath Party and Order Number 2 (23 May) disbanding the army — a policy widely, if not universally, credited with fueling the insurgency that followed
- **Post-2003 Iraq:** a 2005 federal constitution built around a real, unwritten sectarian power-sharing convention (a Shia PM, Sunni Speaker, Kurdish President)
- **8 December 2024:** a Hayat Tahrir al-Sham-led offensive captured Damascus, ending 54 years of Assad family rule and 61 years of Ba'ath rule in Syria, after 13 years of civil war beginning in 2011

CHAPTER 9: LEBANON & NON-STATE POWER: A GENUINELY DIFFERENT STRUCTURAL MODEL

Middle East Politics Fundamentals

Chapter 9 · Lebanon & Non-State Power: A Genuinely Different Structural Model

Every prior chapter examined how power is distributed within one recognized state's own formal institutions — between an elected chamber and an unelected council, between a president and a parliament, between a ruling party and a military. Lebanon adds two genuinely new elements this course hasn't yet covered directly: a system that distributes top state offices among named religious communities by explicit convention, and a real, armed political movement operating alongside the state's own institutions rather than fully inside them. Both deserve to be taken seriously as real, documented structural features, not dismissed as instability.

1943: An Unwritten Pact, Built on a Single Disputed Census

Lebanon's confessional system traces to the summer of 1943, when Bechara El Khoury, a Maronite Christian soon to become the country's first President, and Riad al-Sulh, a Sunni Muslim soon to become its first Prime Minister, reached what became known as the **National Pact** — a real, deliberately *unwritten* agreement, never codified in the constitution itself. It established a convention that would govern Lebanese politics for decades: the President always a Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister always a Sunni Muslim, and the Speaker of Parliament always a Shia Muslim.

A real, permanent foundation built on one, never-repeated count

The original 6:5 Christian-to-Muslim ratio of parliamentary seats was based on a real **1932 census** — the only official census Lebanon has ever conducted. No census has been held since, largely because any updated count would itself become a real political flashpoint over how power should be redistributed. Lebanon's entire confessional structure still rests, in a real and literal sense, on a population snapshot now nearly a century old.

1975-1990: Civil War, and a Real, Formal Rebalancing at Taif

Lebanon's confessional tensions helped drive a real, fifteen-year civil war beginning in 1975. The war ended with the **Taif Agreement**, reached in Taif, Saudi Arabia on **22 October 1989** and ratified on 4 November of that year. Taif made two real, structural changes at once.

A real rebalancing of seats

Parliament grew to 128 seats, split evenly 50-50 between Christians and Muslims — replacing the old 6:5 ratio the 1932 census had set, without abandoning the underlying confessional logic itself.

A real shift in executive power

Before Taif, the Sunni Prime Minister was appointed by, and answerable to, the Maronite President. After Taif, the Prime Minister and cabinet answered to the elected legislature instead — a genuine, documented transfer of real executive authority away from the presidency.

Finding: Taif did something genuinely new for this course — it wrote an unwritten convention down

Every prior chapter's own constitutional changes have involved amending or replacing an existing written document. Taif did something structurally different: it took a convention that had operated purely by informal political custom since 1943 — never appearing in Lebanon's own constitution at all — and formally, permanently embedded it into a ratified constitutional document for the first time. Chapter 8's own coverage of post-2003 Iraq described a genuinely similar unwritten sectarian convention (a Shia Prime Minister, Sunni Speaker, Kurdish President); Lebanon's own history shows what can happen to a convention like that decades later, once real political pressure eventually forces it into formal, written law.

Hezbollah: A Real, Documented Dual Identity

Hezbollah was founded in 1982, in the direct aftermath of that year's Israeli invasion of Lebanon and inspired by Iran's own 1979 revolution — a group of Lebanese Shia clerics organizing with real, substantial training and funding from Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, which reportedly deployed some 1,500 advisers to Lebanon's Bekaa Valley to help build the movement.

A real, elected political party

Since first contesting elections in 1992, Hezbollah has held real seats in the Lebanese parliament and real ministerial posts in Lebanese cabinets — a fully participating, formally recognized part of the state's own political system.

A real, independently armed militia

At the same time, Hezbollah retains its own separate, independently commanded armed wing, outside the formal chain of command of the Lebanese national army — a real, documented dual status genuinely unlike any political party covered elsewhere in this course.

A real, recent, and severe blow — presented as institutional history

On **27 September 2024**, an Israeli airstrike on Beirut killed Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah's Secretary-General for more than three decades, alongside several other senior commanders — a real, documented, and historically significant loss for the organization, arriving amid a broader real escalation of conflict between Hezbollah and Israel that year. Hezbollah's own leadership structure and dual political-military role survived the loss, but genuinely weakened, a fact directly relevant to the next section.

A Real, Measured Cost of Non-State Power Sitting Alongside the State

Michel Aoun's own presidential term ended in **October 2022**. What followed was a real, documented institutional paralysis: the Lebanese parliament failed **twelve separate times** to elect a successor, leaving the presidency vacant for more than two years — a direct, structural consequence of a political system requiring cross-confessional consensus that competing factions, including Hezbollah and its own political allies, could not reach.

Finding: a real, dated resolution, and what actually changed to produce it

Parliament finally elected General **Joseph Aoun** as President on **9 January 2025**, following sustained real international pressure from the United States, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Qatar, and France — pressure that only succeeded once Hezbollah's own political leverage had been genuinely reduced by the 2024 conflict and Nasrallah's death. Aoun's own first public commitments included a real, explicit pledge to "monopolize weapons"

under the authority of the state — a direct, unmistakable reference to Hezbollah's own separately held arsenal. The sequence is a real, concrete illustration of this chapter's own central point: an armed political actor's own strength or weakness can directly determine whether the formal state's most basic institutional functions — electing a head of state, among them — can operate at all.

Hezbollah is this course's clearest real example of the wider regional pattern named at the very start of this course (Chapter 1) — a powerful, armed non-state actor operating alongside a country's own formal institutions, sometimes cooperating with the state and sometimes constraining it, without ever being fully absorbed into it. Similar real patterns exist elsewhere in the region, though none is examined in this course's own limited ten-chapter scope in the depth Lebanon's own case receives here.

What Comes Next

Chapter 10 closes this course with a capstone applying every real analytical tool from Chapters 1-9 to a single structured comparison across all eight political systems this course has covered.

Hands-On Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Explain the real structural relationship between the 1943 National Pact and the 1932 census — why does the fact that no census has been held since 1932 matter directly to how Lebanon's confessional system still functions today?

[→ Solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

This chapter names Taif's own writing-down of the National Pact as structurally different from every prior chapter's own constitutional changes. Explain specifically what kind of change every earlier chapter's own examples were (amending or

replacing an existing document) versus what Taif actually did — and why that distinction matters.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

Using the real 2022-2025 presidential vacancy and its real resolution, explain the specific causal chain this chapter identifies between Hezbollah's own military weakening in 2024 and Lebanon's parliament finally being able to elect a president in January 2025.

→ [Solution](#)

Chapter 9 Quick Reference

- **1943 National Pact:** an unwritten agreement — a Maronite President, a Sunni Prime Minister, a Shia Speaker of Parliament — built on a real, never-repeated 1932 census that set a 6:5 Christian-Muslim seat ratio
- **1975-1990:** a fifteen-year civil war, ended by the Taif Agreement (22 October 1989), which rebalanced parliament to a real 50-50 Christian-Muslim split and shifted real executive power from the President to a legislature-answerable Council of Ministers
- **Finding:** Taif formally wrote a previously unwritten convention into law for the first time — a genuinely different kind of constitutional change from every prior chapter's own amendments to an already-written document
- **Hezbollah:** founded 1982 with real Iranian IRGC training and funding; a real, elected political party since 1992 that also retains its own independently commanded armed wing outside the national army
- **27 September 2024:** Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah's Secretary-General for over three decades, killed in a real Israeli airstrike on Beirut, genuinely weakening the organization
- **2022-2025:** a real presidential vacancy lasting more than two years, with parliament failing twelve times to elect a successor, resolved only once international pressure

and Hezbollah's own reduced leverage allowed Joseph Aoun's real 9 January 2025 election

CHAPTER 10: CAPSTONE — COMPARING POLITICAL LEGITIMACY ACROSS THE REGION'S SYSTEMS**Middle East Politics Fundamentals**

Chapter 10 · Capstone: Comparing Political Legitimacy Across the Region's Systems

This capstone doesn't introduce a ninth country. Its job is to reach back to a real tool this course named in its very first chapter and never yet actually used — Max Weber's own three-part typology of legitimate authority, from Political Theory Fundamentals' Chapter 1 — and apply it, system by system, across everything this course has covered. Some systems fit one of Weber's three categories cleanly. Several don't, and saying so honestly is as much the point of this chapter as the classifications that do work.

A Real, Quick Recap of Weber's Typology**Traditional authority**

Legitimacy resting on long-standing custom — the real, widely accepted belief that a ruler holds power because that is simply how things have always been done, most commonly through inherited succession.

Charismatic authority

Legitimacy resting on a specific leader's own perceived extraordinary personal qualities — a real claim to devotion or obedience that exists because of who that particular individual is, not because of an office or a rule.

Legal-rational authority

Legitimacy resting on a system of formally enacted rules and offices — real obedience given to whoever legally occupies a position, defined by a constitution, statute, or codified procedure, regardless of who that individual happens to be.

The Monarchies: A Real, Clean Case of Traditional Authority

Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and the five Gulf states covered in Chapters 2 and 3 are, collectively, this course's clearest real cluster of traditional authority — legitimacy resting on inherited royal succession, in several cases (Saudi Arabia most explicitly) layered with a real religious dimension as well. But even here, the fit is not perfectly clean: Jordan's own written constitution and elected House of Representatives, Kuwait's own historically assertive elected National Assembly, and the UAE's real, if narrow, elected half of the Federal National Council all introduce genuine legal-rational elements sitting alongside — not replacing — the traditional core. "Traditional" describes the real foundation these seven systems share; it does not describe the whole of any single one of them in full.

Iran: A Real, Textbook Case of Routinized Charisma

Weber's own theory includes a specific further concept directly relevant here: charismatic authority is inherently unstable, resting entirely on one individual, and so a movement built on it must find a way to survive that individual's own death — a process Weber called the **routinization of charisma**, converting a personal claim to authority into a lasting institutional one.

Finding: Iran may be the single clearest real-world example of this exact process in the modern world

Ayatollah Khomeini's own authority as leader of the 1979 revolution was genuinely charismatic in Weber's precise sense — a real, personal claim to religious and revolutionary legitimacy that existed because of who Khomeini specifically was. Rather than dying with him, that authority was deliberately routinized into a lasting office, the Supreme Leader position defined by *velayat-e faqih* (Chapter 4) — a role now filled, since 1989, through the fully institutional process of the Assembly of Experts, itself elected and its own candidates screened by the Guardian Council. Iran's system took a real, personal charismatic claim and converted it, quite deliberately, into an enduring legal-rational-religious office — precisely the transformation Weber's own theory describes.

Turkey, Egypt & Post-2003 Iraq: Legal-Rational Authority, With Real, Honest Complications

All three of these systems are formally legal-rational — power resting on a written constitution and defined offices, not on inherited right or personal charisma. But each real case carries a genuine complication worth naming rather than smoothing over.

System	Formal basis	Real, honest complication
Turkey (Ch.5)	The post-2017 executive presidency, a constitutional office	Erdoğan's own personal political dominance genuinely exceeds what the office's formal design alone would predict
Egypt (Ch.6)	A constitution, elections, a Presidency	Real decisive power has traceably sat with the military as an institution across seven decades, regardless of the formal document in force at any given time
Post-2003 Iraq (Ch.8)	The real 2005 federal constitution	A genuine, unwritten sectarian convention (Shia PM, Sunni Speaker, Kurdish President) operates alongside the written document, not fully captured by it

Ba'athist Iraq & Syria: Personalist Charisma, and a Real Return to Tradition

Saddam Hussein's own real rule strains Weber's typology in a different, more honest way: his authority was enforced far more through the party's own security apparatus and a real, filmed act of terror (the 1979 purge, Chapter 8) than through any genuine, broadly-felt personal charisma of the kind Weber's own concept originally describes — a case worth naming as personalist, coercively maintained authority rather than forcing it into "charismatic" simply because it centered on one man.

A real, striking irony worth naming directly

Syria's Ba'ath Party came to power in 1963 as an explicitly anti-monarchical, revolutionary movement. Yet Bashar al-Assad's own real 2000 succession — a constitutional age amendment passed the very evening his father died, covered in Chapter 8 — followed a genuinely **traditional**, hereditary logic in every meaningful sense: power passing from father to son specifically because of who his father was. A revolutionary republic,

founded to abolish inherited rule, ended up practicing it in all but name for over two real decades.

Israel: This Course's Closest Approach to Pure Legal-Rational Authority

Israel (Chapter 7) is the system in this course that maps most cleanly onto Weber's legal-rational category — a system of Basic Laws, a directly elected Knesset, and a Supreme Court holding real, court-tested judicial review power since 1995. Authority here rests on offices and codified rules rather than any single family's inherited claim or any single leader's personal charisma — even coalition governments that rise and fall in rapid succession, as Chapter 7's own 2019-2022 sequence showed, do so entirely within the bounds of that same legal-rational framework, not outside it.

Lebanon: A Real, Named Fourth Category Weber's Typology Doesn't Capture

Lebanon's own confessional system (Chapter 9) resists all three of Weber's categories at once. It is not traditional in Weber's own sense, since no single ruling family or dynasty holds power. It is not charismatic. And while Taif formally wrote the system into law, calling it purely "legal-rational" misses what actually does the legitimizing work — not the office itself, but which named religious community that office is permanently reserved for.

A real, honest limit of the tool this chapter has otherwise applied successfully

Political scientist Arend Lijphart's own real, separately developed concept of **consociationalism** — a formal system of power-sharing among a divided society's own distinct communities — fits Lebanon far better than any of Weber's three original categories, each developed primarily from European historical cases that never had to describe an arrangement quite like it. This is worth stating plainly rather than forcing Lebanon into a category it doesn't actually belong in: a genuinely useful analytical tool, applied honestly, sometimes tells you where its own limits are.

The Full, Real Synthesis

System	Primary real type	Honest complication
Saudi Arabia & Jordan	Traditional	Real legal-rational elements layered on top (Jordan's constitution)
The Gulf monarchies	Traditional	Genuinely varying real amounts of elected input layered in (Kuwait most, Oman least)
Iran	Routinized charismatic-religious	A real, textbook Weberian case, not a complication
Turkey	Legal-rational	A real degree of personal political dominance exceeding the office's own formal design
Egypt	Legal-rational (formally)	Real decisive power traceable to one institution, the military, across seven decades
Israel	Legal-rational	This course's closest clean fit; genuinely minimal complication
Ba'athist Iraq (Saddam)	Personalist / coercive	Strains "charismatic" in Weber's own original sense
Ba'athist Syria (Assad family)	Traditional (hereditary)	A real, striking irony inside a formally revolutionary, anti-monarchical republic
Post-2003 Iraq	Legal-rational	A real, unwritten sectarian convention operating alongside the written constitution
Lebanon	Consociational (Lijphart)	Genuinely outside Weber's own three-part typology altogether

What This Course Actually Showed

Chapter 1 opened by naming "the Middle East" itself as a political convention rather than a natural category — a real, useful label for a set of countries that share geography and, in real historical terms, deep interconnection, but that this course's own nine content chapters have

shown do not share a political system in any meaningful sense at all. Absolute monarchy, a theocratic-republican hybrid, a strengthened presidency, military-backed authoritarianism, a parliamentary democracy built on an unfinished constitution, two branches of the same collapsed one-party movement, and a confessional power-sharing model resistant to Weber's own European-derived categories — nine chapters, nine genuinely different real answers to the same basic question of where legitimate authority actually comes from. That range, honestly worked through rather than flattened into a single regional narrative, is what a genuinely comparative course on this region can actually offer.

Course Complete. Middle East Politics Fundamentals closes here, at 10 of 10 chapters.

Hands-On Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Explain, in your own words, what Weber's own concept of "routinization of charisma" actually describes, and why Iran's own real transition from Khomeini's personal leadership to the institutionalized office of Supreme Leader fits that concept more precisely than any other system covered in this course.

[→ Solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

This chapter distinguishes Saddam Hussein's own rule as "personalist / coercive" rather than genuinely "charismatic" in Weber's original sense. Explain the real difference between those two descriptions, using the 1979 party-congress purge (Chapter 8) as your evidence.

[→ Solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

Explain why Lebanon's own confessional system genuinely doesn't fit into any of Weber's three original categories, and why naming a real, separate concept (Lijphart's

consociationalism) instead is a more honest use of an analytical tool than forcing Lebanon into the closest-available Weberian label.

→ Solution

Chapter 10 Quick Reference

- **Weber's typology:** traditional (custom/inheritance), charismatic (a leader's own perceived extraordinary qualities), and legal-rational (formal rules and offices) — from Political Theory Fundamentals Chapter 1
- **Traditional:** Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and the five Gulf monarchies (Chapters 2-3), each with varying real legal-rational elements layered on top
- **Routinized charismatic-religious:** Iran (Chapter 4) — this course's clearest, most literal real-world case of Weber's own "routinization of charisma" concept
- **Legal-rational, with honest complications:** Turkey (personal dominance beyond the office), Egypt (real military-institutional power beneath a formal constitution), and post-2003 Iraq (an unwritten sectarian convention alongside a written one)
- **Legal-rational, closest clean fit:** Israel (Chapter 7)
- **Personalist/coercive, not cleanly charismatic:** Saddam-era Ba'athist Iraq (Chapter 8)
- **A real, striking return to tradition:** the Assad family's hereditary succession inside Syria's formally revolutionary, anti-monarchical Ba'athist republic (Chapter 8)
- **Outside Weber's typology entirely:** Lebanon's own real confessional system, better described by Arend Lijphart's consociationalism (Chapter 9)
- **Closing point:** nine chapters, nine genuinely different real answers to where legitimate authority comes from — confirming Chapter 1's own opening claim that "the Middle East" names a geography, not a political system