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## New Middle Eastern Studies

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### **Review of Amaney A. Jamal, *Of Empires and Citizens: Pro-American Democracy or No Democracy at All?***

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**To cite this article:** Martin, Alexander P., review of Amaney A. Jamal, *Of Empires and Citizens: Pro-American Democracy or No Democracy at All?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), *New Middle Eastern Studies* 3 (2013), < <http://www.brismes.ac.uk/nmes/archive/1130>>

**To link to this article:** <http://www.brismes.ac.uk/nmes/archive/1130>

Online Publication Date: 23 July 2013

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## NEW MIDDLE EASTERN REVIEWS

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### **Of Empires and Citizens: Pro-American Democracy or No Democracy at All?**

Amaney A. Jamal

Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2012, 276 pp., \$27.95 / £19.95, Paperback

ISBN: 978-0-691-14965-3

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Jamal's case study on Jordanian and Kuwaiti client relations with their United States patron is a useful volume that will benefit those interested in core-periphery theory, Middle Eastern democratisation and rentier-state theory. It also offers an important angle for those looking at variations in political Islam, noting that pressure to devolve power from the ruling monarchy and democratise often comes from Islamist groups. Jamal argues that Kuwait is making successful steps towards democracy because Kuwaiti Islamist groups are pro-U.S. and the Kuwaiti government is pluralist. Jordan, meanwhile, is regressing into authoritarianism because its government is unaccepting of the anti-US Islamist groups, whose rhetoric may harm Jordan's patron-client relationship.

The book's central argument is that in Arab states that are completely dependent on the U.S. for both security and economic needs, only pro-American democratic forces will be permitted to influence their governments. The U.S. benefits economically and strategically from the dependency relationships they have inherited and created in the Middle East. Therefore, rather than supporting the principle of democracy per se, the U.S. actively encourages the political status quo whether it is democratic or not.

Dependency theory, the basis of the book's argument, is not a new concept in political science. However, its deployment in a well-structured and supported argument successfully establishes that the U.S. only supports 'friendly' democratic forces like the Kuwaiti Islamic Constitutional Movement, but not the Jordanian Islamic Action Front.

Chapter One critiques the existing theories and explanations of MENA's democratic deficit issues, in particular that the MENA region is a cultural exception and inhospitable to democracy. Jamal's important contribution is to claim that twenty-first-century models still 'pay inadequate attention to the international context' (p. 7), arguing against the realist perspective that all states act independently of each other. Furthermore, she argues that the influence of external patrons is more important than the role of middle class in democratisation (p. 14). Therefore 'modes of production' in Arab states are of less importance when foreign aid is a more significant source of income. Jamal's argument highlights the short-comings of existing political culture theories concerning the lack of Arab Democratisation from scholars such as Diamond, Huntington and Putnam, and political economy formulas regarding modernisation, in addition to twenty-first-century works by Boix, Acemoglu and Robinson, and Dahl. She argues that these works are too simplistic, are not specific to the MENA region, and do not reflect its empirical realities (p. 12). As long as U.S. patronage remains key to strategy, and as long as 'the U.S. values friendly and co-operative alliance over democracy' (p. 18), democratic groups that are anti-U.S. will not flourish in the Middle East.

States are therefore caught between the external patron and their citizens. Using the fall of Mubarak in Egypt to illustrate this point, once the U.S. had given the 'green-light' to protesters, the regime's position was considerably weakened (p. 19). However, Jamal does not make overarching, one-size-fits-all assumptions regarding this 'client-patron' model, admitting that empirical realities should always be considered. (p. 21)

In support of her own reasoning, Jamal dismisses culturalist arguments by claiming that this dependent relationship with the US has little to do with Islam; 'Arab exceptionalism may not be in its Islamic culture but instead may stem from the Arab World's subordinate location in the international system' (p. 28). With the Arab region unable to resist foreign actors, the U.S. dominates with its use of sanctions and military intervention. U.S. foreign policy interests dictate American behaviour in the Middle East and while the Arab World is dependent on the U.S. for both 'security and economic needs' (p. 27), an informal American empire, created at the end of the Cold War, has made the Arab World increasingly reliant on its American patron.

Chapter Two is a concise but thorough historical analysis that portrays Jordan as an artificially created state designed to be entirely dependent on its patron, Britain. Even after independence was granted, dependence on Britain, then the U.S., continued throughout the Cold War. U.S. aid has made Jordan even more dependent on U.S. trade, and post 9/11, the U.S. has also met Jordanian security needs (p. 51). Due to its considerable oil reserves, small territorial size and aggressive neighbours, Kuwait has been historically dependent on Britain, then America, to provide security.

The findings from Chapters Three and Four can be summarised as follows. Jordanians suffering from poor economic prospects are more likely to be in favour of democracy and to support an Islamist party or movement. They equate Islam, as a form of protest, with an anti-U.S. and anti-monarchy stance. Jordanians with a vested interest in the economic gains from the U.S.-Jordan relationship are more likely to support the status quo and the monarchy. They may support democratic principles but argue that Jordan is not ready for democracy since they fear that an Islamist party would upset the U.S. and hinder economic progress. They understand that the U.S. is paramount for security in Jordan but are distrustful of long-term U.S. plans.

Kuwaitis, like Jordanians, place high importance on stability and security since they are surrounded by unstable states. Kuwaiti liberals, conservatives and Islamists are all generally pro-U.S. and pro-democracy. Anti-monarchists favour reducing royal powers in favour of more representative and accountable government rather than abolition. While liberals or feminists and Islamists often disagree, they all respect and adhere to the 'rules of democracy'. Kuwaitis who favour the status quo do so because they are content with their situation rather than because they fear Islamist parties. An Islamist government in Kuwait would not upset the relationship with the U.S. the way an Islamist government in Jordan would.

The book employs a mixed methods approach. The original research (Chapters Three and Four) in the form of one-on-one interviews is supported and balanced (in Chapter Five) with quantitative data from various sources such as the Arab Barometer. The different data sets offer alternative explanations but come to the same assessment that security and stability, while maintaining order and economic growth, are more important than democracy; despite evidence that citizens of both states believe democracy is the best form of government. (p.146) Further cases are analysed in Chapter Six, which takes a broader view of Middle East clientism, comparing Morocco to Jordan and Saudi Arabia to Kuwait, and which adds additional support to Jamal's argument.

The book has a readable style that is not over-burdened with technical jargon. Challenging traditional culturalist and structuralist explanations for the lack of democracy in

the Middle East, it uses core-periphery theory as an explanatory framework for authoritarian resilience. Within the context of the Arab Spring, Jamal's line of argument would suggest that relations between the pre-revolutionary governments of Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya and their patrons were more significant than populist uprisings in bringing about regime changes in those countries. Authoritarianism is only resilient when democratic forces are anti-U.S and Washington's relations with the dictator remain harmonious.