1 AUTHORITARIAN GOVERNANCE IN SYRIA AND IRAN

Challenged, Reconfiguring, and Resilient

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AFTER A DECADE of authoritarian renewal, nondemocratic regimes in the Middle East find themselves under stresses that only a short time ago were, if not unimaginable, then certainly unexpected. As the first decade of a new century ended, regimes that once seemed all but invulnerable found themselves on the defensive. In Tunisia, an entrenched authoritarian ruler collapsed under the weight of mass protests. By mid-January 2011, incumbent President Zine al-Abdin Ben Ali had taken refuge in Saudi Arabia and, together with his family, was the target of international arrest warrants. Also in January, mass protests led Jordan's King Abdullah to dismiss his government and initiate a process of limited constitutional reforms. In Egypt, protests on a scale unprecedented in the region forced the end of the Mubarak era in February 2011 and, as this is being written in early 2012, continue to pressure the Egyptian military to open the political system and permit a transition to real democracy. In October 2011, Muammar al-Qaddafi, Libya's ruler for over forty years, was killed following months of armed struggle against rebel forces backed by NATO air support. The following month, similar protests and the armed mobilization of regime opponents forced Yemen's President Ali Abdallah Salih out of office, bringing his forty-three-year tenure as Yemen's ruler to an end. Elsewhere in the Middle East, from Morocco to Bahrain, authoritarian regimes moved to shore up social policies that they felt would mitigate, at least temporarily, the economic and social pressures that contributed to popular uprisings.

The significance of these changes cannot be overestimated. At the start of December 2010 authoritarian regimes in the Middle East appeared more deeply

consolidated than they had in the late 1980s, when the Third Wave of democratization broke against the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean and then receded. Despite two decades of Western support for democracy and civil society promotion, by late 2010 hopes for genuine and far-reaching democratic change in the Middle East seemed to have reached a dead end. Yet, only two months later, Arab citizens, acting spontaneously and outside any formal political framework, revitalized the possibility of Arab democracy. Through their sacrifice and commitment, they achieved more in a matter of weeks than Western democracy promoters had accomplished in two decades.

The protesters who have redefined politics in the Middle East also pose significant challenges to scholars of authoritarianism. Although it is too soon to know whether Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen are on the path to genuine democracy, as opposed to the reconfiguring of authoritarian governance, their recent experiences will undoubtedly force a reassessment of arguments about authoritarian persistence and the durability of authoritarian systems of rule in the Middle East. Those who have developed arguments accounting for the success of authoritarianism in the region, including the editors of this volume, thus have a particular obligation to be clear about conditions under which their arguments might be falsified and will undoubtedly be among those who assess old arguments in the light of new facts.

What seems clear, however, even from a vantage point that is deeply enmeshed in the urgent struggles underway across the region, is that authoritarianism in the Middle East will survive this transformational moment. In Syria, one of the two cases on which this volume focuses, fear of civil war is deepening as a popular uprising begins to morph into armed resistance to a repressive regime. Syrians have joined their Tunisian, Egyptian, Yemeni, and Jordanian counterparts in taking to the streets to demand the end of a brutal authoritarian government. The Syrian regime responded with promises of reform but then, like its counterparts elsewhere, quickly resorted to large-scale repression. In Iran, the second case covered in this volume, the hard-liners of the Islamic Republic initially showed extraordinary audacity in claiming the Egyptian uprising as an omen that the region was tipping in their direction. However, supporters of Iran's failed "Green Movement" of 2009—the wave of protests and mass mobilization prompted by Iran's rigged elections that year—viewed events in Egypt very differently. They found the most important parallels to be between their own treatment at the hands of the Revolutionary Guard and the fate of Egyptian protesters or their Syrian counterparts, who

have been attacked by regime thugs and state militias. Regardless, the relative success of the Arab uprisings thus far has failed to revitalize Iran's own protest movement or to force the Iranian regime into major concessions, let alone bring about its demise.

None of the key approaches to the study of Middle Eastern regimes saw the wave of protest coming. Yet far from contradicting recent work on authoritarianism in the Middle East, the response of many Arab regimes to mass pressures for change has been largely consistent with the expectations and frameworks developed in the research literature: surviving authoritarian regimes have learned from the experiences unfolding across the region and have adapted their strategies of governance in response (Heydemann and Leenders 2011). They have made concessions—more cosmetic than real in many cases; adopted policies intended to mitigate the economic and social drivers of conflict; sought to divide and fragment nascent oppositions; applied heavy repression when deemed necessary; imposed stricter controls over social media, the internet, and new communications technologies; and otherwise demonstrated the flexibility and adaptive capacity that have served them so well over the course of their many decades in power.

Whatever our own hopes for more widespread and deeper democratic transformations in the Middle East, therefore, the facts suggest that authoritarianism will remain a prominent and formidable presence in the lives of millions of citizens. The study of authoritarian governance therefore remains essential for our understanding of the political dynamics and inner workings of regimes across the region—even while recognizing that recent events demand renewed attention on our part to shifts and pressures that might drive cases such as Syria and Iran in directions that now, in the wake of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen, cannot be ruled out. Indeed, from March 2011, Syria too became engulfed in turmoil, its government struggling to contain protests demanding the fall of the regime, demands from which, as late as January 2011, Bashar al-Asad believed his regime to be insulated by virtue of its Arab nationalist credentials. Largely due to the regime's harsh and unremitting response to what began primarily as calls for reform, confrontations between the regime and protesters have become so violent that there appears to be no possibility for a return to the status quo ante. Regardless of what the future will bring—regime change or not—the protracted struggle now holding Syria in its grip speaks volumes about the Asad regime's willingness and capacity to press for its survival at any cost and by any means.

The developments of 2011 will leave the political landscape of the region changed but recognizable. Yet they also highlight concerns that have animated this volume since its inception in late 2009. Among the most important of these is the understanding that the Middle East is home to not one but to many forms of authoritarian governance. Differences among regimes were always present but have tended to be overshadowed by the use of "authoritarianism" as a generic descriptor awkwardly capturing a rich pallet of nondemocratic rule. In the aftermath of the successful popular uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen, however, it has become more important than ever to break this generic category apart and assess not only the attributes that regimes such as the Syrian and Iranian share—and, as we argue in what follows, they share more than might be evident at first glance—but what distinguishes them, as well. As the political trajectories of Middle Eastern states seem increasingly likely to diverge in years ahead, with some perhaps consolidating democratic gains while others remain under distinct and resilient forms of authoritarian rule, understanding variations in modes of authoritarian governance and linking these to varying degrees and forms of regime resilience become an increasingly urgent priority.

WHERE TO FROM HERE IN THE STUDY OF MIDDLE EAST AUTHORITARIANISM

For much of the past decade, research programs in political science, political economy, sociology, and anthropology have chronicled experiences of authoritarian regression across the Middle East, explored sources of authoritarian persistence, and developed explanations that account for authoritarian survival in an era of democratization (Brownlee 2002 and 2007; Lust-Okar 2005; Posusney and Angrist 2005; Pratt 2007; Schlumberger 2007). Setting aside not only the lingering essentialisms of previous research but also the more recent (and perhaps newly relevant) legacies of "transitology," these research programs have in large measure turned away from earlier efforts to understand failures of democratization. Instead, like the current volume, they assumed the viability of authoritarianism as a system of rule, not least because it has been around for over half a century, and directed their attention to understanding how authoritarian regimes in the Middle East govern. Individual rulers at times faced daunting challenges. They explored how authoritarian systems of rule managed the challenges they confronted and how, in doing so, they reconfigured existing institutions and practices, developing new configurations of both that equipped them to endure significant economic, social, and political stresses

without breaking, even while societies in the Middle East were themselves adapting to new patterns of authoritarian governance (Heydemann 2007a).

The current volume is a contribution to this emerging and still relevant research program. In keeping with the assumptions that inform such approaches to the study of authoritarianism in the Middle East, the following chapters view authoritarian regimes in Iran and Syria as consolidated and viable systems of rule able to withstand significant, although by no means all, challenges. We do not presume that our two case countries are either stalled in transitions to democracy or exceptional in the challenges they face and the strategies they have developed to manage them. Nor do we rule out the possibility that significant political change can occur in the future, especially in Syria, where popular demands for an end to the regime have been so intense that it would be foolish to assume that the regime will succeed in its increasingly violent attempts to hang on. Instead, the chapters focus on understanding and explaining longstanding patterns that shed light on critical aspects of how these regimes govern, including at moments of crisis, and how the societies over which they rule have themselves adapted to their political environments.

While broadly situated within emergent research programs, however, this volume also seeks to stretch their boundaries by extending and refining assumptions about authoritarianism in the Middle East in at least four ways. First, our focus in this volume is not on the *persistence* of authoritarian regimes in Syria and Iran—a theme many of the authors have addressed in previous work—but their *resilience*.[1] To some, this may appear to be a minor distinction. We view it as consequential, however, both for how we conceptualize authoritarianism in the Middle East and for how we organize our research. Authoritarian persistence carries connotations of anachronistic, one-person dictatorships stubbornly clinging to power while falling increasingly out of touch with their societies and rapidly changing environments. Chehabi and Linz's "sultanistic regimes"—personalist rule resting on little more than sheer force and bribes, weakly institutionalized, and enjoying no social base to speak of—appear to be compatible with these conceptualizations (Chehabi and Linz 1998). By contrast, authoritarian resilience refers to the attributes, relational qualities, and institutional arrangements that have long given regimes in the Middle East, conceptualized as *institutionalized systems of rule,* the capacity to adapt governance strategies to changing domestic and international conditions. If questions of persistence draw our attention to explanations of *outcomes,* questions of resilience shift our focus to explanations of *processes* and in particular to the dynamic and complex interconnections between processes of authoritarian

renewal, on one hand, and social adaptations to these processes, on the other. Questions of resilience thus require that we broaden our analytic focus beyond regime-level analysis—which remains relevant—to encompass the microlevel adaptations among social actors to new patterns of authoritarian governance.

Second, in contrast to some research on Middle East authoritarianism, which has implicitly viewed state and social actors as occupying discrete political spaces, the chapters here focus on the interconnections and overlap between the two. In particular, scholars who maintain normative expectations about the role that civil societies play as advocates of reform, democratization, or "development," or who assume that civic sectors provide an inherent counterweight to authoritarian states, tend to assume the separateness of "associative life" even if they acknowledge that reality is often far messier than these assumptions warrant and that civic sectors may even reinforce authoritarianism instead of posing a challenge to it (Jamal 2007). Without in any sense erasing the all-too-real disconnects between Middle East states and the societies they govern, the following chapters focus instead on the political effects of this distance: how gaps between ruler and ruled are themselves productive of certain kinds of social adaptations to authoritarian rule, how social actors exploit these gaps in unintended ways, and how their shape and boundaries (whether viewed as constructed or not) are in turn affected by regime-level efforts to contain and manage Middle Eastern societies. Thus, in making authoritarian governance central to the analysis of Syrian and Iranian politics, we have not discarded the significance and role of nonstate actors but have instead set aside the expectation that nonstate actors effectively organize in spheres independent from or (only) in opposition to the state, thereby generating a platform for liberal-democratic change. In the current volume this interactive conception of state–society relations is evident in Güneş Murat Tezcür's analysis of Iran as a competitive authoritarian regime and in Arzoo Osanloo's chapter on the strategies developed by Iranian women to seize the regime's focus on women's rights as the basis for expanding their legal autonomy in ways that have challenged the regime's intent. In Max Weiss's chapter, we see these interconnections reflected in contemporary Syrian literature and the quietly subversive strategies that novelists adopt to convey the effects of life under authoritarianism for their protagonists.

Third, building on research that Heydemann (2007a and 2007b) and others have pursued over the past decade on authoritarian upgrading, our focus on resilience extends and deepens how we conceptualize the *adaptive capacities* of regimes and societies in both Syria and Iran. Unlike much of the

more recent work on authoritarian modernization, we do not view the adaptive attributes evident in these two cases as limited in scope to "defensive" responses to political and economic challenges. They are not episodic features that emerge during moments of crisis only to fade back once the crisis recedes. Thus, we do not conceptualize this capacity in terms of "survival strategies" (Brumberg 2003). Instead, we define regimes in Syria and Iran in terms of what we call *recombinant authoritarianism*: systems of rule that possess the capacity to reorder and reconfigure instruments and strategies of governance, to reshape and recombine existing institutional, discursive, and regulatory arrangements to create recognizable but nonetheless distinctive solutions to shifting configurations of challenges (Stark 1996).[2]

This recombinant quality is critical for understanding the sources of regime resilience in Syria and Iran. It creates possibilities for incumbents to amend and modify the arrangements, both formal and informal, through which they manage the distribution of power and resources, the production of legitimacy, and the maintenance of their authority. It is manifest in the processes of authoritarian upgrading that reshaped strategies of governance in the Middle East over the past decade. We see it at work, as Thomas Pierret's chapter shows, in the expansion of state regulatory authority over religious affairs in Syria since 2008 and the resulting transformation of a critical domain of state–society relations along lines that mark a sharp break with the past experience of the Syrian Ba'thist regime. The picture emerging from Pierret's chapter is more complex and fluid than is suggested by frequent references to the Syrian regime's uncompromising "secularism." We can find it in the capacity of the Syrian regime to adjust the roles allocated to judicial institutions as circumstances and regime requirements change, as Reinoud Leenders demonstrates in his chapter. It is also evident, as Kevan Harris's chapter attests, in the multiple and competing institutional frameworks the Iranian regime maintains to manage social policy in the Islamic Republic. In other words, recombinant authoritarianism is not simply a defensive reaction to threats, though the plasticity of some Middle East regimes at such crucial moments is certainly essential to their survival. Rather, these two regimes, and perhaps others as well, are exhibiting something deeper: an *institutionalized flexibility* that is characteristic not only of reactions to threat but also of everyday governance. Recombinant authoritarianism, as the following chapters show, is as much a feature of normal politics as it is of regime responses to moments of exceptional stress.

Fourth, our conception of Middle East regimes leads us to take seriously the question of *authoritarian legitimacy* along several dimensions: the strategies

regimes use to secure domestic support; the institutional arrangements—judicial and redistributive arrangements in particular—that regimes construct both to support legitimacy claims at home and to consolidate claims to sovereignty in the international system; and the capacity of regimes to exploit external threats to reinforce domestic legitimacy. Though legitimacy is often viewed as a secondary consideration for regimes that rely heavily on coercion to secure their citizens' compliance, the following chapters not only reinforce the importance that Middle East regimes attach to legitimacy, importance that seems likely to be amplified as a result of regime collapse in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya; they also explore strategies of legitimation as an arena within which the Syrian and Iranian regimes demonstrate their recombinant capacities. This is not to say, of course, that such strategies are necessarily successful; the Syrian regime has undoubtedly lost much of its legitimacy through its repression of largely unarmed protesters. Yet the chapters in this volume underscore the flexibility with which such regimes respond to legitimacy challenges and thus push our understanding of authoritarian legitimacy and regime resilience well beyond the truism that high legitimacy is equated with survival and low legitimacy with potential regime breakdown. Instead, as seen in the chapters by Anoushiravan Ehteshami, Raymond Hinnebusch, and their coauthors; Leenders; Tezcür; and Harris, legitimacy has a far more dynamic quality than might be assumed given the strict ideological orientations commonly attributed to the Syrian and Iranian regimes.

The emphasis of the chapters in this volume on the dynamic and adaptive qualities of governance and of state–society relations thus underscores the importance of exploring processes of political change within consolidated authoritarian regimes. Yet it also acknowledges that, even in the wake of regime collapse in Tunisia, Libya, Yemen, and Egypt, political change in the Middle East may in some instances become regime reinforcing and will not necessarily be of a liberal-democratic nature or evolve toward preconceived frameworks of authoritarian breakdown or democratic transition.

SYRIA AND IRAN AS RECOMBINANT AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES

The following chapters engage these issues through a focus on two very differently organized authoritarian regimes, Syria and Iran. Syria is emblematic of the region's secular autocracies, dominated by a single-party regime since 1963, when the Ba'th Party seized power and distinctive in the limited extent

to which it has participated in broader trends toward political openings and selective economic reform in the Middle East. It occupies a position as one of the more intensely authoritarian regimes in the Arab world. Iran, on the other hand, stands out not only for its character as a theocratic regime, an avowedly Islamic republic since its revolution in 1979, but until recently for its relatively soft form of authoritarian rule. Prior to June 2009, when mass protests broke out over an unprecedented degree of election rigging, Iran combined theocratic rule supported by a repressive state apparatus with meaningful electoral competition and limited space for political mobilization. Even following the June 2009 elections and a sharp increase in regime repression in response to the Green Movement, politics and governance in Iran have exhibited a degree of institutional fragmentation, decentralization of decision making, and sustained levels of social mobilization that continue to distinguish the Islamic Republic from most of its Arab neighbors.

Indeed, setting aside their shared reliance on anti-Americanism and anti-Westernism as sources of legitimacy and the basis of their strategic alliance, Syria and Iran are such strikingly divergent regime types that for many purposes they would serve well as "least similar" cases, useful primarily to illustrate variation in modes of authoritarian governance. We selected these cases, however, not to highlight their self-evident differences but to underscore the ways in which, despite these differences, Syria and Iran display significant elements of comparability across two divergent models of authoritarian rule. Most important from our perspective is that both exhibit the recombinant attributes that we view as central for explaining regime resilience in these cases. What the following chapters demonstrate, across domains that range from strategies of economic governance, to the roles and functions of the judiciary, to the management of state relations with key organized interests (such as women in the Iranian case and Islamists in the Syrian case), is the degree to which these two very different authoritarian regime types share the capacity to reconfigure and adapt strategies of governance to accommodate a changing political, economic, and social landscape, even if this by no means guarantees regime survival into the indefinite future.

When seen through the lens of recombinant authoritarianism, in other words, important similarities between Syria and Iran move to the fore. At a macrolevel, both are cases in which regimes that rely heavily on clientalist networks and the use of patronage to exploit and manipulate formal institutional frameworks, alter organizational roles and functions among state

agencies, and deploy state regulatory authority to give a legalistic appearance to the arbitrary exercise of political power. In both cases, regimes promote the proliferation of "rules of the game," adding and combining modes of governance with considerable flexibility. In recombinant authoritarian regimes, multiplicity prevails. Indeed, it is a defining element of regime resilience, as it allows incumbents to juggle their options, constituencies, and resources without being beholden to any of them or being irreparably undercut by the unintended consequences of their choices. Multiple modes of economic governance overlap and coexist: market-based, clientalist, and state-directed strategies provide a wealth of opportunities for the management of regime constituencies—even if, at times, shifts in the balance of opportunities may lead to tensions between competing constituencies of a regime or, as in the Syrian case, to widespread discontent. This is especially evident in Caroline Donati's account of the emergence of new cohorts of politically influential business cronies in Syria who have exploited economic liberalization to capture the benefits of deregulated economic sectors, while an older generation of regime beneficiaries within state and party institutions perceived that they were losing ground. In Iran, as Harris shows, multiple institutional networks oversee complementary systems of redistribution, each of which generates loyalty and legitimacy among the particular social sectors they serve. Similarly, in both cases, we find multiple judicial systems operating under distinctive rules and procedures, including, in Syria, an entirely distinct set of courts created to handle security-related matters.

In both cases, moreover, the demands of regime legitimation required important shifts in strategies of governance, leading the Iranian and Syrian regimes to reconfigure relationships with key domestic constituencies in the process. As Ehteshami and Hinnebusch and their coauthors demonstrate in their chapter, the erosion of domestic support for the Iranian and Syrian regime at moments of significant external pressure made foreign policy an especially attractive domain for their efforts to renew and revitalize their legitimacy at home, although in the Syrian case insufficiently so to have prevented the current uprising. Yet if both exploited external threats for domestic purposes, the effects of these efforts moved the Iranian and Syrian regimes in opposing directions—creating incentives to broaden political inclusion in the Syrian case while undermining such incentives in the Iranian case, producing a narrowing and hardening of the Iranian regime's ruling coalition in recent years.

The following chapters elaborate on these elements of recombinant authoritarianism from a variety of disciplinary and thematic perspectives. In

identifying participants for this project, we attached a high priority to scholars who have spent significant time on the ground in either Syria or Iran, countries that do not offer welcoming conditions to researchers. We brought together authors whose work was based on original, primary-source material and whose research interests and approaches, however diverse, provide insight into the dynamic qualities of authoritarian governance in Syria and Iran through detailed attention to specific empirical cases. We were less concerned with achieving symmetry in our coverage of each case than in bringing core aspects of recombinant authoritarianism to the fore in both cases. Nonetheless, several unifying themes emerged in the course of the project, and in the remaining sections of this introduction we summarize the findings of our authors in four key areas that we also use to organize the presentation of chapters in the volume: (1) economic governance and recombinant authoritarian rule; (2) authoritarian resilience and the management of religious affairs; (3) social and literary responses to authoritarian resilience; and (4) strategies of authoritarian legitimation. In all these respects, a comparison of the two countries—using single-case chapters to shed light on both similarities and differences—will enhance an understanding of the resilience and the recombinant quality of authoritarianism in both Iran and Syria. And if findings from two cases may not be sufficient to satisfy claims about the generalizability of recombinant authoritarianism in the Middle East at large, its presence in two such divergent regimes gives us a useful starting point for further comparative research.

ECONOMIC GOVERNANCE AND RECOMBINANT AUTHORITARIAN RULE

In both Syria and Iran, authoritarian regimes have constructed systems of economic governance that express distinctive political logics yet provide incumbents with extraordinary flexibility in managing access to and the allocation of economic resources and opportunities. In both cases, these systems provide vivid examples of how seemingly discordant economic and political goals can be accommodated through the proliferation of economic institutions, the appropriation of formal institutional frameworks by informal predatory networks, and the use of social policy to reward some constituencies and marginalize others. They highlight the extent to which rules of the game proliferate, as new institutions, new policies, and new informal networks are layered onto those already in place. Yet they also demonstrate the frictions and challenges incumbents face as they restructure systems of economic governance to adapt

to changing circumstances. Real resources are at stake when recombinant authoritarian regimes realign the flow of economic benefits and opportunities. The shift from state to market in Syria, however selective and limited it might be, changed patterns of corruption and clientelism, privileging some regime loyalists over others. The use of social policy as an instrument of political competition in Iran created competing welfare systems offering varied levels of benefits and support. In both cases, those who lose out in the process can become a potential threat to regimes, in turn prompting new adjustments and adaptations to contain potential challenges.

Donati's chapter on authoritarian renewal in Syria situates economic policy change in the context of broader processes of regime restructuring that followed the rise to power of Bashar al-Asad as his father's successor in July 2000. Even as the second President al-Asad consolidated his control over critical instruments of regime authority, placing his own loyalists in positions of power in the security services and the Ba'th Party apparatus, he was also reconfiguring frameworks of economic governance to redirect rent-seeking opportunities toward new elements of his ruling coalition. As Donati writes, Hafiz al-Asad's generation "got rich through the state sector," while Bashar al-Asad's networks of supporters "monopolized the private sector and prospered, to the detriment of economic growth." In effect, a system of market-based cronyism emerged alongside of, and at times at the expense of, a longstanding system of state-based cronyism. This process of privatizing the state, as Donati notes, "creates new players and new forms of political, economic and social regulation, which transforms authoritarian rule." It also transforms the organization of Syria's political economy.

For Bashar al-Asad and those in his immediate circles, economic liberalization created new domains of rent seeking, permitting him both to increase the scale of economic resources at the regime's disposal and to manage access to these economic opportunities in ways that enhanced the president's authority; sustained the loyalty of those on whose support he depended, especially in the security services; and thus buttressed the security of his regime. This took place through a variety of means, as Donati details based on her extended periods of fieldwork and interviews in Syria. These include the controlled privatization of public sector assets that were delivered into the hands of regime cronies; the liberalization of previously regulated sectors such as banking, with highly politicized criteria used in determining who would receive permission to establish private banks; loosening of controls on foreign

investment while directing investment flows through regime loyalists; and the development of new markets in areas such as telecoms that were similarly allocated to individuals close to the president.

In addition, however, the shift from state-based to market-based modes of rent seeking also permitted the regime to broaden its support among certain segments of Syrian society. Economic reforms fueled a real estate boom in and around Damascus. The withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon in early 2005, although certainly constituting a setback in foreign policy terms, created opportunities for commercial development in Damascus and elsewhere, with the shift to Syria of all kinds of routine economic activities that were no longer so easily conducted in Beirut. Many Syrians gained access to new communications technologies. Private universities were established. Western-style shopping malls proliferated. Despite the regional and international turmoil roiling Syria's foreign policy, daily life within Syria became more comfortable for the well-to-do, and the regime received credit from the few who benefited from its economic "modernization."

During 2005, these trends were formalized in what the regime came to define as a new development strategy: the "social market economy." This phrase was intended to capture and reconcile divergent and frequently contradictory frameworks of economic governance that had emerged under Bashar al-Asad. In this neatly packaged formulation, the regime would preserve its commitment to the populist and redistributive social policies that defined state–society relations under the Ba'th (Hinnebusch 2002) and retain the public institutions that such policies required but would complement these elements with newer, market-oriented policies and regulatory frameworks that would overcome the dysfunctions and inefficiencies associated with the public sector and give Syria the foundations for improved economic performance.

Beyond this attempt to brand Syria's economy in terms that would make it palatable to international financial institutions and foreign investors, however, the move toward a social market economy both depended on and reflected the kinds of adaptive flexibility that we associate with recombinant authoritarian regimes. The capacity of Bashar al-Asad and his inner circle to reconfigure Syria's economy, create new sources of rents, and generate the resources needed to manage new networks of patronage and clientalism is, as Donati affirms, central to the resilience of the regime.

Yet this process of authoritarian renewal, as Donati calls it, should not be seen as an unmitigated success or, indeed, a guarantee for regime survival.