

# ***The Basis and Barriers of Democracy Development in Arabic Countries around the Persian Gulf in Globalization Era***

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## ***Abstract***

*One of the common features of Persian Gulf countries is the same historical destiny which comes from colonization, religion, tradition and the common culture which have influenced the political structures of these countries. To this end, in the recent decades, lack of democracy in this region is highly considered by the thinkers. With development of international communications, some of these countries felt the need of a change in order to save their governments and started some reforms in their structures yet these reforms were not deep and strong and had no acceptable results. Therefore, the thinkers believe that a western democracy appearance in this region is impossible because of the cultural, economical and political context. Also, with the appearance of globalization need and development of communication, virtual press and satellites and the change of Middle Eastern people's view about lifestyle; the new tendencies made some of these countries make policies for liberty of internet and others against it and starting the filtering. It seems that this increases the gaps between governments and people in this region. Therefore, this research studies the barriers of having democracy in this region with a descriptive-analytical method.*

***Keywords:*** *Persian Gulf, democracy, globalization, development, political system, civil society*

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## ***Introduction***

*The term of 'democracy' is combined from two Greek words of 'demo' which means people and 'crates' which means the power and government. The descriptions of democracy are different and they have a wide range; yet their basis is the same and they are based on the citizens' political participation and focuses on the fact that the citizens must be the main resource for the political decision makings. The degree of democratic development and the amount of democracy in societies differ and this amount can be calculated according to the different indexes such as civil laws, representation principle, and principle of separation of powers, supervisory of powers, parliament and the responsibility of governors. Democracy as a regional and historical process is limited to a number of countries and is new and modern in most of the countries. The importance of democracy has increased today in a way that this concept has become a valuable concept which most of the countries use in order to legitimate their political system. In fact, the meaning of democracy has changed into its greatest meaning during time. Different political systems including, the United States, European countries, African one-party countries and late and present communist systems and even religion movements call themselves democracies and this caused conflicts between different political systems in a way that some of the political systems just accepted themselves as democracies. According to that, the UNESCO held a conference in order to demystify the ambiguities around the meaning of democracy in which more than 50 countries participated. The important point of this conference was that these countries persisted that they are democracies and some of them said that they are the only democracies in the world. This conference showed that the meaning of democracy of communist systems differs from what United States and France set. The western systems in this conference believed that democracy means*

*having elections, liberty of press, radio and television, political societies, religion, thought and expression, legal equity, the right of opposition with government, the right of job choice, the rights of creating labor free unions, the right of travelling freely, permanent or temporary immigration and the most important meaning for them was being free from fear. Today, all the world's democratic systems believe that the aim of democracy is having political, economic and cultural liberties. These freedoms don't mean the development of financial, cultural and religious corruptions, yet they are needed for the society's growth. In a democratic society, people must be the guardians of social interests and the society must be the guardian of personal ones and this can be fulfilled by cultural excellence and removing the political-economical barriers. According to what is said, talking about the possibility or impossibility of democracy in the Middle East lead us through democratic challenges. Today, one of the needs and necessities of this region is democracy because settlement of regional, religious and cultural conflicts in the countries of this region from one hand and the international conflicts on the other hand and also neutralizing the international threats, especially the geopolitical ones need the establishment and institutionalization of democracy and democratic culture. Therefore, the main question of this study is: what are the important barriers which caused lack of democracy in Persian Gulf area in the globalization era?*

## ***Globalization and formation of democratic demands in Arab states of the Persian Gulf***

*In the definition of globalization, we recite McGrew's saying which is: globalization is the increase of the number of links and interactions expanded beyond governments and creates a new global system. In this regard, Alvin Toffler says: the world is faced with a third wave of life which will gradually lead to instability and unrest in all fields including politics and it will be followed by a new type of sociopolitical life which nature and necessities are very different than the former waves of human life and it particularly finds meaning in relation to the two fields of communication and political stability (Toffler, 1987, p. 607).*

*In the Persian Gulf area, there are still monarchy regimes such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, and so on. These regimes are based on tribal and religious relations which favors the interests of a particular class of the society than the rest and does not allow other members' contribution. For this reason, these governments see democracy as a threat to the survival of their own regimes. In these regimes, political and social freedom is limited to the entertainment of communities. By taking control of the public media and using Arab people, these regimes prevent and oppose any development of democracy.*

*In this matter: 1- reduction of authoritarian regimes' authenticity in these areas, 2- quick shift and demand of societies toward becoming democratic, 3-politicizing religious, racial and ethnic matters, 4-expansion of people's awareness has caused the leaders and politicians to conduct even short and passing corrections, which unfortunately were not much successful. Today's world is the field of communications and all are connected like a global village. Thus, one cannot imagine to be separate from this village. Aside from being successful or unsuccessful, recent public uprisings in these societies reflect the political maturity and will of the people of these societies and moving toward a democratic government.*

***1) Globalization effect on increasing the speed of authenticity reduction of authoritarian regimes in Arab states of the Persian Gulf: the most significant effect of globalization is in the field of the internal structure of the countries of the field and changing the government method of these states. As with the increase of communicational devices, countries lose***

*power in separating themselves from each other; therefore, civil activities will be done in a global level, e.g. conferences or lecture. Particularly with the development of international affairs and the direct effect of its political aspect, the globalization phenomenon reduces power and authority of national governments and instead increases the power of international institutions (Dorosti, 2001, p.137).*

- 2) Globalization effects on establishment of democratic perspectives and demands in Arab states of the Persian Gulf:** *development and growth of social and communicational networks has familiarized the people of these countries with new phenomena across the world and also with the civil society of other countries and international organizations. This familiarity causes people to be oriented toward new phenomena and consequently changes people's attitude toward everything. Change in people's perspective toward life changes people's expectations of authorities as well. People now cannot be satisfied through the traditional reason for government's authenticity, and governments are obligated to adopt new methods for maintaining their authenticity. Some signs are witnessed concerning these changes of behavior. For instance, in Kuwait, people welcome government criticizing newspapers more than other countries. Apparently the globalization process have widened the gap between governments and nations in the Persian Gulf region (Kodal, 002, p. 100).*

*In the contemporary era, observing human rights is considered as one of the most important reasons for governments' political authenticity, however, for instance in Emirates, the human rights execution state for the people of this country is not about changing the government or joining political party accepted by human rights institutes (Dorosti, 2008: p 137). Moreover, revolution in the field of communications and consequently in media have formed a much high effect in the cultural field of these countries which of course these cultural changes are inevitable, but they are faced with resistance from the governments and government relying capital holders in this region.*

- 3) Globalization effect on politicization of racial-ethnic identities in Arab states of the Persian Gulf:** *the globalization phenomenon and consequently development of the communicational space have threatened or even removed the economic, cultural, informational or even political borders of countries. With such a condition and with the increase of awareness in lower classes of societies, new political, social and cultural demands of these classes have*

*created new challenges for the governments in the region. This culture vulnerability process is followed by national identity and sodality. it is expressed in some resources that in 1990, nearly 800 ethnic-national movements happened across the world which some groups live in several countries (like Kurds in Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria). Globalization process directly affects the sociopolitical and more importantly cultural aspects of countries and consequently the identities and ethnics, and this is inevitable (Schulte, 2003: 211). Fading or removing the culture and identity of other societies by pivotal countries particularly United States of America for imposing their own culture is of the consequences of cultural globalization. As Mahmud Audeh has said: Arabs society is faced with the cultural invasion phenomenon which is also followed by changes in Arabs' eating habits. He believed that this transformation of eating habits are moreover followed by transformations and changes in the social classifications (Karani, 2002: 171).*

*Mahmud Abed Aljebri, professor of philosophy from Morocco says: internet and development of the spaces of social networks lead to renewal of social life through providing as space for conversation and communication between individuals, removing time and place constraints and popularization of new cultures. Moreover, informing through internet for conventional meetings increase organizational contributions (Mostaqimi, Vasei zadeh, 2010: 285-384)*

- 4) Gradual reduction of government's authority and increase of subnational and transnational authority in Arab states of the Persian Gulf:** *one of the features of Middle East political systems is their political freedom demands which are severely objected by human rights institutes. Development of internet networks have been used as a ground for human rights groups activities. Development of internet networks is a ground for human rights groups' activities and their influence on non-governmental organizations. Nowadays, the smallest details of different events around the world are communicated within a few seconds to other places of the world, and governmental security organizations cannot prevent this from happening. News related to governments treatment with their opponents are followed by public thoughts reactions and sometimes the pressure of such public thoughts become effective. As governments cannot respond to the infinite demands and challenges of the civil society, they delegate a part of their authority to local and regional political institutes. Also, countries method of*

globalization management have a high effect on the process of political changes as well including democratic institutes (Dorosti, 2001: 140).

It is true that the globalization phenomena causes economic growth and improvement of the living condition and public state of people's life and cultivation of democracy; on the other hand, the globalization phenomenon leads to increase of unemployment, economic inequity, political instability, return to governmental economy, economic downturn and consequently fading out of the role of democratic institutions. This is the condition formed in most Arab states of the Persian Gulf.

- 5) **Internet impact as one of the globalization indices on the factor of increasing social awareness and human development in Arab societies of the Persian Gulf:** a Finnish researcher named Thomas Haag expresses in a study: internet provides various modern solutions for political activities of people and for their contribution in it, still, democracy flows in the real world, not in the virtual one – based on reports, human development index ratio in Iraq in 1998 were 53% and it had the rank 126<sup>th</sup> in the global scale. In a complete report from CIA concerning the role of internet, it is said that: for elevation of costs in execution, internet usage will be exclusive to the elites of the region. Informatics revolution can have enormous effects on stability or instability of the political systems dominant in the Persian Gulf region and it can increase the awareness and demands of the nations in this region, and this creates serious challenges for our identity. Human development reports in 2003 (research report, 2003: 21) indicate that the residents of this region believe more in democracy as the best type of government than the rest of the world do, and they have the highest level of refusing autocratic governments. On the other hand, elevation of literacy level and increase in the number of university graduates have formed a professional middle class, a civil society and experts demanding change. Expansion of communicational networks familiarizes the people of these societies with new lifestyles and governmental institutions, which these familiarities would lead to their demands and inquiries and their change of perspective. An educated person who is familiar with today's world cannot bear using traditional authentication methods. Thus, governments need to enforce changes or corrections for enduring their governing authenticity.

**Democracy constraints in Arab states of the Persian Gulf:**

*Democracy prerequisites in Middle East should be with consideration of the historical and cultural conditions of any country. However, for establishing and institutionalizing democracy in Persian Gulf states in a mutual manner, some fundamental conditions should be met. In recent decades, major challenges for lack of democracy development include: political, economic, demographic, social and public thoughts challenges. These challenges highly threatened the authenticity of the political power of Arab rulers. In order to maintain their government and relatively satisfy the public thoughts inside and outside their countries, these countries need to turn to corrections. Despite what was said, in countries such as Saudi Arabia, suppression is still witnessed alongside with the initial political freedom, and in countries such as Kuwait and Qatar, movements toward political freedom are considerable and they have a lower level of suppression compared to Saudi Arabia. The most important constraints for achieving democracy are as below:*

***Lack of growth in civil society and political culture:***

*Civil society is a set of social institutes, communities and organizations without any dependencies on governments and playing a determinant role in formation of political power. Civil society has a direct relationship with democracy. The higher the civil society develops, the more knowingly are the contributions, and as contributions are conducted more knowingly, better choices are made and consequently government would become more responsive. In fact, cultural grounds should be found in a society so that the civil society is cultivated better within that society. Many scholars believe lack of existence of a cultural ground in the Persian Gulf states as the reason for civil society's lack of growth. One of the democratic governments' features is formation of society government from down to up. Despite the uncivilized societies in which this relationship is vice versa and from up to down (Bashirieh, 2003; 324). In civil societies, people believe to be playing a role in their destiny, and this the people who delegate their will and power to the government, so that the government can be the representative of people for general system governing, or in other words, people are the axis of the government. The features of a civil society include: election, citizens contribution, observing citizens freedom rights, equity against the law, principality of law, and wisdom.*

*One of the other most important prerequisites for achieving democracy is the existence of a suitable cultural ground. Political culture is a set of thoughts, attitudes and values forming a political life and the cultivation of this political*



*culture includes much elevation of political awareness, public contribution and personal self-sufficiency and contribution in collective decision making. On this basis, governments orientation toward democracy has two important indexes: first, institutes and political processes including political leaders and necessitates their responsiveness, and second; citizenship values and models called the political culture reflecting the position of citizens including men or women and the need for their contribution in developing civil activities (Bashirieh, 2003: 332).*

*Some analyzers believe that because of structural and political culture insufficiency, this region does not naturally have the capacity of accepting democracy. For accepting democracy, the civil culture of the society should also be promoted. For development of civil culture, civil society and its activities should be focused upon. Civil society is a collection of social institutes, communities and organizations without any dependencies on governments and playing a determinant role in formation of political power (Bashirieh, 2003: 324). Emergence of bright-minded groups in these regions are considered as the most important groups of civil society which can challenge the autocracy of the regimes of this region in a not so far future. With a little thinking, we would realize that some of the civil society institutes are being formed. Moreover, the existence of several non-governmental organizations in the states within this region has caused the relative growth of political parties and challenging governmental structures in these countries. One of the signs of democratic changes emergence is the acceptance of some democratic processes by some of Arabic countries' authorities, such as announcement of holding council election and formally recognizing women's rights in Saudi Arabia, the most conservative governmental regime in this region. This action can also be spread to other Arabic countries as well (Kenneth, 2003: sit).*

### ***Autocratic structure of the region's governments:***

*For finding the important and basic challenges of democracy, government type, structure, nature and political power of governmental systems should be sought. The dominant form of government in this region is autocracy which a considerable part of democracy failure depends on this factor. These autocratic regimes control government's resources producing different methods. These regimes are monarchical and hereditary and principally believes in contribution of people a little or does not believe in it at all.*

*Where government cannot be related to people and a family gets its way in the society as the decision maker and statesman through gaining more power or wealth and finally shows itself as the ultimate ruler of people, no place is left for democracy, and also a ground is provided for autocratic governments. Governing policy in this region only considers personal interests. In the discussion of leaders' governing type in this region, it should be emphasized that change in leadership is very typical in these regions. Power is concentrated at the hands of one or several particular individuals which prevents achievement of democracy, and separates potentials, responsibility and power resources distribution. Such leaders are at power either through coups or through other agents. However, power structure and model in Persian Gulf states are no similar. In the late 1960s, scholars mentioned the governments of these regions as hereditary monarchy and believed it to be the path of degradation and destruction. But since 1970s, these anticipations concerning the monarchic countries of this region were proved to be wrong, as these governments are still continuing their lives through enforcing very little changes. The mentioned subject contains this question that how some of these regimes have survived in this unrestful and instable region and haven't seriously been shaken (Michael Herb, 1999:1).*

*Since the emergence of independent Arabic governments after WWII, several challenges were formed for the autocratic regimes of the region. Some scholars believe enforcement of infinite power and dictatorship as the significant and root factors in the political unrest and instability of the region and believe that the emergence of public reactions for changing governments to be derived from complete autocracy in the closed political systems of this sensitive region, like Arabic Spring phenomenon occurring during the last several years. However, still two factors of "modernism and new traditionalism" confirm autocracy in this region (Michael Herb, 2008: 338).*

*Of course the traditional foundations of autonomy in the Persian Gulf region have been highly shaken during the last several years, and instead, different types of "rational-legal" power are being founded. Concepts and discussions of today's Arabic world is established on democratization of Arabic countries societies. In the literature, the necessity of transferring autocratic governments to a democratic condition is highly mentioned which this does not necessitate formation of a revolution and it should not necessarily be accompanied with the degradation of the monarchical regimes of the region. Also, the survival and endurance of these regimes can be because of the gradual transformation into liberal regimes. As it*

was mentioned, in this transferrance, the throne should not be fallen, but the increase of parliaments' power and decreasing the kingdom's authority is considered. As Gregory Gause has said: a logical necessity can be held between monarchy liberalization and logical power. In other words, the more a monarchy or kingdom moves toward liberalization, the higher the parliament's power becomes and consequently the level of logical authority is reinforced in political ceremonies (Cristal, 1996: 65-66).

### ***Inability in complying Salafi Islam and Democracy***

*Religion is one of the important elements in governing. In the Persian Gulf region as well, Islam has had deep impacts on government methods and society. On this basis, the relationship between Islam and liberal instructions should be accurately investigated for finding the reasons of not having democracy in this region.*

*Democracy is concept influenced and adopted from the western political culture into the Islamic civilization. This means that no concepts related to government method or features of governor cannot be found in Islam. Notions such as justice have been more focused by Muslim scholars, but considering that democracy is a form of government, it was never discussed by Muslim scholars. Major features of government in the world of Islam relies on the personal decisions made by leaders and rulers of society. When religious concepts and instructions are discussed, it aims to prevent religious prejudices and comply religious instructions with logical understanding, and in fact modernization of religious instructions depends on its rationality (Lashgari, 2009: 125). Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, influence of western concepts including democracy increased in Islamic societies and different orientations and attitudes were formed among Islamic scholars;*

- A) Some scholar teachers welcomed democracy in the recent decades as a government method and believed to be compatible with Islam's instructions, this group of scholars tried to renew the Islamic concept of "Shura"<sup>3</sup> (Benard, 1995: 78).*
- B) Scholars and scientists of the world of Islam who believe democracy concepts and foundations to contradict Islam's instructions such as Farabi and Ibn-e Roshd who had critical opinions about the Republic book of Farabi and believed it as a type of aberration (Thaqeb, 2004: 46).*

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<sup>3</sup> Consultation

*In one look, it can generally be said in comparison of the concept of democracy in west and its concept in Islam that: democracy in west is opposing with anthropocentrism and in Islam it is opposing with God-centeredness. In democracy's concept in Islam, man is God on earth and cannot create the divine rules or override them, but he is responsible to establish God's government on earth through using Quran and tradition in consultation with the nation (Mohaqeq Damad, 2000: 143). Based on the mentioned reasons, most scholars believe that as the relationship between God and man, person and society, citizen and government, freedom and will and responsibility in Islamic and Western civilizations are basically different, then establishment of western countries is very hard.*

*For explaining the relationship between Islam and democracy, two main approaches are investigated: 1- contradiction of religion and democracy, 2- compatibility of religion and democracy. Scholars of the first approach believe that in a land where is ruled by divine laws, democracy cannot be formed, because power is delegated to people in democracy, while in Islamic governments, power is not given to people but to God. In other words, they believe that creation of democratic corrections means overriding and removing the religious culture and tradition (Hafezian & Ahmadian, 1979:69). For instance, the equity between men and women in "positions" which a woman is not allowed to travel without the authorization of her husband. Now the question lies here if a woman is in a position which necessitates domestic or international travels and her husband does not allow it, what happens then? If the woman accepts her husband's opinion, she is left from doing her duty. This is a sample of conflicts or inequity of man and woman in positions such as judgeship or taking the leading responsibility.*

*The scholars of the second approach believe that equity of all humans is one of the fundamental bases of Islam and also the most significant principle of democracy. They express that when democracy reaches to autocracy level or demands unlimited freedom, religion can prevent conduction of immoral act through the constraints it holds for humans. What causes the religion to comply with democracy is that religion is one of the cultural institutes and should be far away from being politicized. In other words, religion should be separated from politics. This separation causes the compatibility of religion and democracy. Incompatibility of religion and democracy in States of the Persian Gulf is derived from this fact that Persian Gulf societies are traditional and*

*democracy is considered as a novel phenomenon for these societies (Haqiqat, 2004: 62).*

### ***Rentier economy***

*Economic growth is one of the success factors of democracy. Economic growth is one of the main factors for stabilizing and expanding democracy. The more economic growth has a suitable condition, achieving stability becomes more feasible in democracy, which of course this relationship is not absolute. The thing that is important in this region is the autocracy state in these countries. For the aforesaid structural features, the Persian Gulf states are not interested for democratization. These countries are not counted among industrial developed countries, but they are counted among countries with high per capita income and a relatively high economic growth. Although with the decrease of oil price in the second half of 1980s and 1990s, vulnerability of these regimes became clear. Based on this fact, even if other legal, cultural or political conditions are met, again it cannot be expected to have a successful democracy (Paulo Sergio, 1999: 141-142).*

*In most countries of the world, the major part of budget is acquired through taxation incomes, but in Middle East countries, major part of governments incomes are provided directly from selling oil and oil dependent products and such. The rentier nature of the economy of these countries have a serious and basic contradiction with formation of independent socioeconomic classes from their government. Since government is the only receiver, distributor and funder of oil incomes, this leads to domination of government in economy and lack of formation of an independent economy and their growing dependency on oil incomes and consequently political weakening in these societies. In other words, the state is called rentier. Rent is an income gained without effort and it is against the concept of wage and profit which are the results of economic effort and activity (Rezai, 2007: 3). Adam Smith defines rent as a type of income distinct from other income resources such as wage or profit. This type of income is gained by particular individuals or groups without any efforts (Mirtorabi, 2008: 112-113). Rent can generally be defined as compilation of income resources in the hand of government as a powerful tool and limiting its distribution among social and public institutes and structure and also limiting the geographical distribution of power inside the country (Shirvani, 2008: 54).*

*On this basis, monoculture economies and concentration of incomes gained through it in the hands of government increases the government's independence from society and creation of a constraint in the path of developing democracy. The issue is that governments with relatively massive incomes gained from selling fossil and monoculture resources conduct large national purposes which principally does not hold an advantage for contribution of citizens (Karimipour, 2008: 68). Rentier economies on one hand are not interested in varying production, non-oil exportations, industrialization and social and economic classes' independence, and on the other hand, government's exclusiveness in economy obligates the release of the real potential. Consequently, because of being economically dependent to the government, this class cannot play a role in success and development of democracy (Sardarabadi, 1989: 324).*

*In such countries, planning and decision making is only with consideration of the opinions and perspectives of government's cabinet, and governmental organizations believe that only government employed experts can plan with regard to scientific measures and values, and no attention is given to social institutes.*

## **Conclusion:**

*Expansion of the demand for democracy and socioeconomic development in the Middle East area is increasing following social changes, and this has put the rulers of the area under pressure of changing their structures. Inefficient governments have led to a wide range of public dissatisfaction for not being interested or capable in responding to these wide range of people's demands. Although, sometimes, some of the governments of this area ceremonially try to show that they comply with some of democracy criteria. It seems that the main and basic constraint of democracy development in Middle East is the autocratic governments who are interested in maintaining the current condition. Democrat forces are always suppressed and threatened by opinionated governments for not having advertisement tools and opposing the autocratic regimes. In other words, lack of advertisement tools and facilities and continuous threats by governments has slowed the movements in this area. For helping to establish and root democracy in Middle East, Islamic scholars should create a logical link between global understanding and religious instructions through renewing the religious interpretations. Any society grows with consideration of its different culture with other societies and its political contribution is based on its historical norms and conditions. Some of these societies are slower and some of them are faster in achieving the standards of democracy. But it seems that the Persian Gulf region is faced with various hard constraints in this path. For removing some of these constraints in the path of democracy in this region, it is necessary to facilitate achieving a civil society through providing the essential instructions for promoting the awareness of the region's societies. Encouraging the governments of Middle East to democracy and forming democratic governments through free and healthy elections along with economic development and existence of independent media and renewal of religious concepts can effectively help removing democratic constraints in the Persian Gulf.*

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