

## **Extensive Islamic Legitimation in the Arab Monarchies: Overview of the Double-Edged Sword in Maintaining its Legitimate Veneer**

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### **Abstract**

This article examines the influence of Islamic legitimacy on the Arab monarchies' survival in the present time. Existing literature on the politics of the Arab monarchies has referred to the Islamic legitimacy of the monarchies as their unique source for gathering support from the population, but the discussion overlooks the international dimensions of the monarchies' attempts to utilize their unique legitimacy. Arab monarchies' recent active provocations of "moderate" Islam and inter-religious dialogues highlight the importance of this dimension. To address the problem, this article develops a new framework for understanding the Islamic legitimacy of the Arab monarchies, named "extensive Islamic legitimacy," and shows that the recent royal Islamic discourse in the Arab world is more than a normative call for peace and mutual understanding; it is also an attempt to legitimize their repression of the domestic society, which could ruin the façade of peacefulness and promote opposition groups to take more radical strands. The balance between repression and inclusion should be the key to the effect of Islamic legitimacy on the survival of the Arab monarchies.

### **Introduction**

There exist eight monarchies in the Arab Islamic world today, namely: Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates. They dominate one third of the number of states affiliated to the Arab League, and globally speaking, the Arab Islamic world constitutes another center of the world's existing monarchies as opposed to Western Europe.

What effect does Islam have on the rule of such Arab Islamic monarchies today? One might consider that the monarchies are strictly ruled under the teaching of Islam, one prominent traditional mode of rule, since the Arab world was the birthplace of Islam in the 7th century. However, it is not that simple. As Anderson [2000] argues, the keys to the establishment of the contemporary Arab monarchies are more secular and modern factors, such as the colonial power's divide and rule policies, and the integration of the nationalist movements and the ruling monarchies. Considering the fact that most of the contemporary

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Arab monarchies were established in the colonial era, in the 19th or 20th century, except for the Moroccan and Omani monarchies,<sup>1</sup> we could recognize the huge influence of the colonial powers and the emerging nationalist movements under colonial rule.

However, this explanation does not seem to clarify the question of how the monarchies maintained their rule *after* their regimes were established. Existing scholarship attempts to provide answers to the question from different perspectives [Bank et al. 2015; Herb 1999; Kostiner ed. 2000; Menaldo 2012; Yom and Gause 2012], but the effect of Islam has yet to be examined sufficiently. Some studies mention the effect of Islamic legitimacy, illustrated in the link between the royal family and the name of the state such as the “Hashemite” kingdom of Jordan, particular monarchy’s special relations to the holy Islamic cities such as Makka and Madina for Saudi Arabia and Jerusalem for Jordan, cooperation with the *ulama* (especially for Saudi Arabia), and dynastic proximity to the line of Prophet Muhammad [Albrecht and Schlumberger 2004: 378; Anderson 1991; Hudson 1977: 26], but most researchers provide no more than a broader and general description.

To fill the gap, this article focuses on how Arab monarchies have employed strategies for legitimizing their rule by Islam until today. What this study pays a special attention to is the recent Arab Islamic monarchies’ attempts at promoting “moderate” Islam and interreligious dialogue. Since around the turn of the century, the Arab monarchies have eagerly initiated such initiatives, including the “Amman Message” in Jordan in 2006, the “Marrakesh Declaration” in Morocco in 2016, the Saudi Arabia led “King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID)” established in Vienna in 2012, and the “Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies” in Abu Dhabi in 2014. At first glance, it seems that such initiatives are merely social ones and have no political significance. However, as this article demonstrates, the initiatives reflect these authoritarian monarchies’ search for regime maintenance through the mobilization of the idea of Islam. Arab monarchies’ recent call for securing Islamic values does support the regimes in justifying their rule, but it is not fully accountable to the society. Increasing securitization of the concept of Islam in their rule could undermine the Islamic legitimacy of the Arab monarchies, and their legitimacy would possibly become just empty rhetoric of justifying autocracy.

This article proceeds as follows. Section I looks into the literature of Islamic legitimacy, and proposes a new framework for understanding the recent development in the Arab monarchies regarding strategies of Islamic legitimation. Section II briefly illustrates the historical background of the Arab monarchies’ survival and their legitimacy. Section III examines the recent active Islamic legitimation strategies of the Arab monarchies within the framework developed in the Section I. In the final section, this study summarizes the

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<sup>1</sup> Even though these two monarchies survived the colonial era and reinstated themselves, the colonial influence on them is also apparent.

arguments and findings and describes the conclusion.

### **I. Theoretical Framework: Aspects of Authoritarian Legitimation**

Legitimacy<sup>2</sup> is one of the pillars that support the stability of authoritarian regimes. This applies to the cases of Arab monarchies, and it is considered to be one of the keys for the survival of the Arab monarchies. The seminal work of Hudson [1977] addresses the issue of legitimacy in the post-independent Arab world. He argues that the lack of legitimacy is the reason for the “autocratic, unstable character of all present Arab governments” [Hudson 1977: 2] and conducts analysis on the political development of the Arab states. In the analysis of Arab monarchies, he refers to Islam as one of the unique sources of the legitimacy of the monarchies. However, he is not optimistic about its effect on regime maintenance. This is due to his profound insights into the Arab society in the day. He argues that “Arab society is no longer traditional in the sense that any significant sectors can be swayed by appeals to custom, status, or superstition” [Hudson 1977: 17]. Islamic legitimacy is no exception. He denies that people accept monarchical dictatorship under the name of Islam without any objection but contends that “the leader must demonstrate his competence if he is to earn the traditional oath of allegiance” [Hudson 1977: 19].

In fact, this view on Islamic legitimacy applies to the conventional Sunni Islamic political theory. Because the Sunni schools put a high priority on the maintenance of order, they have accepted monarchical rules even if the ruler seizes power by force. They consider that dictatorship is better than chaos. However, this acceptance of monarchical rule is conditional: they accept as long as the monarch maintains order. If the *umma* views that the monarchical rule can no longer preserve order, the monarch loses support from the *umma*. Therefore, both from the perspective of modern social changes and classical Islamic political thought, it is no wonder that Arab society today requires the monarchs to prove their competence if they wish to maintain their rule.

How do Arab monarchies legitimize their rule by Islam? Albrecht and Schlumberger [2004] categorizes multiple ways that Arab states legitimize their authoritarian rules. At the beginning, they distinguish internal and external legitimacy, the former concern being the relationship between the ruling regime and the domestic society, and the latter being between the ruling regime and the international society. This distinction comes from the fact that the Arab states rely both on domestic and international society for their survival. The international society, especially Western governments and international organizations, provides substantial aid to the Arab world, based on their perception of a particular regime, as well as on that

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<sup>2</sup> This study follows Gerschewski’s comprehensive study of the definition of authoritarian legitimacy by regarding legitimacy as “a relational concept between the ruler and the ruled in which the ruled sees the entitlement claims of the ruler as being justified, and follows them based on a perceived obligation to obey” [Gerschewski 2018: 655].

regime's geo-strategic importance or international alliance [Albrecht and Schlumberger 2004: 376]. In other words, external legitimacy is the key for the Arab regimes' financial security.

Albrecht and Schlumberger [2004] subsequently refers to the "traditional religious legitimacy" as one of the sources of international legitimacy for the Arab states, as well as "allocative power through international rent income (oil and gas)" and "distinct developmental concepts based on collectivist ideologies" [Albrecht and Schlumberger 2004: 376]. They regard the legitimacy as a special resource for Arab monarchies, and refer to the link between the ruling family and the name of the state (e.g. "Hashemite" kingdom), employing Islamic interpretation in the establishment of the state (e.g. Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia), and the monarch's role as guardian of the holy cities (e.g. the Saudi king as the guardian of the two holy cities, as is seen in his title, *khadim al-haramayn*), as well as the tribal linkages between the ruling monarchy and the Bedouin society in the smaller Gulf states [Albrecht and Schlumberger 2004: 377]. Thus the authors consider the Islamic legitimacy as one of the traditional sources of internal legitimacy.

However, such a limited understanding of Islamic legitimacy in the Arab monarchy is challenged by the Arab monarchy's recent active promotion of "moderate" Islam and interreligious dialogue as mentioned in the introductory section. As I will demonstrate in the following sections in detail, the Islamic legitimacy of the Arab monarchies should be considered as a kind of legitimacy that extends across the internal and external dimensions and is politically constituted under the logic of authoritarian survival. Indeed, the official promotion of a "moderate" image of Islam might contribute to gaining support from the domestic society, but in the era of Islamophobia, the promotion is mainly directed at the international audience. In fact, the promotion of "moderate" Islam emerged in the efforts to counter the rise of jihadist terrorism in the world after the 9.11 terrorist attack in the US, which strengthened cooperation between the Western governments and the incumbent Arab regimes. Furthermore, this increased cooperation implied the West's acceptance of the authoritarian rule of the Arab monarchies: the international actors not only provided increased amounts of aid but also gave implicit support to authoritarian oppressive measures by the monarchies, under the name of combatting terrorism [Albrecht and Schlumberger 2004: 377]. In other words, Western support of the Arab monarchies based on the monarchies' Islamic legitimacy, or the external dimension of Islamic legitimacy, contributes to maintaining two key strategies of authoritarian survival, namely repression and cooptation using rent flows, which eventually affects internal legitimacy.

When focusing on such a wide-ranging effect of Islam in legitimizing the authoritarian rulers, Islamic legitimacy seems to be a panacea for their survival. However, extensive use of Islam could lead to the loss of Islamic legitimacy, since it might blur the line between repression and legitimacy. If the regime's appeal to Islam were to be interpreted as a means of repression, it would no longer be able to function as a source of legitimacy. This is what Hudson witnessed

in the Arab world in the post-independence era, namely the volatility in the Arab politics and the authoritarian and instable nature of the regimes in the region [Hudson 1977: 2]. Therefore, we need to be careful not to mix up the two different poles of repression and legitimacy when analyzing the effect of the Arab monarchy's use of Islam on the regime survival.

To summarize, this section has reviewed current scholarship on Islamic legitimacy in the Arab world and proposed a new framework for analyzing it today, especially in the context of Arab monarchies' active promotion of "moderate" Islam and interreligious dialogue. Islamic legitimacy should be considered as something that functions both internally and externally, considering its potential support of the strategies of authoritarian survival. However, at the same time, we need to be careful in categorizing the Arab monarchy's use of Islam: though it looks like an example of Islamic legitimacy, its potential repressive aspects lead it to a means of repression, a function that is inherently different from legitimation. If the Islamic legitimization policies are seen as repressive by the domestic society, Islamic legitimacy no longer exists. To verify this argument, the next two sessions trace the historical development of the Arab monarchies in the changing regional and international situations, and the outcomes of their use of Islam.

## **II. Arab Monarchy's Predicaments in the 20th Century**

In the two decades after independence, the Arab world was characterized by the "Arab cold war" [Kerr 1971], between the Arab conservative monarchical camp and the Arab progressive republican camp, led by Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir and his allies. A number of monarchies gave way to republics under the significant influence of republicanism, and almost half of the remaining monarchies fell during this era. Eventually, nine monarchies maintained their rule, the current eight monarchies and now defunct Iranian monarchy. The decline of the tide of Arab nationalism after the *Naksa* (catastrophe), the Arab countries' devastating defeat against Israel in the war of 1967, weakened the challenges of republicanism to the Arab monarchies, but a new challenge emerged in a decade: namely the Islamic revival.

The most influential event of Islamic revival was the Islamic Revolution in Iran in February 1979. The Pahlavi monarchy, which had been thought to be the most resilient, pro-US monarchy in the Middle East, was demolished by the popular demonstrations, and this gave birth to an Islamic republic. What is important here is the fact that the Islamic republic of Iran challenges the monarchies' legitimacy by providing an alternative model of Islamic rule in the contemporary era; this is illustrated by the very fact that the new Islamic republic was established by ousting the Pahlavi monarch from the throne, and also, subsequent challenges to the other monarchies under the direct and indirect influence of the birth of the Islamic republic, including the Grand Mosque Seizure<sup>3</sup> in Mecca in November 1979, the attempt

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3 For the details of this incident, see [Ochsenwald 1981; Kéichichian 1986].

coup in Bahrain in 1981, and the bomb attacks in Kuwait in 1983. In addition, the intrusion of Saddam Hussein's Iraq into Kuwait in 1990, as a subsequential byproduct of the Iran-Iraq War, posed threats to the legitimacy of the monarchies. It undermined the Kuwaiti royal family's credibility due to their prompt escape from their country without providing any security to the nation. Furthermore, it undermined the Saudi monarchy's credibility since the "Custodian of the Two Holy Cities" allowed US troops to enter their soil in order to save Kuwait from the Iraqi threat and to protect Saudi oil fields, due to the Saudi's inability to protect its ally by themselves.

Faced with the initial Iranian challenges, the monarchies took the strategies of repression and cooptation, in addition to strengthening regional cooperation through the establishment of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in 1981, to marginalize the radical oppositions. The monarchies gave some political space to the moderate Islamic movements and increased the material benefits to the population to coopt them; at the same time, the monarchies strengthened security measures like coercion and punishment.<sup>4</sup>

### **III. Islamic Legitimation under the "War on Terror"**

Since the turn of the century, the Arab Islamic world has witnessed three important changes regarding their rule: the succession from charismatic leaders to the monarchs of a new generation, the development of Islamic political movements across the region, and the beginning of the US-led war on terror.

The years around the millennium were coincident with the succession of leadership in the Arab monarchies. In 1999, both the Jordanian and Moroccan Kings passed away and their sons succeeded to the thrones. The past leaders were seen as the "fathers" of the nation: they not only succeeded in maintaining their rule but succeeded in developing the country from the instability in the post-independent era. Soon in 2004 and 2006, the same thing happened in Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and the UAE, where the founding fathers of the emirates passed away, giving way to the next generation. The new leaders had to show their own charisma that could equal their fathers to establish their own rule. This led to their active use of Islamic discourse both domestically and internationally. The rise of Islamic political movements in the society also characterizes this era. Though partially, political liberalization policies in some of the Arab countries, including Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Turkey, moderate Islamists increased their influence in their countries due to their entry to the official political field.

Most importantly, the global trend of towards a "war on terror" significantly influenced the politics of the Arab monarchies. The global rise of jihadist terrorism posed significant threats to the Islamic world, and the Islamic legitimacy of the ruling monarchies. To counter

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<sup>4</sup> Regarding the challenges of the Gulf monarchies after 1979, see [Freer 2018: 69–105; Wehrey 2014: 27–38].

the threats, the Arab monarchies clarified their stance by alliances with the US's initiative in the "war on terror," against the terrorist attacks. This supplied the regimes with increased Western support, both ideologically and financially. The monarchies strengthened their repression in their domestic societies in the name of combatting terrorism, and Western powers kept silent about their excessive abuses of power. This increased repression was supported by a flow of abundant foreign aid, which also supported socioeconomic development programs. For example, the Jordanian regime strengthened its repression, as Greenwood [2003] evaluates that the Jordanian regime "returned to a strategy of "cabinet rule" via temporary legislation and a strong reliance on the police and security courts to roll back political freedoms and stifle dissent" [Greenwood 2003: 94] in the years after 2001, with the increase in US aid assistance. Jordan obtained over \$1 billion in grant aid from the US, a sum amounting to 28% of the total expenditure in the year [Yom and al-Momani 2008: 52].

Based on these backgrounds, the Arab monarchies started to use Islamic discourse extensively in the domestic and diplomatic dimensions. Through the Islamic messages, the ruling monarchies attempted to gain normative support from the domestic and international audiences, while strengthening their repressive measures against opposition groups while labelling them as the enemies of "true" Islam.

The leading example of the extensive use of Islamic discourse by the monarchies is the Jordanian monarch's "Amman Message" released in 2004. This message was an attempt at a scholarly defense of the official interpretation of "the true nature of Islam and the nature of true Islam" [The Royal Aal Al-bayt Institute for Islamic Thought] with the support of leading *ulama* in the world. According to the "Three points of the Amman Message," it rejects *takfir* (deeming a person an apostate/excommunication) and acknowledges the four Sunni schools of jurisprudence (Ḥanafī, Mālikī, Shāfi'ī and Ḥanbalī), and the two Shi'ī schools (Ja'farī and Zaydī), and the Ibādī and the Zāhirī schools. Furthermore, it accepts the differences among these schools of jurisprudence, and finally, it acknowledges all the fatwas as long as they are issued by an authority who is qualified with the requisites of each school of jurisprudence, with the methodology of the schools of Islamic jurisprudence [The Royal Aal Al-bayt Institute for Islamic Thought].

Importantly, the Amman Message is more than a royal statement. The Message was submitted to international conferences in the world, and gathered 552 signatures from 84 countries, in the period between July 2005 and July 2006.<sup>5</sup> The list of countries who endorsed the Message includes not only those in the Islamic world but also the West, such as Australia, Belgium, France, Germany, the UK, and the US. This illustrates that the official provocation

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<sup>5</sup> The list of conferences to which the Amman Message and Its Three Points were submitted, and that of people who endorsed them are found in <<https://ammanmessage.com/grand-list-of-endorsements-of-the-amman-message-and-its-three-points/>> (accessed on January 31, 2021).

of “moderate” Islam by the Arab monarchies should be considered as a strategy of internal and external Islamic legitimation. Jordan subsequently initiated inter-religious dialogues as well, namely “the Amman Interfaith Message” in 2005, and “A Common Word Between Us and You” in 2007,<sup>6</sup> which share the characteristics of extensive Islamic legitimation strategy.

Such extensive use of Islamic discourse has been increasingly seen in this decade. Saudi Arabia established “King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID)” in Vienna in 2012, with Austria and Spain. Again, this initiative arose from the international concerns about the “climate of mistrust” and the “divisive narrative of an intractable global “clash of civilisations” in the era after the 9.11 terrorist attacks [KAICIID]. The UAE also established the “Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies” in Abu Dhabi in 2014.<sup>7</sup> The Forum also emphasizes international cooperation and their defense over “moderate” Islam, saying that the Forum “gathers hundreds of ulama and Islamic intellectuals from different areas in the world, for the sake of establishing a united position for confronting the disturbances and violent activities in the Islamic world” [Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies]. It holds international conferences annually, and one prominent achievement of this is the Marrakesh Declaration in 2016. The Declaration was issued as a result of an international conference held jointly in Marrakesh, Morocco, by the Forum and the Moroccan government. It examined the issues regarding the rights of religious minorities in the Islamic world with the participation of more than 300 Sunni and Shia leaders from all over the world [Marrakesh Declaration; Petersen and Moftah 2017]. From the viewpoint of Arab monarchy’s Islamic legitimation, the Marrakesh Declaration should be considered as the achievement of both the Abu Dhabi and Moroccan monarchs’ attempts at legitimizing their rule.

At the same time as provoking such peaceful, “moderate” discourse, the Arab monarchies took repressive measures against those groups and people who were not regarded as being “true” to Islam under the official Islamic discourse. Such repressive measures gained momentum in the post-Arab Spring era, when the Islamic political parties in the region, mostly affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood to some extent, declined in the official political space. The most important event in this regard was the collapse of Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt in July 2013. The Muslim Brotherhood won the general election after the overthrow of the Mubarak regime and with Mohamed Morsi elected as the president of the republic in June 2012, they took control of the country but were removed from the government by the coup of the military a year later. Following this coup, the El-Sisi government firmly repressed the Muslim Brotherhood, including the dissolution of the Freedom and Justice Party,<sup>8</sup> a ban

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6 For the details about these inter-religious dialogues, see [Browsers 2011; Ikehata 2017: 48–50].

7 Kourgiotis [2020] gives details of the Forum, in the study of the UAE’s utilization of religion in the international relations.

8 The political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood created in April 2011, after the downfall of the Mubarak regime.

on the Muslim Brotherhood, and the detention of thousands of people, accusing that “they belong to a banned terrorist group and took part in violent protests” [Darwisheh 2018: 65]. Antagonism against the Muslim Brotherhood was not limited to the Egyptian case. The Arab monarchies took tighter measures against the Muslim Brotherhood affiliated organizations in their own countries.

UAE is the most offensive actor in the repression against the Muslim Brotherhood, precisely speaking, the *Islah*, its affiliated society in the UAE. The country detained a number of *Islah* members in the aftermath of the Arab Spring,<sup>9</sup> and finally put the society on the list of “terrorist organizations” and outlawed their activities in 2014 [Reuters 2014]. The government justified these tough measures against the oppositions on the grounds that their discourse “incited insecurity and existential threats to the state and its political sovereignty” [al-Zo’by and Başkan: 406–407].

Other monarchies were less offensive against the Muslim Brotherhood, but they took repressive measures against the Brotherhood to some degrees. This is striking, because the monarchies have historically created a mutual relationship between them to counter other oppositional movements. For example, the Saudi monarchy had long been on good terms with the Muslim Brotherhood, and had accepted its members fleeing from the harsh repressions under Nasser’s Egypt or Hafez al-Assad’s Syria, to counter against Arab nationalist and leftist ideologies [Mattheisen 2015: 4]. However, frustrated with the growing criticism against the Saudi regime at large since the Arab Spring, the Saudi regime took repressive measures against the Muslim Brotherhood. Saudi Arabia eventually designated the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization in 2014 [BBC News 2014]. Bahrain, a close ally with Saudi Arabia, did not take the decision to designate the Muslim Brotherhood affiliated group in Bahrain<sup>10</sup> as a terrorist group, but showed the regime’s support to the Saudi and the UAE’s fight against the Muslim Brotherhood across the region [Darwich 2017: 1298]. In Jordan, the regime has historically created a symbiotic relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood as a “loyal opposition” [Köprülü 2017], to counter oppositions. The Hashemite regime did not designate the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist group, but the regime strengthened its repressive attitude towards the group after the Arab Spring.<sup>11</sup>

The stability of the Arab monarchies that we are witnessing today might convince us that the monarchies’ attempts at legitimizing their rule by Islam have been successful. However,

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9 Al-Zo’by and Başkan [2015: 406] reports that the UAE authorities had detained 72 people by the end of 2012, most of whom were members of the *Islah*.

10 The al-Minbar National Islamic Society (*Jam‘īya al-Minbar al-Waṭanī al-Islāmī*) is a political organization affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood. In a monarchy where the Sunni ruling family reigns over the Shi’a dominated population, al-Minbar has served as a crucial ally to the regime. Regarding the development of political movements in Bahrain, see [Moore-Gilbert 2016; Wehrey 2013].

11 Ryan [2018: 73–76] describes how the Jordanian government attempts to weaken and divide the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan.

the social responses in the monarchies do not confirm the effect of Islamic legitimation. Legitimacy should be accompanied by the ruled population's acceptance of the ruler's claims as being justified. What we are witnessing in the Arab monarchies is the continued dissent against the ruling regime, especially in the form of radical, violent activities. For example, Ryan [2018: 76] refers to a trend in Jordan shifting from the Muslim Brotherhood toward more Salafist camps, part of which led to them crossing the border into Syria to join the Syrian civil war as jihadist fighters either in the camp of al-Qā'ida affiliated Jabha al-Nuṣra, or the "Islamic State." This has had domestic repercussions in the form of terrorist attacks: for example, in Jordan ten people's lives were lost in the "Islamic State" led attack in al-Karak in 2016, which was the first terrorist attack since the Amman bombings in 2005. Such incidents would consolidate the regime's status as a leader of "moderate" Islam, of inter-religious dialogue, and of the fight against discrimination against the Muslims in the world, but it has not been easy for the Arab monarchy's Islamic legitimation strategy to heal the divisions in their own societies.

### **Conclusion**

This article has examined the current situation of Islamic legitimacy in the Arab monarchies. In the first section, it reviewed the existing literature and proposed a new framework for understanding Islamic legitimacy in the Arab monarchies today. In contrast to the existing literature that focuses merely on the historical roots of the ruling family and its domestic influence, the new framework, extensive Islamic legitimacy, broadened the scope to the international dimensions of the Islamic legitimacy. Based on this framework, the following sections examined the historical development of the Arab monarchies and their use of Islamic legitimation strategies. In the course of growing the importance of controlling radical Islamic movements, especially after the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the 9.11 attack in the US, the Arab monarchies started to launch royal Islamic discourses in the international sphere. Referring to the examples of Jordan, UAE (Abu Dhabi), and other monarchies, this article described two conflicting features of these moves: firstly, gathering international support to the fight against terrorism or religious discrimination in world, both normatively and financially; secondly, utilizing the "moderate" discourse as a façade of repression to both domestic and international audience. Such a move is gaining momentum in the post Arab Spring era, after the Muslim Brotherhood lost power in Egypt.

The very fact that Arab monarchies survive today while maintaining their repressive Islamic legitimation strategies seems to illustrate that they have succeeded in gaining the people's acceptance of the strategies and the ruling regime. However, we should not lose sight of the possible repercussions from society in opposition to these repressive measures. The repressive characteristics of the extensive Islamic legitimation strategies inevitably contradict

the veneer of the legitimate ruler. The continued Islamic opposition in various forms in the region, especially violent ones, imply this issue. If the balance between repression and inclusion were to swing towards repressive, their Islamic legitimacy would fade away and the Arab monarchies would have to tighten their authoritarian regime without legitimacy.

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