«THEORIES OF MODERNIZATION AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF TRADITIONAL SOCIETIES IN THE CONTEMPORARY ARAB WORLD»

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	The article analyses the key stages in the development of modernization theory and its critiques, with a view to highlighting the shift from universal models to more culturally sensitive approaches. The article discusses political and social transformations in Arab monarchies, including reforms in institutional structures and the efforts of ruling elites to stabilise and modernize governance systems.

INTRODUCTION

The process of modernization, defined as the transformation of traditional societies into modern ones, is a crucial factor in socio-economic and political development. Contemporary modernization theories delineate a series of stages and approaches, striking a balance between universal principles and the distinctive national development aspects. In the Arab world, particularly in the Gulf monarchies, modernization is a process that incorporates traditional and contemporary governance methods. This process has gained significant relevance in the context of strategic initiatives like Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, which aims to diversify the economy and strengthen social institutions. This study focuses on analysing modernization theories and their application in Arab countries, taking into account the specific political and social transformations that are currently shaping the region.

METHODS

This study made use of both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The following methods were employed:

The historical-analytical method was employed to examine the evolution of modernization theories and their application in Arab countries.

A comparative analysis was conducted to compare modernization patterns across various Arab nations, including Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman, and Kuwait.

A qualitative content analysis was used to analyse strategic documents (e.g., Vision 2030) and official statements on modernization reforms.

A sociocultural approach was utilized to assess the impact of traditions and national characteristics on modernization processes.

In accordance with the prevailing tenets of social science, the concept of modernization is understood to encompass a number of interrelated aspects. Firstly, the term 'modernization' is used to describe the ongoing process of the Industrial Revolution, which led to the emergence of a small group of highly developed states with advanced technologies. Secondly, it encompasses the endeavours of other countries to narrow the gap and attain a level of development comparable to that of the most advanced nations (this phenomenon is frequently referred to as "catch-up" or "catching-up" modernization). The third aspect comprises the unceasing endeavours of the most developed countries to augment their advancement through innovations and reforms across a range of domains, including the economy and social sectors. This enables them to respond effectively to contemporary challenges.

Accordingly, when viewed through the lens of this typology, transformation can be situated within the second category of the modernization process, which encompasses the aspiration of less developed countries to catch up with their advanced counterparts. It is important to note, however, that transformation can only occur effectively in societies that are sufficiently industrialised and urbanised. The concept of 'transformation' (derived from the Latin 'transformato', meaning 'conversion, transformation, modification') signifies a restructuring of the forms and methods of

economic activity, as well as a change in its objectives[1]. In a broader context, to transform means to convert or change something from one state into another[2]. This concept should be associated with changes that result in its qualitative transformation and development.

In studying this process, it is essential to consider transformation in a holistic manner, as it affects both political and economic systems, which are inherently interconnected. The political and economic aspects of transformation influence one another: the development of a market economy can contribute to the democratisation of political life, while democratisation, in turn, can enhance the liberalisation of the economy. Adopting a comprehensive approach allows for a deeper understanding of the essence and dynamics of the transformation process.

After systemic theories, such as T. Parsons' structural-functional approach[3], first introduced transitological perspectives on the political system—viewing it as a set of elements and relationships addressing current political challenges—modernization theories began to emerge. These theories adopted the core principles of structural-functional analysis as their theoretical foundation.

A significant contribution to the development of modernization theory, which emerged in the 1950s and 1960s, was made by the works of scholars such as David Apter's *The Politics of Modernization* (1965)[4], Gabriel Almond and Bingham Powell's *Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach* (1966)[5], and Shmuel Eisenstadt's *Modernization: Protest and Change* (1966) [6], and *Revolution and the Transformation of Societies* [7], Additionally, the works of Samuel Huntington[8], Talcott Parsons[9], Alain Touraine[10] and Wolfgang Merkel [11] also played a crucial role in shaping the field.

In the field of modernization theory, two principal approaches can be discerned: the "conservative" and the "liberal" approaches.

Those who espouse the "conservative" approach, as exemplified by S. Huntington and H. Linz, perceive the principal obstacle to modernization in the dichotomy between public activism and political participation, on the one hand, and the existence of efficacious institutions for articulating and unifying interests, on the other. However, they also highlight that the lack of preparedness of the general public for governance and their inability to effectively utilise political institutions contribute to the instability of political regimes.

Those who espouse the "liberal" perspective, as exemplified by R. Dahl and G. Almond, regard modernization as essentially entailing the establishment of an open social and political system, facilitated by enhanced social mobility and the incorporation of the population into the political community. The primary criterion for defining political modernization is the extent of public inclusion in the system of political representation. The nature and dynamics of modernization, according to this perspective, are contingent upon the extent of open competition among free elites and the level of ordinary citizens' participation in the political process. It is argued that successful modernization requires the assurance of stability and order through direct dialogue between elites and the population, as well as the mobilisation of the masses.

Over time, modernization theories have increasingly recognized the inadequacy of a strict dichotomy between tradition and modernity. The majority of researchers concur that while technological advancement and the adoption of Western institutions and norms (Westernisation) play a pivotal role, they are not the sole determining factors. They emphasise the secondary nature of these factors, asserting that the success of modernization is contingent upon the prevailing social relations and cultural characteristics of a specific society.

In the latter half of the 1980s, the concept of "modernization bypassing modernity" began to gain

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currency, emphasizing the preservation of sociocultural traditions without the forced adoption of Western models. This concept, proposed by S. Huntington and S. Eisenstadt, does not reject the universality of socio-political development; rather, it advocates a combination of respect for traditions with conscious participation in the modernization process. This approach views modernization as a self-developing process that is contingent on the actions of political elites, the influence of objective circumstances, and the behaviour of ordinary members of society.

Two key terms are explored in this concept: "counter-modernization" and "anti-modernization." Counter-modernization represents an alternative approach to modernization that is not based on Western models, while anti-modernization describes active resistance to this process. According to Alain Touraine[12], modernization is a process through which traditional societies are transformed into modern ones, but this transformation is neither linear nor universal. Touraine emphasizes that modernization involves not only the adoption of technologies and new institutional forms but also profound changes in social structures, cultural values, and the relationships between individuals and society.

According to the analysis of transformations by German scholar Wolfgang Merkel[13], Political science has four main approaches to transformation. These are the systemic approach, structuralism, culturalism and actor-oriented theory. Each is concerned with the causes, successes and failures of democratisation. Those who espouse the systemic approach focus on economic and social factors, whereas structuralists concentrate on state institutions and social structures. Culturalists direct their attention to religion and culture, while supporters of actor-oriented theory direct their attention to the political sphere.

In the opinion of M. Levy, the defining characteristic of modernization is rationalisation. He viewed capital as the most crucial modernising force, capable of disseminating social technologies, values and democratic institutions[14].

T. Parsons identifies four central functional systems that differentiate modernization: the economy (adaptation), politics (goal attainment), social community (integration), and culture (value reproduction)[15]. According to T. Parsons, this development process is considered not only normative but also historically determined.

A significant contribution to the development of modernization theory was made by G. Almond and L. Pye. In particular, G. Almond argues that the main criterion of political modernization is "the involvement of the population in the system of political representation, with the main condition being stability, which is achieved through dialogue between the elite and society"[16]. At the same time, he believes that the responsibility for the success of political modernization lies with the political class. L. Pye holds a similar view, emphasizing the need to expand the number of those involved in making key, socially significant decisions[17]. In this way, the scholar emphasizes the dependence of the legitimacy of government decisions and the government itself on political participation.

For G. Almond and L. Pye, the involvement of the population in political processes is a fundamental factor in political modernization. However, S. Huntington is more cautious about the growth of political participation, viewing it as a threat to modernization if the actual level of mass preparedness does not align with such participation. He links modernization to the level of stability and organization of political institutions. He considers political modernization as one form of political development and associates it with the rationalization of power, the differentiation of structures, and the growth of political activity among the population[18]. According to S. Huntington, the main goal of a modernizing society is to achieve stability, which can only be ensured through strengthening state power. It is not necessary for the political system to conform to Western liberal democracy standards.

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In Huntington's theory, we can already see the beginnings of a new, reflective approach to modernization processes, which was further developed in the works of E. Giddens and U. Beck. This approach critiques not only the concept of a single path of development for all societies based on the Western model, considered the most successful and competitive, but also the very foundation of civilization. In the context of globalization, it became clear that modernization processes have led to a number of issues, such as the inadequate logic of global wealth distribution, religious fundamentalism, high conflict potential, the emergence of a risk society, environmental problems, wars, terrorism, and more. The created "risk society" requires a revision of the traditional approach to politics, taking into account the increased interdependence of many processes in the global world[19].

Thus, when summarizing the views of Western scholars, the development of modernization theories can be divided into three main stages:

First stage (mid-20th century): The theory of modernization emerged against the backdrop of the collapse of colonial empires. It assumed a transition from traditional to modern society based on the Western model, ignoring national specifics.

Second stage (late 1960s – 1970s): The ideas of the first stage were revisited. It was recognized that modern societies could include traditional elements, and modernization could strengthen traditions. Stability and order became important for successful modernization, sometimes requiring authoritarian regimes (S. Huntington).

Third stage (since the late 1980s): The theory acknowledged the possibility of national modernization projects that combine advanced practices with traditions. There was a shift from Eurocentrism to recognizing the value of non-Western civilizations. Modernization began to be viewed as a variable process, taking into account unique national conditions.

Thus, modernization theory evolved to recognize the diversity of development paths that account for cultural and historical specifics.

In the late 1980s and 1990s, significant political changes took place in the Arab world, driven by both internal and external factors. These changes were caused by economic and social transformations, as well as the generational shift in leadership. The new elite, which came to power, aimed to implement not only economic but also socio-political reforms. These reforms included changes in the institutional structure and functions of the state. The goal was to alter the role of state institutions and improve the legal and political situation of citizens.

The 1990s and early 21st century in the Arab world were characterised by a notable increase in the level of political dynamism evident in the process of constitutional development. During this period, numerous countries adopted new constitutions (in Algeria and Oman in 1996, Yemen in 1991, Sudan in 1998, Bahrain in 2002, Qatar in 2003, and others) or made significant amendments to their existing fundamental laws (1990 amendments to the Lebanese constitution, 1996 amendments to the Moroccan constitution, and others). In 1992, the system of state institutions in Saudi Arabia was codified in a document, the "Basic System of Governance," which was adopted by the king and subsequently referred to as the country's constitution. This marked the first instance in the country's history where its system of state institutions was codified in this manner.

It is important to note that, whereas the patterns of constitutional development in Arab countries were previously determined by the nature of their social orientation, at the present stage, most Arab countries in their constitutions proclaim adherence to universally recognised principles and norms of human rights protection, including the UN Charter and other international organisations [20].

Recent political events in the Arab monarchies of the Persian Gulf are referred to as "modernization" by the ruling elites of these countries. The goal of this modernization is to give the existing regimes a more contemporary appearance and increase their stability. To date, there is a significant amount of research dedicated to the process of modernization in the Arab monarchies, known for its widespread dissemination and recognition among Orientalists (G.G. Kosach[21], E.S. Melkumyan [22], V.A. Isaeva, A.A. Tkachenko [23], A.O.

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Filonika, A.I. Yakovleva, D. Adid [24], B. Korani and R. El-Mahdi [25], M. Ottaway [26], F. Verry [27] and others). All researchers agree that a process of political transformation has begun in the Arab monarchies, as well as in the Arab republics, a process recognized by the ruling elites themselves. They gradually realized that the preservation of their political status quo was only possible if they expanded and strengthened their social base. This includes cooperation with representatives of the "educated class," regardless of their background, and turning them into permanent allies who have access to decision-making. For example, in Saudi Arabia, the political system transformed, and a third "center of power" emerged (alongside the traditional alliance between the Al Saud dynasty and the clerical body led by the Al ash-Sheikh family). The "educated class" gained its own, though state-controlled, institutions of influence – the monarch-appointed Consultative Council and partially elected municipal government bodies[28].

In the context of internal political changes, the monarchs initiated a process of reforming the consultative councils, known as "shuras," based on traditional Islamic principles of consultation. This principle, which has long been applied in Muslim societies and states, involves making key decisions collegially, through the exchange of opinions among representatives of various communities with the aim of reaching a consensus.

However, in recent years, there have been notable shifts in this power structure, with a notable trend towards expanding the powers of these bodies and significantly altering the procedures for their formation and functioning. Orientalist G.G. Kosach has already referred to this structure in Saudi Arabia as a "proto-parliament"[29].

In countries such as Oman and Qatar, significant changes have occurred in the system of governance, including the transformation of Shura Councils into parliamentary bodies. These changes include the introduction of universal elections, the extension of voting rights to women, and the expansion of the Councils' powers. In Oman, for example, bills are now discussed in the Consultative Council before being submitted for review by the head of state and the government. Additionally, the Councils have become more active in drafting legislation and amending existing laws. Bahrain has also undergone significant political reforms, leading to the restoration of a parliamentary system of government. The new constitution includes the National Assembly, comprising a lower house (the House of Deputies) and an upper house (the Consultative Council). A key development was granting women the right to vote, which facilitated their active participation in the 2002 elections.

In 1992, Kuwait restored regular elections, adopted the "Basic Law of Governmental Authority," and established a Consultative Council in Saudi Arabia. In 1993, Yemen held its first multi-party elections. In 2002, Bahrain held municipal elections with women's participation and elections to the House of Representatives. The adoption of a new constitution in Qatar in 2003 established the principle of direct elections to the future legislative assembly. In 2005, Saudi Arabia held partial municipal elections, while Egypt conducted its first direct presidential elections. In Kuwait, women were granted the right to both actively and passively participate in elections. In 2006, the UAE held its first partial elections for the Federal National Council, with a quota system for each emirate, while the composition of the Consultative Council of Saudi Arabia was expanded to 150 members. Since 2003, despite the prohibition of political parties, Saudi Arabia has operated the King Abdulaziz National Dialogue Center, which aims to create a platform for communication between different sectors of society and strengthen national unity based on Islamic values [30].

The combination of traditional and modern approaches in governance represents a complex and prolonged process that requires time for the harmonious integration of various elements. In the Arabian

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monarchies, this process began in response to public demand.

We are currently witnessing significant changes in Arab countries, reflected in strategic plans such as Saudi Arabia's «Vision 2030», Oman's «Vision 2040» and Bahrain's «Economic Vision 2030», which signal their commitment to profound political, economic and social change. These initiatives aim to diversify the economy, reduce dependence on oil, and develop high-tech and sustainable industries. Youth has become the main driver of these changes, with nationalism playing a key role in supporting new ideas and projects. As a result, the region is opening up much faster than in previous decades, accompanied by social change and increased liberalisation, which in turn strengthens internal stability and contributes to economic growth.

In particular, Saudi Arabia's ambitious «Vision 2030» aims to transform its economy into a diversified and innovative one, while maintaining respect for Islamic values and national traditions. Reforms include the development of high-tech industries, tourism, education and infrastructure, as well as greater youth participation in economic and political life. These changes, while challenging, are opening up new opportunities for prosperity and strengthening the country's position on the international stage.

Significant social and cultural changes are currently taking place in Arab countries, including improvements in women's rights and religious moderation, which are part of the broader process of societal modernization. These transformations present both opportunities for further development and challenges, such as overcoming conservative sentiments and ensuring stability. The slow and cautious approach to reforms is justified, as the introduction of new institutions for popular representation and accountability could threaten political stability. Therefore, while modernization is crucial, maintaining a balance between change and stability remains key.

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