

# MIDDLE EAST / WESTERN ASIA

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202 United Cities and Local Governments



## I. Introduction

The geographical region of Western Asia/the Middle East encompasses Turkey, the Near East<sup>1</sup> –with the exception of Israel–, the Arabian Peninsula, and Western Asia, including Islamic Republic of Iran. The region has, for many decades, undergone political, military, ethnic, and religious tensions that have affected its stability. Of the countries that we will be examining, seven are monarchies (Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates), six are republics (Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey and Yemen) and the autonomous territory of Palestine, which has not yet all the attributes of a state. Indeed Turkey is the only country that has enjoyed stability, for several decades, based on secular and democratic institutions. The religious factor is also important and omnipresent throughout the region, in the constitution and across private and political spheres.

This grouping of over 260 million inhabitants is dominated from the demographic standpoint by Turkey (74.7 million inhabitants) and Islamic Republic of Iran (69.5 million). The population is now predominantly urban (Syria 50.1%, Islamic Republic of Iran 67%, Iraq 67.2%, Turkey 67.3%, Oman 77.6%, Jordan 79%, Lebanon 87.5%, Kuwait 96.3%), with the exception of Yemen (25.6%). But the existence of a few industrialized economies and the wealth generated by oil revenues must not lead one to overlook either the huge differences that exist between the countries of the region, or their sometimes mediocre performances in terms of education, governance, and freedom –performances which were highlighted by the 2004 UNDP report.

Nevertheless, in spite of the ceaseless political, military, and religious tensions, wars and other perennial obstacles to the regions' stability as a whole, and certainly to the development of local autonomy and decentralization, some advances deserve recognition: the first local elections in Saudi Arabia, the holding of democratic local elec-

tions in Palestine, the restoration of mayoral elections by universal suffrage in Jordan, and the 2002 constitutional reforms in Bahrain. Under pressure from elite segments of their populations, Islamic Republic of Iran and Kuwait have also begun tentative changes in this direction. Turkey, which has had a modern municipal system since 1930 and whose citizens as a whole support decentralization as one of the criteria for membership of the European Union, is something of an exception to this description; three new laws favorable to decentralization were adopted in Turkey in 2004-2005.

These changes, however, cannot conceal a broader trend throughout the region –Turkey excepted– toward the gradual confiscation of local authority by central governments. In certain cases, even the tasks of providing street cleaning, sewer maintenance, and public health measures, are being taken away from local governments. The most extreme case is Jordan where the provision of 13 different types of service has been taken back by the state. This form of centralized control typically involves privatization, under the pretext of improving efficiency and overall services.

Decentralization only appears in the constitutions of Lebanon, Syria, Islamic Republic of Iran, and Turkey. Turkey has a middle-level local government, but in the other three countries decentralization applies to only the lowest tier, municipalities.

Apart from the Sultanate of Oman, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain, where the roles of the municipal councils have been defined from the start as purely and openly consultative, legislation in other countries in this region – especially Kuwait and Turkey – does grant certain powers to local authorities.

Nevertheless, the existing laws rarely present a precise list of local powers, such specifics being the province of future implementation orders promised but never published. The vagueness of such laws

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1. *Insofar as there does not exist any generally accepted definition of the terms 'Near East' and 'Middle East,' we shall refer to the former Levant, (Lebanon, Syria, Palestine and Jordan) as the 'Near East,' and the countries of the Arabian Peninsula, Iraq, and Islamic Republic of Iran, as the 'Middle East.' Turkey for our purposes here is considered part of Western Asia.*

*With the exception of Turkey, local authorities' limited financial independence is coupled with a priori administrative control of local council proceedings, as well as a posteriori control of all work by local authorities*

creates overlapping areas of responsibility in practically all fields. The central government uses this vagueness to retain most of the powers, leaving municipal authorities with only derisory duties.

Reliance on conveniently vague laws typically results in a paucity of financial resources for local authorities, and the concomitant restriction of the services local governments can realistically provide. Apart from Turkey, the only country in which local authorities have decent (although not large) resources at their disposal is Palestine, where they keep up to 90% of the taxes they collect plus income provided by non-government organizations (NGOs). In the majority of nations in the region, obtaining money for operations and services requires unceasing appeals to the central government, or to the organizations that manage national finances. One result: increasing levels of debt.

A single figure is enough to describe the scale of the problem. Whereas the local government share of public expenditure represents 20% of the gross domestic product (GDP) in OECD countries, money for local government averages only about 5% of GDP in the Arab countries.

Furthermore, with the exception of Turkey, local authorities' limited financial independence is coupled with *a priori* administrative control of local council proceedings, as well as *a posteriori* control of all work by local authorities. Together, these two measures ensure complete control of local powers by central government.

By contrast with Turkey, there is, in Islamic Republic of Iran and Syria, 'cascading' supervision of lower councils by higher councils. In Palestine repeated outbreaks of violence often make it impossible to submit matters to the central power, leaving local authorities with *de facto* autonomy.

Local governance is underpinned by local democracy, which is itself boosted and

supported by civil society. Within the region, the voice of civil society is sometimes hesitant to make its opinions heard, and this in turn has repercussions for decentralization and local government.

This trend toward centralization has experienced an unprecedented intensification since the first Gulf War. In fact, because of a particularly unstable geo-strategic situation due to the upsurge of armed conflicts, the heightening of community and sectarian tensions and the interplay of international pressure, the governments of the region are haunted by the fear of the break-up of national entities. This is particularly the case where the ethnic or religious groups in power are a minority, or comprise a very slight majority. In Islamic Republic of Iran, which is a mosaic of 80 communities, 51% of the population is Persian; in Lebanon, 18 communities, each with a different religion, live together; Jordan has a very strong Palestinian minority; and several countries in the region have a large Kurdish community.

## II. Evolution of local government structures

The following table presents local government organization in the region.

Before going further with an analysis of the region's governmental structures and their recent evolution, it is necessary to emphasize that Turkey is unique in this part of the world. Turkey is included in this study of the Near East and Middle East because of its geographical location at the gates of the Levant, and its majority Muslim religion. However, as Yves Lacoste has stressed, "The North-South model experiences a stumbling block in the very exceptional case of Turkey"<sup>2</sup>. Turkey is a secular state adjacent to Europe, but most of its residents are Islamic. Turkey is geographically part of the Middle East; its topography affects many Middle Eastern states, and has done so for countless millennia. Within the framework of a secular state, Turkey is relatively cen-

2. Yves Lacoste,  
Géopolitique,  
Larousse, 2006,  
p. 227.

Table 1 Administrative organization

Country	Population / land area	Political regime	Federal entities or autonomous regions	Second tier	Local level
Bahrain	0.727 m 690 km <sup>2</sup> GDP (per capita): 14,370 USD*	Constitutional monarchy			Municipality (12)
Iran, Isl. Rep.	67.7 m 1,648,200 km <sup>2</sup> GDP (per capita): 2,770 USD	Islamic republic		Province (28) Department (314)	City/town (931) Small town Village
Iraq	26.5 m** 438,320 km <sup>2</sup> GDP (per capita): 928 USD***	Parliamentary republic	Kurdistan	Region Governorate District	Municipality
Jordan	5.4 m 88,800 km <sup>2</sup> GDP (per capita): 2,500 USD	Constitutional monarchy		Governorate (12)	Municipality (99)
Kuwait	2.5 m 17,818 km <sup>2</sup> GDP (per capita): 24,040 USD*	Absolute monarchy (Emirate)		Governorate (5)	Municipality
Lebanon	3.6 m 10,452 km <sup>2</sup> GDP (per capita): 6,180 USD	Parliamentary republic		Region (6) ( <i>Mohafazah</i> ) Department ( <i>Caza</i> )	Municipality (930)
Oman	2.6 m 309,500 km <sup>2</sup> GDP (per capita): 9,070 USD*	Absolute monarchy (Sultanate)			Municipality (43)
Palestine	3.5 m 5,842 km <sup>2</sup> (The West Bank) +365 km <sup>2</sup> (Gaza Strip)	Palestinian Authority'		Governorate (14) (9 in the West Bank 5 in the Gaza Strip)	Municipality (74) (63 in the West Bank 11 in the Gaza Strip)
Qatar	0.813 m 11,000 km <sup>2</sup> GDP (per capita): 28,833 USD***	Absolute monarchy (Emirate)			Municipality (10)
Saudi Arabia	24.6 m 2,149,700 km <sup>2</sup> GDP (per capita): 11,770 USD	Absolute monarchy		Province (13) Governorate Center (A or B)	Regional council (7) Principal council (5) Council (107) Group of villages (64)
Syria	19 m 185,180 km <sup>2</sup> GDP (per capita): 1,380 USD	Authoritarian presidential republic		Department (14)	Town (107) Small town (248) Village (207) Rural unit
Turkey	72.6 m 783,820 km <sup>2</sup> GDP (per capita): 4,710 USD	Parliamentary republic		Special departmental administration (81)	Municipality (3,519) <sup>3</sup> 16 Metropolitan Municipalities Village (35,000)
United Arab Emirates	4.5 m 83,600 km <sup>2</sup> GDP (per capita): 23,770 USD*	Federation of absolute monarchies (Emirates)	Emirates (7)		Municipality
Yemen	21 m 527,970 km <sup>2</sup> GDP (per capita): 600 USD	Authoritarian presidential republic		Governorates	Municipality (326) Provincial municipality (20) District municipality (326)

Source: World Bank 2005, except: \* Source: World Bank 2004. \*\* Source: World Bank 2003. \*\*\* Source: World Bank 2002

3. Beside these ordinary municipalities, the metropolitan municipalities provide urban services at the metropolitan level to ensure greater efficiency, as well as harmonization and coordination between municipal districts. The metropolitan municipalities supervise and provide assistance for district municipalities.

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tralized, but its local government system is subject to a constitutional jurisprudence that is extraordinary in the region.

Turkey is the only pluralist secular democracy, and has always attached great importance to developing its relations with European countries. Historically, Turkish culture has had a profound impact over much of Eastern and Southern Europe. After the First World War and the proclamation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, the Kemalism, to which the present Turkish state is heir, deliberately distinguished its political and social system from that of the Arab countries. This was particularly emphasized by the abolition of the Caliphate and the adoption of the Latin alphabet, modified only slightly<sup>4</sup>. Turkey's modern democratic conception and acceptably functional institutions present more contrast than similarity to other Middle Eastern nations. This contrast is no less apparent in regard to decentralization.

## II.1. The objectives of decentralization

By means of constitutional and legislative reforms during the past ten years, all the countries in the region have embarked upon a change of direction toward increased administrative decentralization. However, far from being uniform, the underlying motives and results are quite different and wide-ranging.

### a) External factors

*Membership of the European Union.* As a country where decentralizing reforms are increasing in scale, Turkey has been motivated by its desire to gain membership of the European Union, whose criteria for membership include respect for human rights. It is therefore within the framework of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, signed in 1988 and ratified in 1992, that this wide-ranging renovation of state structures – including new local government laws and constitutional changes – is taking place.

*U.S.A. policy in the region.* The United States maintains a military presence in the region, particularly in Iraq. The promotion of the principles of « good governance » and democracy have become the declared US policy in the region. With the on-going support of different countries, the United States sustains its regional policy through direct and indirect means.

*Economic pressures.* Along with political pressures and within a context of neoconservative globalization, the non-petroleum-producing countries – Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine – face demands from international backers for the restructuring, not only of their weak economies, but also of their societies. The strengthening or the establishment of local government is one of the pillars of these reforms in that it constitutes the first step in applying the principles of good governance.

### b) Internal factors

*Internal population pressure.* Although civilian society is not accustomed to making its voice heard, there has recently been an increasing demand for local democracy by two groups whose interests converge only in this single area. Both appear to see in moves toward democracy the means of bringing victory to their overall concept of the state. One group, often referred to as radicals, wants a more rigid system of government. The other group, the intellectual elite, wants to establish real democracy. An example of this urging toward democracy is the 100 Saudi intellectuals who in January 2003 presented the Crown Prince with a petition requesting changes; similar pressure led the Jordanian government to restore the election of mayors by universal suffrage.

*Coming to terms with demands for autonomy.* In the specific case of Iraq, where internal pressures are nationalist in nature, decentralization has enabled the granting of extensive autonomy, including legislative powers, to Kurdistan. However, these powers do not grant or imply independence for that region.

4. These reforms also fell within the framework of the 'Six Arrows' as Ataturk's general nationalist policy aimed to ensure the modernization of Turkey.

*The need for economic restructuring.* With the exceptions of Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Yemen, the economies of the region are based on oil; only Syria and Turkey can be considered industrialized countries.

Yet the exhaustion of oil reserves in the near future appears likely<sup>5</sup>. The governments of oil-producing nations are therefore trying to anticipate a profound structural change in their economies to facilitate rapid expansion of private initiative. This concerns Syria in particular. Dubai, which does not have any oil, but which benefits from oil revenues through the federation of the Emirates, represents a striking example of success in this type of restructuring.

*Restoring impetus to governance in general.* After almost 30 years of systematic destruction of Palestinian state structures by Israel, the Palestinians, according to the 1993 Oslo Accords, wanted to set their state structures back on their feet in order to construct a state. However, as it is impossible to establish a real central government inasmuch as there is no territorial continuity between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the only way of providing services to the people and to enable them to take effective action regarding the affairs which concern them is through the local governments. This removal of central authority has greatly increased public confidence and trust in local Palestinian government, the institution closest to its citizens.

It is surprising that providing better public services is mentioned as a concern only in Turkey. One explanation may be that, for this purpose, administrative decentralization (*déconcentration*) in Saudi Arabia, and a rather authoritarian management are perceived as quite effective. In fact, the management of the city of Dubai, which is a resounding success in terms of town planning, infrastructure, economic development, and service provision, results solely from the will of the Emir.

## II.2. Encouraging progress

In Turkey, where the decentralization process is most advanced, three new reforms<sup>6</sup> were passed in 2004-2005. Furthermore, the 2005 union of municipalities' law<sup>7</sup> will finally make the villages a real tier of decentralization. It is now possible for the local authorities, on their own initiative, to organize referendums on specific local issues —an interesting system of direct democracy.

Likewise, Iraq's 2004 constitution establishes decentralization as a priority, (Iraq's 1990 constitution did not) devoting an entire chapter to "regions, governorates, and municipalities." This document sanctions the autonomy of Kurdistan, which becomes a "region" with a regional government, parliament, and judicial authority. Moreover, it encourages the creation of regions by the grouping together of governorates. In addition, and in contrast to other countries of the region, except Turkey, where administrative decentralization (*déconcentration*) and delegation prevail, Iraq's new constitution organizes decentralization on the basis of the administrative and financial autonomy of local authorities, including regional and municipal councils<sup>8</sup>.

Following this same trend, in 1999 Islamic Republic of Iran finally achieved a long-standing reform: the elections of councils. This reform was first presented as far back as the 1907 Constitutional Revolution, and was again championed after the revolution of 1979. Some 92 years after it was first proposed, this change took effect under the presidency of the reformer Khatami.

Another important reform is currently in progress in Jordan, a country whose king has made good governance principles one of the national objectives. This reform aims to divide the country into three regions, each of which will have its own regional parliament as well as local management of its own affairs.

5. On this subject, it is interesting to compare the official figures provided by the governments and the large oil companies with those provided by ASPO.

6. On the municipalities (no. 5393 of 3 July 2005), on the metropolitan municipalities (no. 5216 of 10 July 2004) and on the special administration of the department (law no. 5302 of 22 February 2005).

7. Law no. 5355 of 26 May 2005.

8. In actual fact, this is only really applied in the north, in Kurdistan. Elsewhere, the local authorities only enjoy a weak level of autonomy, and it is not uncommon to find that municipal councilors and mayors are appointed directly.

Lebanon used to have properly functioning municipal governance, but this lost all substance during the 1975-1990 war, as security concerns led to the centralizing of all services within the different ministries. Executive power was concentrated<sup>9</sup> in the office of a President of the Republic, who was always a Maronite Christian. However, at the end of the war, the Taëf Pact, a constitutionally valid document signed to put an end to the war, made more room for all communities. In the first place, executive power passed to the Council of Ministers, whose members represent different faiths in proportion to their demographic importance. The document also mentions administrative decentralization as one of the main areas for reform, thereby distinguishing itself from the constitution, which does not mention it at all. The new accord directs that "a more extensive decentralization be adopted at the level of the smallest administrative units"<sup>10</sup> and that "the municipalities, agglomerations, and unions of municipalities see their resources strengthened by the provision of the necessary financial resources"<sup>11</sup>. Within this framework, it became far easier for local communities to voice their demands for a greater degree of self-government; the creation of 25 municipalities since 2004 testifies to the acceptance of this reform at high levels of the Lebanese state.

in 2002, states that<sup>13</sup> the law "will do so as to ensure the independence of local authorities under the supervision and direction of the State," and "will do so as to ensure that the local authorities are able to manage and supervise local affairs." In Saudi Arabia, the first election of half the municipal councilors was organized in 2005.

Yet in Turkey the reform of the executive committees (*encümen*) –the entities responsible for municipal management– still raises concerns. In fact, each tier of decentralization –Special Provincial Administrations (SPA), ordinary and metropolitan municipality and village– has a deliberative body called a council, which is elected by universal suffrage. At the municipal and village level, the executive officer (the mayor or the *Muhtar* respectively) is also elected by universal suffrage. On the other hand, at the top provincial level is a governor appointed by the state. Moreover, each council works in conjunction with an executive body called the 'executive committee.' Before the reform, this executive committee was fully appointed in the metropolitan municipalities, fully elected in the SPA and half was elected and half was appointed in the ordinary municipalities. The new legislation directs that, without exception, half of all executive committees must be elected and half must be appointed. Although this measure is based on a managerial vision of local government management, the presence on an executive committee of members appointed by the mayor or the governor runs counter to the full exercise of local democracy and decentralization. It is, moreover, the interpretation that the Turkish Constitutional Court gave of it<sup>14</sup> in 1988: all deliberative bodies must be elected. It is therefore not impossible that these texts will be amended in the near future.

Likewise, according to the new law<sup>15</sup>, the SPA council now elects a chairman from among its own members. Although this chairman is responsible for the council agenda, it is the governor who stays at the

9. *Lebanese constitution*, art. 17.

10. *Taëf Pact* [III : A, art. 3].

11. *Id. Art. 4*

12. *Maire de quartier*. This institution exists in many Arab countries, including Lebanon.

13. Art. 50.

14. Notice no. 1988/23 of 22 June 1988 and decision no. 1988/19 of 13 June 1988.

15. Law no. 5302 of 4 March 2005, art. 11.

In a similar case, the Palestinian Authority, which was formed as a result of the Oslo Accords, was especially keen to proceed with the strengthening of local government. The population naturally made these bodies its favorite forum for public expression of demands, including practical requests regarding services. All this was in a situation where the increasingly weak states, or the *mokhtars*<sup>12</sup>, who had lost the confidence of the population because of their suspect role during the occupation, were not in a position to ensure the provision of services. As viable power centers, these municipalities are becoming increasingly autonomous.

Two other cases also deserve mention. In Bahrain the new constitution, promulgated



head of the executive committee and who represents the SPA<sup>16</sup>.

In Islamic Republic of Iran, the new law regarding councils, which was adopted at its first reading by the Islamic Consultative Assembly, also seems intended to restrict the councils' room to maneuver.

### II.3. The persistence of the centralized model

#### a) Central state supervision

These advances toward further decentralization are quite significant, even though, for the most part, they are still reforms on paper or are restricted to administrative decentralization only. Most such reforms still await the fiscal and economic decentralization that is essential for their implementation. Consequently, the standard system of government in the region remains strongly centralized. Moreover, it bears mentioning that some countries, such as Oman and Qatar, do not even mention local powers in their constitution. In Saudi Arabia, provisions for local governance are also absent from the constitution; instead, they are specified in a separate text, the 1992 'law on the provinces.' Even this document does not deal with municipalities. Rather it addresses only provinces, all of which are controlled by princes of the royal family.

Independent decision-making by local authorities is allowed in Turkey, Palestine, and Iraq, but in other countries in the region, real decisions are made only by higher authorities, either a single designated official or some lesser officials holding power through a complex of arcane laws. Where there is a clear, single channel of authority, municipalities are subject *de facto* and *de jure* to government authority through their relevant ministry. This is the case in Saudi Arabia, where local authorities are dependent on the Ministry of Rural and Municipal Affairs. In Jordan, little can be done without the backing of the territory's

governor; in Bahrain, Oman, and Lebanon up to 80% of the decisions must be checked by the Ministry of the Interior, or by a governor with regional executive powers.

Other governments practice a more insidious form of control. Under the guise of a nominal freedom to make decisions, an arsenal of measures appreciably limit the decision-making powers of local authorities.

*'Cascading supervision.'* In Syria and Islamic Republic of Iran, there is 'cascading supervision' of lower-tier councils by higher-tier councils. In Islamic Republic of Iran, the constitution specifies, moreover, that "the provincial governors and the mayors [...] must apply, within their jurisdiction, the decisions of the Higher Provincial Council"<sup>17</sup>, a fact that clearly calls into question public professions of a desire for decentralization.

*The executive committees.* Two countries have, in addition to local councils, municipal legislative bodies vested with executive powers; these are called executive committees in Turkey, executive *bureaux* in Syria. While the members of local councils are elected by the people, the members of executive committees or the executive *bureaux*, are appointed by more or less direct procedures<sup>18</sup>. In Turkey, the constitution<sup>19</sup> defines local authorities as bodies that have a legal personality, and whose legislative bodies are elected. This, in fact, opens the way to the election of all or part of the members of the executive committees, as much at the Special Provincial Administration level as at the municipality level.<sup>20</sup>

Syria's case is slightly different. There a third of the members of the executive body can be recruited from outside the municipal council –on the basis of criteria which are far from clear.

*The ambivalent role of popular councils.* In addition to the municipal councils, the *mahalle muhtarligi* (neighborhood councils) chaired by a *muhtar* have existed in

16. *Id. Art. 25 et 29.*

17. *Art. 103 'Of the power [of the Higher Provincial Council] on local government.'*

18. *In Turkey, the appointed half of the executive council is selected by the mayor from among the municipality's chief officers, within the framework of the 'strong mayor system.'*

19. *Art. 127.*

20. *The Turkish Constitutional Court has ruled that the executive councils are governing bodies and that their members must be elected.*



Turkey since the Ottoman Empire. They are very similar to the Lebanese *mokhtar*. The role of these local community leaders was made official by Article 9 of the new municipal law.<sup>21</sup> This law gives them official functions, notably in the field of the registration of births, marriages, and deaths, and in tax collection. In addition, they ensure contact with the municipality and represent their local community area on the 'town councils' by passing on the requests and comments of the people from their administrative area. Introduced by the new municipal law, the "city council" –*kent konseyi*– is a consultative institution, an outcome brought by the success of the Turkey Local Agenda 21 Program. This constitutes a unique mechanism of governance in Turkey that brings together the central government, local government and civil society within a framework of partnership. In general, this participatory mechanism encompasses a broad spectrum of local stakeholders, representatives of working groups, neighborhood committees, women and youth councils.

In other countries, however, authorities working in parallel with the municipal council can represent an important opposition force in the hands of the central government, particularly when they have the potential to report on and perhaps slow down the work of the municipal councils. It is this second situation which applies for the Syrian 'popular organizations,' which represent various socio-professional categories, such as manual workers, farmers, and women, and which must make up at least 60% of local councils. Furthermore, their elected representatives, even those not on the municipal council, have the right to monitor their activities.

#### b) The weight of the political and social system

The report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) indicates that "the progress in the field of decentralization in the Arab countries has been very

slow, particularly because of the uneven level of involvement in decentralizing reforms."<sup>22</sup> In fact, it is difficult not to see in the persistent strong centralization a reluctance on the part of the governments of the region to accept local governance and the independence inherent therein.

*The refusal of a loss of sovereignty.* The main reason for government distrust of local governance is fear of a loss of sovereignty. Excluding Turkey, where power belongs to the institutions, governing tradition is based on the personal exercise of power, with the government, on its own initiative, delegating a part to people of its own choice. Given this context, to put in place real decentralization would require a complete overhaul of state structures, beginning in some cases with a separation of powers and election of legislative bodies by universal suffrage.

In the particular case of Lebanon, which nevertheless satisfies these conditions, the only area of agreement of the traditional community leaders is their wish to put a brake on the resumption of municipal governance. In fact, they consider local municipal authorities to be usurping some of their prerogatives. They seem to believe that municipal authorities are only intended to provide services for their supporters in exchange for their votes. This vicious circle keeps the local councils in a state of lethargy. Members of parliament, who are themselves traditional leaders or who owe allegiance to them, use their legislative position to gradually weaken the power of the municipalities.

This analysis is equally valid for those states where members of the ruling families, or those of a political party, or of a dominant movement have all the power.

*The security factor.* The other factor which hinders the decentralization of the states is security. Some large fault-lines cross the region, the main one being the community organization. In fact, the risk of subversion is

21. Law no. 5393.

22. ELISSAR SARROUH,  
Decentralized  
Governance for  
Development in the  
Arab States, report  
presented during  
the forum on  
governance in the  
Arab states, Sana'a,  
6-9 September  
2003.



far from negligible in those states with a large Shiite community, as in Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Bahrain. Neither are Islamic Republic of Iran, Lebanon, and Iraq safe from implosion.

*The inertia of civilian society.* Again excepting Turkey, those in power are not alone in their indifference to decentralization. In the general population, it is mostly identifiable groups who desire increased decentralization. Such groups include the cultured urban elite, extremist parties, and those who see it as a means to autonomy or even sovereign independence.

Civilian society reduced to its most simple expression is typically comprised to a greater or lesser degree of client networks, which are perceived as being more efficient and more reliable than the state, sharp divisions among different cultural and religious communities, and a widespread tradition of submission to central authority. Indeed, in this region the desire for freedom is embodied far more in religion than in politics, suggesting that the larger citizenry plays an insignificant role as a driving force for change. Evidence for this is the absence of political parties in six of the 14 countries studied (Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Oman and Qatar). In Jordan, political parties were not legalized until 1992. Further support for the weakness of political systems for expressions of popular will can also be seen in the rapid expansion of radical religious movements. It is through religious organizations that we receive calls for reform, the popular expression of demands that can not be voiced successfully by political means.

*The influence of the religious factor.* Most of the countries in the region base their legislation on the *Sharia*. This is the case of Saudi Arabia, (Const. art. 1), Bahrain (Art. 2), Islamic Republic of Iran (Art. 2), Jordan (Art. 2), Kuwait (Art. 2), Oman (Art. 2), Qatar (Art. 2), and Yemen (Art. 3). The Syrian Constitution establishes a slight nuance by indicating that "Islamic jurispru-

dence will be one of the main sources of legislation." The exceptions are Turkey and Iraq, which are secular states, and Lebanon, where a hybrid system entrusts private legal matters to the religious tribunals of each religious community, Christian or Muslim, but takes as its basis secular business and public law.

The original feature of Islam in comparison with other religions is that it provides guidance not only on private life, but also on the system of government. This, however, does not mean that its interpretation is totally unequivocal, and the two famous *ayets*—"Consult them in the affairs which concern them"<sup>23</sup> and "Let them consult each other"<sup>24</sup>—gives rise to a wide range of interpretations. It is on the narrowest of these interpretations that Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Oman have based their decision to replace the legislative bodies with a consultative assembly, the *Majlis-al-Shura*; the same *ayets* have, on the other hand, given rise to the election of councils in Islamic Republic of Iran and Jordan.

*The perception of a supranational identity.* With the exception of Oman and Turkey, all the countries of the region claim in their constitutions to be an "Arab nation," (Bahrain, Jordan, Lebanon, Kuwait, Qatar, Syria, and Yemen), or an "Islamic nation" (Islamic Republic of Iran); both in the case of Saudi Arabia. This is seen as the ultimate goal toward which the national structure would be a stage. It is a question of the translation into political terms of the sense of belonging to the Umma (the community of Islamic believers). This mythic identity would in no case succeed in resulting in a federal reality, but it tells us a good deal about religious aspirations and about the dominance of the group over the individual, and of global over local policy.

*Between necessary change and an inward-looking identity:* Most of the countries of the region are recent in origin, and are currently grappling with two major trends: the wish for change and modernization,

23. Koran, [3:159].

24. Koran, [42:38].



and the influence of Islamic movements. Caught in the crossfire between globalization and an inward-looking identity, and faced with real threats of destabilization, a number of leaders prefer to play the stability card to the detriment of structural reforms – all the more so because such reforms are sometimes perceived as being encouraged by the West.

#### **II.4. Specific structures for the organization of the metropolitan cities**

The region of Western Asia/Middle East encompasses 28 big cities of more than a million people<sup>25</sup>. In 2006 these cities together had 77.14 million people which represents 37% of the whole population of the region<sup>26</sup>. The metropolis experienced a very fast growth: 10.6% between 2005 and 2006 compared to only 2.56% experienced by the population of the whole region.

Only Turkey in 1984 granted its major cities the special status of 'metropolitan municipalities,' a status that was reformed in 2004<sup>27</sup>. Turkey's 16 metropolitan municipalities have a total population of 25.9 million inhabitants –38% of the country's total population.

This special political status enables Turkish cities to be run with comparative efficiency. Big cities are divided into two levels: the proper metropolitan municipality, and the ordinary first-tier municipalities. The metropolitan municipality is responsible for urban services: urban planning, large parks and green areas, collection and disposal of household and industrial wastes, water, sewerage, natural gas and public transportation, establishing and operating marketplaces for wholesalers and slaughterhouses, sports, leisure and large recreation areas.

Nevertheless, the latest reform was keen to encourage coordination and cooperation between the two levels, as well as among

the different municipal councils that make up the metropolitan municipality. If this reform has indeed successfully strengthened the metropolitan municipalities' range of activities, some balance remains. On one side, a mayor elected by direct universal suffrage; on the other, the presence of members of the first-tier ordinary municipality councils within his council.

In other countries, there is no special status for big cities, although this has been discussed, but never undertaken in Jordan.

Only Amman, Beirut, and Damascus have special status, and this only in matters of security. Their municipal councils are essentially deliberative bodies with no real power.

Regarding the organization of metropolises, some are based on a hierarchical model, e.g. a central municipality vested with the executive authority and lower level municipalities the functions of which are mainly licenses (such as delivering building permits) and administrative work. This is the case, for example, in Amman. Others follow a "horizontal" model, with equal status, as for example Mashad in Saudi Arabia.

However, in most cases there are big cities with a municipal council vested with executive and legislative functions; there exist sometimes inner city district municipalities, whose status goes from pure executive bodies (Tehran) to consultative bodies (Baghdad). In this case, surrounding municipalities located in the metropolitan area are subject to the regional authority (region or governorate).

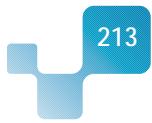
The case of Dubai is exceptional. The management of the city has been devised as for an enterprise, the head of which is a general director.

It is clear that, apart from the exceptions of Turkey and some cities elsewhere, such as Amman and Dubai, the exponential deve-

25. In decreasing order of their population in 2006: Teheran, Istanbul, Baghdad, Riyadh, Ankara, Isfahan, Jeddah, Amman, Izmir, Alep, Mashed, Damas, Kuwait, Beirut, Sana, Mosul, La Mecca, Damn, Dubai, Tabriz, Bursa, Gaza, Basra, Shiraz, Andana, Gaziantep, Qom and Ahvaz.

26. In Yemen 8% of the population, in Syria and in Islamic Republic of Iran 25%, in the Emirates 30%, in Iraq 37%, in Palestine 38%, in Saudi Arabia 43%, in Jordan 46%, in Lebanon 55% and in Kuwait 72%. Bahrain, Oman and Qatar don't have any city of more than one million inhabitants.

27. Law no. 5216 of 10 July 2004.



lopment of metropolises has taken authorities by surprise. Most have to establish an urban planning considering all aspects of this expansion, in particular socio-economic aspects.

### **III. Responsibilities, management and finances**

#### **III.1. Local authority finances**

*The lack of reliable data and the issue of transparency.* First, it must be acknowledged that obtaining reliable up-to-date data on the finances of local authorities in this region is a formidable challenge. Several factors limit accessibility to pertinent data:

**Practical obstacles to data collection:**

- The lack of reliable data compiled in accord with international standards; international organisations have not been able to publish comparative data on public finance in relation to the countries examined in this report.
- Lack of training for municipal employees in the principles of accountancy and in the exacting standards of accurate book-keeping.
- Lack of computerization of data, although some countries are on the right track.
- In the case of Palestine, the destruction of the archives by Israel.

**Informal obstacles:**

- A tradition of secrecy that pervades the entire region.
- Lack of cooperation from some municipal officers.

Few national governments in this region have demonstrated sufficient concern about accounting practices to cause a discernable decline in the widespread public perception of corruption. However, some progress is apparent in a few countries. In Lebanon, Prime Minister Fouad Sanioura introduced an annual independent audit of all the ministries, along with the computerization of

accounting data. Jordan has become a member of the International Monetary Fund's Government Data Dissemination System and has started to communicate verifiable data. Saudi Arabia and Oman have also started to publish their accounting data, and Turkey has achieved remarkable transparency, partly due to government efforts and partly because of a citizens' initiative called 'Society Follows the Budget.'

*The weakness of local taxation.* In Turkey, local expenditure amounts to 4% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), 75% of this share goes to the municipalities and 25% to the SPAs. This is the highest share of GDP in the region, except Jordan (which is 6% according to UN-POGAR).

In Turkey, the Constitution and the laws require the national government to contribute to the financing of local functions. State funding covers little more than 50% of municipal budgets; 55% of these state funds represent a 6% share of national taxes, redistributed to the municipalities in proportion to their population. Moreover, the metropolitan municipalities receive a share of 4.1% of the taxes collected in the region, revenues which in turn are redistributed to the metropolitan municipality itself (55%) and to the municipalities (35%). A further 10% is allocated to water and sanitation. In addition, 15% of the municipal budget is paid as subsidies from the various ministries. National government subsidies and transfers assure a more balanced distribution of financial resources among local governments throughout the country.

The share of local taxes, those collected within the municipalities' own financial resource base, remains rather small, reaching only 12.4%. To that are added various taxes paid directly by the municipalities, including taxes on property ownership, gambling, public shows and activities, as well as on electricity and gas consumption. Although small, this local share of tax revenue collected locally has been increasing since 1988.

The system's stumbling block is that local authorities have no taxing rights, with the exception of the tax on property ownership, because they are members of the committee that fixes the tax base. All the rates, including those for the property ownership tax, are fixed by the central government, in accordance with article 73 par. 3 of the constitution, which states that "All types of taxes and rights are to be established by the law," and that the Council of Ministers can be empowered by law, and within the limits laid down by law, to fix the exemptions, reductions and rates. Between 1980 and 1990, the Constitutional Court delivered several rulings which interpreted these constitutional provisions as meaning the termination of any local authority taxing right.

A bill currently under consideration predicts an increase in municipal and SPA revenues as well as a real equalization; however, it stops short of granting taxing rights to these bodies.

In Lebanon, own taxation only reaches 30% at best. However, the legislation since 1992 has gone in the direction of reducing this type of taxation, and replacing it with taxes collected by central government – a good example of the political desire to weaken the municipalities. In Syria, local finances can hardly be said to exist, as all public expenditure is included in the national budget. Local governments receive funding from central government for running expenses, to which unspent balances are eventually returned (POGAR).

*Insufficient and haphazard resources.* One of the recurring problems of the region's municipalities is the lack of resources, which prevents them from successfully carrying out their functions. In Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, and Yemen, the municipalities are poor, or even very poor. In Jordan the total budgets of 99 municipalities increased, in 2006, to 161 million dollars.

As we mentioned earlier, this is partly due to weak or non-existent local taxing powers. The second problem is the low level of state subsidies, which are haphazard and arbitrary. Most of the time, state funding barely covers operating expenses – sometimes not even that – in countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, and Palestine. This does not leave much leeway for investment potential or the financing of cultural and social activities. For that the municipalities have to rely on the good will of wealthy locals ("evergets") or people living abroad. There are even local authorities that are so deprived of decent resources that the mayors are paid by central government, and all the services are provided by other bodies.

Moreover, the financing of local authorities is under no circumstances considered to be a priority; services such as health, education, civil engineering, and water and power supply, are run either by the ministries or by centralized sector-based bodies. In Islamic Republic of Iran, the present law on municipalities does not even mention finances. For that, the earlier law of 1982 must be consulted. It is also perhaps interesting to note that in Bahrain's annual budget for 2006<sup>28</sup>, the items 'Municipalities' and 'Agriculture' appear under the heading of 'Miscellaneous,' along with the upkeep of the royal stud farms.

In Palestine, there was a slight improvement in 2002, since the mayors then obtained the right to collect directly taxes on fuels and road traffic, in addition to an education tax, the only tax they were allowed to collect directly until then. The Palestinian Authority is supposed to pay back to the municipalities 90% of these local taxes, but it does not do so. Result: the municipalities are becoming increasingly poor. Furthermore, Palestinian cities are not able to collect taxes in the surrounding areas. Realistically, tax revenues can be collected only in villages, to which many people who now live abroad send money, or towns with longstanding strong commercial activities.

28. Figures provided by the Bahrain Finance Ministry.



Until recently, 90% of local investment expenditure was funded by the Palestinian Authority, thanks to funding from outside organizations, such as the World Bank, the European Union for the urban areas, and the UNPD for the rural areas, as well as bilateral technical aid from the G8 countries. However, unhappy about the recent take-over by Hamas, most sources of outside funding have stopped all aid, and there is now a movement toward a fragmentation of services.

Similarly, in Lebanon municipalities are supposed to receive a percentage of revenues collected by the electricity, telephone, and water services. This percentage is supposed to be redistributed to them by the relevant ministries in proportion to the amount collected in each geographical area. In reality, these ministerial organizations return the money only in dribs and drabs.

In theory, a significant part of the municipalities' revenues comes from a percentage of tax revenues allocated to the state where they are managed by an organization called the 'Independent Municipal Fund'<sup>29</sup>. However, this fund has never materialized so revenues payable to municipalities go directly into the national treasury. By some estimates, in 2002 this represented 0.75% of Lebanon's GDP and 2% of the general budget<sup>30</sup>. Despite the modest percentages, the money takes years to be paid, and typically flows only after intervention by a local leader. The situation is improving, but the state, bankrupt and heavily in debt, is still two years behind in its payments.

Those municipalities with a theoretical right to collect local taxes often encounter reluctance among citizens to pay the levy, however legal the tax may be. Particularly in Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine, most local authorities lack the means of compelling payment. For a variety of practical, social, or security-linked reasons, tax collection is at best uncertain.

*The high level of municipal debt.* Borrowing is standard practice for a modern local authority, especially for infrastructure. Bahrain<sup>31</sup> and Kuwait<sup>32</sup> have included in their constitutions provisions for municipalities to "take out, agree to, or secure a loan". Such borrowing power is also possible for the executive body of municipal administration in Islamic Republic of Iran, though not for the municipal councils.

But such measures in municipal funding can lead to disaster, particularly when they are used to compensate for a lack of operating revenue, when they are not used for investments, and when local authorities do not have the means to repay the loans. This is the case in Jordan and Palestine, and both countries are incurring increasingly high levels of debt. Following the Hamas election victory, the withdrawal of international donors from Palestine, as providers of direct financial assistance to local governments, led to the rapid deterioration of the municipalities. In Lebanon, due to scarcity of fiscal resources, some municipal governments have to resort to advance payments from the Independent Joint Municipal Fund, which are disbursed at high interest rates.

In Jordan, new measures address this borrowing crisis. Where municipalities have borrowed to cover operational costs, especially salaries, and are overwhelmed by interest and service fees, the state has paid off the loans. Thanks to a reduction of about 20% in its general administrative expenses, the government has wiped the slate clean for third- and fourth-class municipalities (the smallest), and has committed itself to do the same for the remaining 27 municipalities by 2011.

The increase in the need for public services in Turkish metropolitan municipalities has led to an increasing level of debt. In 2002, this debt was the equivalent of 4% of the GDP –a full year's revenue for the municipalities. However, there is no legal requirement that municipalities balance their

29. Established by decree no. 1917 of 6 April 1979.

30. Al-Dawlyia la Maalumet (*International Journal of Information*).

31. Art. 108, 'On public lending.'

32. Const. Art. 136 and 137. 'On public lending' and 'On local authority lending.'

budgets, and the state has always made up the shortfall with agreeably flexible loans from the Bank of the Provinces.

*State supervision of local authority finances.* State monitoring of local authority finances is a normal, necessary and healthy measure as it ensures that finances are managed not only efficiently, but also with integrity. However, this monitoring should not immobilize the decision-making process. In Lebanon, for example, three separate entities monitor public municipal finances: the comptroller general, the auditor-general, and the State Audit Office. The State Audit Office carries out *a priori* and *a posteriori* inspections of local authority finances, focusing particularly on municipal property management above a specified threshold, the signing of public contracts, public works, and service provision. In effect, such oversight power negates local governmental autonomy for municipalities. Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain have similar systems; budgets are proposed by municipal councils, but the councils can not vote to approve their budgets.

With the aim of reconciling decentralization and the careful management of municipal finances, Turkey has set up a supervision system based on internal bodies called audit committees. These consist of from three to five council members who must be elected annually by their respective municipal councils in towns with more than 10,000 inhabitants, and the SPAs. Their role is to provide a check on the income and expenditure of local authorities. As such, they make up a form of democratic counterweight to the established authority, particularly in those places where the mayor is both the municipality's highest authority and the official with the power to authorize expenditure.

*A posteriori* checks are carried out, as in any modern country, by the State Audit Office.

This lack of resources, combined with their incapacity to implement the areas of respon-

sibility that they have been allocated, makes local authorities dependent on the state, transforming them into central government go-betweens. The central government also manages in an authoritarian and arbitrary way the money that is actually distributed to local treasuries. Unequal distribution is often the rule rather than the exception. For example, the money allocated for street cleaning in just the city of Amman amounts to a third of the entire budget for all Jordanian municipalities. In a similar case, over the past few years the Lebanese government has withdrawn huge amounts of money from the Independent Municipal Fund to pay for street cleaning in metropolitan Beirut. In the same way equalization is nonexistent in numerous countries, such as Jordan and Lebanon.

## III.2. Responsibilities

### III.2.1. Extensive theoretical areas of responsibility

In most countries in this region, municipalities have official responsibility for a wide range of tasks, including infrastructure and many human services. On paper, municipalities are responsible for highways, public buildings and drains, outdoor lighting, and waste collection, and also health, education, culture, sports, and social services. Lebanon's law on municipalities<sup>33</sup> gives municipal councils extensive prerogatives in all these areas, including the support of destitute and disabled people. Similarly, the Palestinian and Jordanian municipalities<sup>34</sup> are supposed to have, respectively, 27 and 39 different areas of responsibility.

### III.2.2. A reality often out of step with the legislation

However, in many countries, there is a gap between legislation and its implementation. Many factors prevent municipalities from meeting their official responsibilities.

*The overlapping of areas of responsibility with central government.* In Saudi Arabia, the Ministry of Rural and Municipal Affairs has drawn up a very precise list of municipi-

33. Art. 47 and following.

34. The law of September 1997 gives them a discretionary power in many sectors.



palities' areas of responsibility<sup>35</sup>. In Oman, the Ministry of Regional Municipalities, Water, and the Environment has done the same. But several national constitutions remain vague on the subject, mentioning only the major sectors of planning, health, and education: or nothing at all. Where they exist, ordinary laws and statutory instruments for their implementation retain this legal vagueness. The predictable result is overlapping of areas of responsibility, which is highly prejudicial to the efficiency of local government work.

Again, Turkey provides the exception. There a *modus vivendi* seems to have been established between the municipalities and the Special Provincial Administrations (SPAs), with each providing services according to its ability. Such is the case for environmental concerns shared by municipalities and the National Administration for the Protection of the Environment, and also for collective housing issues addressed jointly by local authorities and the National Administration for Collective Housing. The distribution of responsibilities is also organized on a territorial basis. In territories where there is a metropolitan municipality, the municipality is responsible for most services; this accounts for the present explosion in expenditure. This also occurs within the administrative area of a normal municipality; in areas not dependent on either, the SPAs are responsible for providing services. The recently legislated reorganization of responsibilities has also contributed to this development.

Unlike Lebanon and Jordan, Turkey does not have a general competence clause of municipalities. At the present time, the main responsibilities of local bodies, particularly the municipalities, are urban planning, public transport and communications, water supply, sanitation, and the treatment of solid waste. Law no. 5302 added economic action, although what exactly this covers is less clear for municipalities than for SPAs. The law also confirmed the pre-existing situation of the involvement of the municipalities in the

maintenance of school buildings and the provision of the necessary supplies. However, the provision permitting municipalities to open preschool establishments was suspended by the Constitutional Court<sup>36</sup> on the grounds that this runs counter to the spirit of the constitution, for which education is strictly a state prerogative.

Everywhere else, almost all the responsibilities are carried out by the central government through its ministries, leaving the municipalities only planning tasks and basic functions such as lighting, drainage, highway maintenance, and waste collection. Of course, there are exceptions, most notably Jordan where 13 essential service responsibilities were taken away from the municipalities by the law of 1995. Beirut, Lebanon, is also a special case. There the provincial governor has executive power, the municipal council being a deliberative body. Also in Lebanon, the *mokhtar* has supplanted most municipal authorities in the registration of births, marriages, and deaths. It should be noted that this is the *mokhtar*'s only real responsibility, though in theory their remit<sup>37</sup> covers public order, health, and education.

In Jordan, some of the responsibilities that have been taken away from the municipalities have been taken over by private national and foreign companies. Similarly, in Lebanon the state has begun to sign contracts directly, not only without the consent of the municipalities, but sometimes without even informing them. Such was the case with contracts for street cleaning, public lighting, and street paving in Beirut and Mount Lebanon. The money for these contracts is directly withdrawn by the state from the funds of the theoretical Independent Municipal Fund. Hope for more profitable public services induced Palestine's central government to enlist the private sector to manage services that require a high level of investment for infrastructure construction and maintenance —water, electricity, and sanitation.

*Administrative checking and central government supervision.* In a decentralized coun-

35. For the precise list, see the 'Saudi Commerce and Economic Review', November 2004. It can nevertheless be noted that street cleaning, public health, town planning, (vice-minister of town planning) and the maintenance of public buildings, public transport, and traffic management (Department of Transport and Traffic Planning) all come under the authority of the Ministry of Rural and Municipal Affairs, with water distribution infrastructures and the building of sewers being administered by a special service that has seven regional branches.

36. Notice no. 2005/14.

37. Art. 25 and following of the law on the *mokhtar*.

try, the state exercises three checks on local decisions: legal, financial and administrative. When this type of checking is carried out *a posteriori* it is the sign of a state that is concerned about good local management. On the other hand, checks conducted *a priori* entail the infringement on local autonomy; this is so, even when some local authorities – particularly those in Lebanon – who are faced with depleted resources, interpret it as a sign of protection and guarantee.

Taking a broader perspective, two fairly distinct systems emerge in the region. In Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Oman, municipalities are branches of their controlling ministry, though they occasionally function as go-betweens. Elsewhere in the region, laws and regulations delineate a minimal, quasi-autonomous status for local authorities, albeit with significant political and financial constraints.

We have seen how much *a priori* financial monitoring weighs heavily on the autonomy of municipalities, preventing them from performing their functions. Similarly, with the exception of Turkey, municipal council discussions are also subject to *a priori* monitoring by the central government or by one of its representatives, such as the provincial governor in both Lebanon and Jordan. Technically, this monitoring of virtually all discussions may even be illegal in some countries where it occurs routinely. Indeed, in Jordan and Lebanon, the constitutions state in almost identical terms that all local affairs must be managed by the municipal councils. Yet in Lebanon, on average only 20% of municipal council decisions are immediately enforceable, 33% require the prior approval of the provincial or regional governor, and 47% need approval from the Ministry of the Interior and the Municipalities<sup>38</sup>.

In a similar way, local councils in Islamic Republic of Iran rely on the Higher Provincial Council, an assembly of all the local representatives, to convey concerns to national

authorities. The Higher Provisional Council is responsible for the monitoring and coordination of the lesser councils. It also drafts bills that concern local authorities, and presents the bills to the National Assembly.

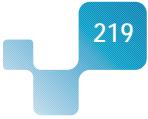
In Turkey, on the other hand, central government supervision has been reduced by the latest reforms, with the provincial governor no longer having direct control over council proceedings or their finances. His powers are now restricted to submitting a case to the administrative tribunal when there is a suspicion of malpractice. In addition, within the framework of a new managerial vision of municipal management, the new laws emphasize the importance of a performance audit based on modern audit methods, rather than on a legality oversight.

The comparative administrative autonomy of local governments in Palestine is offset by significant fiscal control by the central government. Communication difficulties make centralized administrative control impractical, but most financial resources flow downward from the central authorities.

In Syria, Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia, there is an additional administrative check in the form of an electoral system requiring that candidates for local posts be approved by an *ad hoc* electoral committee; this could be called an '*absolute a priori* check' since it takes place prior to the discussions themselves.

*The security factor.* The Palestinian Authority's exclusive powers apply only to 20% of its territory (the category A areas, which are mainly urban), the rest being run jointly with Israel or by Israel alone. As a result, the municipalities only rarely see their decisions, whether about urban planning or tax collection, applied in their area. The use of law enforcement personified by the Palestinian Police is subject to the prior authorization of Israel, which retains control of the vast majority of the rural areas. In addition, everything to do with heavy infrastructures and land use

38. ABDELGHENI IMAD,  
Municipal elections,  
*Jarrous Press*, p. 20.



planning is dependent on an outside body: the State of Israel.

On the whole, local authorities throughout the region have only nominal, if not fake, autonomy. At best, national leaders either retain a traditional concept of the role of local authorities, or consider them unable to deliver higher-quality services; at worst, they do not want them to gain increased importance. As usual, the exception is Turkey, where a certain number of responsibilities are actually carried out – some since the latest law – by decentralized local authorities.

### **III.2.3. External solutions to the municipal framework**

The myriad formal and informal arrangements that prevent local governments in the region from representing their citizens in a meaningful way, lead with little surprise to increasing interest in alternative means of civic participation.

*Unions of municipalities.* Some municipalities in Palestine and Lebanon have sought a solution in the pooling of their resources. In Palestine, for example, 'Joint Service Councils' have been set up by the Ministry of Local Government to construct and run communal infrastructures. This has obvious appeal to the mayors of small local communities, but worries city authorities. The higher municipal authorities understandably fear the loss of their prerogatives, and would rather bring pooling activities to a halt. In Lebanon, on the other hand, it is the lack of resources which prevents the communities of municipalities from functioning, as state subsidies are never fully paid out.

In Turkey, where the municipalities work well, inter-municipal cooperation occurs primarily in rural areas where there is a marked shortage of skilled administrative personnel. The 2005 reform<sup>39</sup> reorganized inter-municipal organizations, making them a new tier of decentralization, with the responsibilities recently granted to the Special Provincial Administrations and with a proper budget. This reform should lead to an improvement

and increased local management of services in the rural areas. Thanks to these, all Turkish villages should benefit, before the end of 2007, from water supply, drainage, and access roads. There are two types of cooperative structures: unions of municipalities and unions for irrigation.

*Neighborhood committees.* During the Israeli occupation in Palestine, Palestinian neighborhood committees were gradually created to deal with those services that would ordinarily be provided by municipalities. They still continue to provide some services, such as waste collection, in the Al Mahâta area of Khan Younès in the Gaza Strip, for example. This system exists also in Iraq, where in the city of Basra 170 local informal committees sustain the municipal council not elected to be distributed food and fuel.

In Turkey, on the other hand, the neighborhood committee consists of a traditional structure organized by the latest law as a direct link between the inhabitants and the municipality.

*Private benefactors.* Despite the informal and seemingly haphazard nature of private aid, private benefactors ("evergets") have always played an important role in Middle Eastern municipal life, Turkey again excepted. At times private funds make up for state inadequacies, but more often private benefactors provide cultural and social services. Primarily in Palestine and Lebanon, though sporadically throughout the Middle East, most municipalities are reduced to relying on private benefactors for grants for schools, health centers and some hospitals, free meals, and cultural centers. During the July 2006 war in Lebanon, traditional leaders and businessmen took responsibility for financing the reconstruction of bridges.

## **III.3. Administrative capacities**

After finances, recruitment methods and training for local government employees is the least transparent administrative element. It is difficult, if not impossible, to obtain precise,

39. Law no. 5355 of 26 May 2005.

reliable figures on the people employed by local authorities. A tradition of patronage makes such information especially difficult to obtain. However, certain major trends are becoming apparent.

*Central government supervision.* In Lebanon, only lesser municipalities are permitted to draw up their own organization charts<sup>40</sup>. Government employees in provincial capitals and in important towns are public servants dependent upon the National Council of the Public Service, which answers directly to the Prime Minister. In Jordan the recruitment of public sector employees, for which the Civil Service Office is responsible, has been decentralized, to each governorate, by the creation of councils run by the governor.

In the countries where some or all municipal councillors are appointed by the central government, they are public servants in the service of the central government; municipal employees who report to them cannot therefore be considered local government personnel. This has been the case in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Kuwait since the last elections in those countries.

*The issue of the training of local government staff.* The lack of training for most local authority employees is a serious impediment to efficiency. Aware of this, several countries of the region, with the encouragement of the UNPD, have launched extensive training programs for local government personnel.

In Saudi Arabia, the 'Municipal Chairmen's Performance Improvement Service,' a special department of the Ministry of Rural and Municipal Affairs, has created a program to improve the skills of municipal personnel, and to encourage their geographical mobility. This is taking place within the framework of a long-standing training program for public servants. The number of those who have received training has risen from 12,649 in 1989 to 23,056 in 2004, and nearly doubled to 43,132 in 2005.

In Turkey, a new municipal law sets deadlines for payment of salaries, and fixes a ceiling for staff expenditure, making it the personal responsibility of the mayor if these limits are exceeded. At the same time, municipalities have been given more flexibility in their staffing structure.

Jordan too launched a series of training programs after an assessment showed that lack of skills and low productivity among municipal employees was slowing the general restructuring of the municipalities.

By contrast, Lebanon has effectively imposed a freeze on municipal hiring since 1975. True, a 1977 law on the municipalities directed the Minister of the Interior to organize training seminars for local employees, but it also seems that nothing substantive has been done since. An indicator of decline in the public sector is the average age of local municipal employees: 55 years. As a result, the number of local government employees is insufficient, as it also is in all branches of the civil service.

In Syria, as in most countries in the region, skilled people are moving out of local authority jobs, and into the private sector where pay and career prospects are much better.

*Malfunctioning recruitment methods.* Many local authorities actively circumvent arcane official hiring regulations. Instead, they hire increasing numbers of local people on short-term contracts. In principle, this strategy allows the municipalities to have more local management of their affairs.

Practices in Turkey are illustrative. Although recruitment of public servants has a high priority in the national legislature, and a competitive examination has been established for government employment, the number of official public servants has remained more or less stable. At the same time, the number of temporary workers, most of whom are not well-qualified, and are employed for an average of

40. Law on the municipalities in Lebanon, art. 88.



one year, is steadily increasing. From 1995 to 2003, the percentage of temporary municipal employees increased from 21.4% to 35%. These temporary workers can be far more easily taken on and dismissed.

Throughout the region, the recruitment of municipal employees is not done on the basis of their skills and experience, but rather through patronage based on political or community factors.

This practice results in an excess of staff, many of whom are poorly qualified or unqualified. Officials simply award jobs in local government as a means of establishing their personal influence. Though to some degree ubiquitous, this practice is especially common in Lebanon and Jordan.

*Inefficiency is by no means the only harmful effect of pervasive nepotism and patronage.* Such practices perpetuate a system of corruption whereby the person who provided the job expects favors in return. The perception of corruption is strong in the region. When citizens in a 2002 Turkish survey assessed their confidence in local authorities at only 5.2 out of 10, the national government was moved to create a special ethics committee to investigate corruption, and three new laws<sup>41</sup> were passed to address the situation. But this requires a strong political will. It should also be noted that the countries that obtain the best scores regarding corruption are also those, such as Dubai, with the most visibly proactive state policies.

## IV. Local democracy

### IV.1. A changing local democracy

Table 2 summarizes significant advances in local democracy in the Middle East region. Note that if the local elections in some countries are based on specially devised election law, they are still in the process of development.

In Saudi Arabia, Prince Mansour Bin Mitab, a firm supporter and the main organizer of municipal elections, did not hesitate to describe them as the first stage, emphasizing that improvements are still needed, including women having the right to vote. As evidence of the newness of the election, the electoral districts themselves had to be drawn up after the registration of voters on electoral lists.

Jordan, since the first local elections in 1999, has been going backward and forward. The government went back on the nomination of mayors in 2003, but promised to hold new elections on the basis of universal suffrage before the beginning of 2007 – except in the city of Amman, which has special status. There were until now 360 appointed council members compared with 920 who are elected. The number of municipalities has been reduced from more than 300 to 99. With the new municipal law of 2007, all council members are elected, except in Amman. Indeed, the municipal elections took place on the 31st of July 2007; about 2,300 candidates ran for 1,022 seats.

In Lebanon, the election by universal suffrage of mayors and their senior deputies was abolished just before the 1998 elections by an amendment *in extremis* of election law. Mayors are now elected by the municipal council.

In Palestine, the voting method is not fixed. Since 2005, when municipal elections were conducted in five successive stages, there have been changes to the procedure, passing from voting for a single candidate to proportional representation. Moreover, the right to vote is not the same throughout the Palestinian territories. In the Gaza Strip, all refugees can vote, regardless of their place of residence; in the West Bank, refugees who live in the towns take part in the voting, but those who still live in the refugee camps indicate their wish to return to their homeland by unanimously keeping well away from local political life.

41. Law no. 3628 of 4 May 1990 amended by law no. 5020 of 26 December 2003, law no. 5237 of 26 September 2004 of the penal code.



Table 2

The lack of a democratic tradition

Country	Date of the last local council elections	Date of the first election of a municipal council	Political parties
Saudi Arabia	2005	1963 in Riyadh – but no elections between 1963 and 2005 (First election on a national scale)	No
Bahrain	2006	1921 in some towns – but no elections between 1921 and 2002 (First election on a national scale)	No
United Arab Emirates	No elections	No elections	No
Iraq	2004 (Dhi Qar province) 2000 & 2001 (Kurdistan)* 1999 (Rest of Iraq)	1869 – but no elections between 1957 and 1999*	Yes
Iran Islamic Rep.	2006	1999	Yes
Jordan	2003	1878 <sup>42</sup> – but no elections between 1957 and 1989	Yes (since 1992)
Kuwait	2006 (partial)	1932	No
Lebanon	2004	1878 – but no elections between 1963** and 1998 (2001 for the villages in the south)	Yes
Oman	No elections	No municipalities	No
Palestine	2005	1927 No elections between 1934 (Gaza Strip) or 1976 (West Bank) and 2005	Yes
Qatar	2003	1999	No
Syria	2003***	1878 – but no free elections between 1972 and 2007***	Yes
Turkey	2004	1856 (for Istanbul); 1878 (for Ottoman Empire); 1930 (for the Republic of Turkey)	Yes
Yemen	2006	2001	Yes

42. This refers to municipal elections held in certain municipalities of the Ottoman Empire in 1878 in accordance with the Law on Municipalities in the Provinces of 18 May 1877.

\* February 2000 for the areas dominated by the Kurdish Patriotic Union and May 2001 for those areas under the control of the Kurdish Democratic Party.

\*\* First significant municipal elections carried out on a national scale.

\*\*\* That is to say without a closed list.



Syria, where the municipal councillors have long been elected by universal suffrage, now wants to move toward real pluralist local democracy. The 2007 reform law stipulates that people may elect the candidates of their choice, and not, as has been the case so far, just one from a list drawn up by the National Progressive Front – a coalition led by the Baath party currently in power.

#### **IV.2. Partially kept promises: the central state and local politics**

The only two states in the region where there is absolute centralization are the United Arab Emirates and Oman. There are no elections in these two states, though the possibility of introducing elections is being considered on an official level.

Municipal elections have been established in all the other countries. For all that, secular traditions, which are more based on the voluntary ‘consultation’ by the sovereign than on the sovereignty of the people, are not easy to circumvent. The electoral process in many places is still marked by central government intervention.

##### **a) *A priori* state intervention**

*Nominations.* The clearest and most official type of intervention is, of course, the nomination of all or part of a municipal council, including mayors. This is presently the case in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Bahrain, and Kuwait.

In Syria, as we have seen, it is the existence of an ‘executive council’ or ‘executive bureau’ parallel to the municipal council which embodies this central control.

*Prior examination of the candidates.* Another form of interference is the prior examination of the candidates by the central power. This permits the central government to effectively steer the election in a particular direction. It is this process that caused the extraordinary length (from February to mid-December) of the 2005 elections in Saudi

Arabia. In Islamic Republic of Iran, candidates are accepted only after an examination validates the intensity of their faith, or their belief in the authority of a jurisconsult, the *Velâyat-é-Faghih* – a situation which continues to arouse strong suspicion. In Syria, according to the present law, the party in power compiles the list of candidates.

*Election into office.* This type of election limits the number of candidates to the number of vacant posts, ensuring that all candidates will attain public office. Seen as a cost-saving measure, it is reserved for unusual circumstances. When, on the other hand, it is the result of pre-electoral bargaining, it can be detrimental to the exercise of socially aware democratic principles.

Pre-election arrangements influenced Lebanon’s most recent elections; 121 municipal councils and 400 *mokhtar* were elected into office following an alliance between the political parties and traditional leaders; in effect, the two factions merged. In Jordan, a similar approach was observed in 17 municipalities.

##### **b) *A posteriori* intervention**

*The modification of municipal councils.* In Jordan in 1999, the king changed the composition of municipal councils to include a woman in each of them – a rather positive action. By contrast, in Kuwait in 1986, the Emir simply dissolved all the municipal councils.

In Syria, once the local councils are elected, they in their turn elect an executive bureau; a third of the executive bureau candidates can be recruited from the local councils themselves. Furthermore, after an election, certain specific public service-related issues can be placed in the hands of permanent or temporary committees that include people from outside the municipal government.

*Intervention in the election of the mayor.* This form of tutelage of the State is



harmful to democracy and to good governance. In Lebanon, the abandonment of direct elections has contributed to this tutelage.

#### IV.3. The people's participation

Palestine's 2005 elections were the first in 71 years in the Gaza Strip, and the first elections in 29 years in the West Bank. Voter turnout was extraordinary: average turnout was 82% and rose to 98% in certain areas. The elections were widely perceived as the restoration of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination after years of the systematic destruction of their state structures.

In Turkey also, the turnout percentage is generally quite strong, proof of the population's involvement in local life. In 2004, average voter turnout reached 72.3%.

In the rest of the region, voter turnout is much lower. There are two main reasons for this. The first is the widespread perception that the game is corrupt. The second, which must not be underestimated, is public disappointment with most of its elected officials. When dishonesty is expected, whether by pre-election selection of candidates with reserved seats — the case in Saudi Arabia and Syria — or by manipulation of election results or even election law, turnout is apt to decline. Allegations of corruption were particularly strident in Yemen after the last election there; the Shiites of Saudi Arabia, and most Lebanese elected officials are widely suspected of cheating. In Lebanon, however, low overall turnout figures (33.3%) can mask wide disparities in local turnout, depending upon what is at stake or the extent of candidates' mobilization. Thus, the low figure of a 21.4% turnout in Beirut contrasts starkly with the 70% turnout in the Bekaa, and the 65% turnout in Nabatiah; in both high-turnout areas, the main beneficiary of the surge in participation was Hezbollah. The second reason, voter

disappointment with the outcome of previous ballots, or the subsequent ineffectiveness of elected officials, does take a toll. Disillusionment with elected officials and the process by which they come to power has been noted especially in Jordan and Islamic Republic of Iran.

However, voter disinterest can vanish when the vote is perceived as an expression of popular demand or a form of approbation. The 2006 municipal elections in Bahrain thus had a turnout — a clear increase — of 72% because of the involvement of the Shiites. Similar elections in Islamic Republic of Iran saw a 60% turnout because of immense discontent with the policies of President Ahmadinejad.

#### IV.4. A specific problem: the representation of women

*A low representation.* Unsurprisingly, in its 2005 report Transparency International severely criticizes the Middle East as being the region of the world where the political representation and participation of women is the lowest<sup>43</sup>.

Turkish women were given the right to vote in 1930, and since 1934 the right to be elected<sup>44</sup>. Saudi women, on the other hand, will only be given the right to vote in 2009, whereas nothing of the kind is planned in the Emirates. Kuwaiti women obtained the right to vote in 2005.

Elsewhere, their representation figures are derisory, hardly reaching 2% of the municipal councils in Lebanon, 1.53% in Islamic Republic of Iran, 3.4% in Qatar, 6.6 % in Syria, and an unabashed 0% in Bahrain.

In most of these countries, entering the political arena requires strong-willed women at a time when merely working outside the home is still discouraged. Women who want to take part in politics often face extremely difficult social factors, such as family opposition and public disapproval. Some allege that women also must overco-

43. [www.transparency.org](http://www.transparency.org).

44. The right to vote was given to women in 1948 in Syria, in 1952 in Lebanon, in 1963 in Islamic Republic of Iran, in 1967 in Yemen, in 1973 in Bahrain, in 1974 in Jordan, and in 1980 in Iraq.

me the reluctance of party managers to accept women, but in all fairness, such male intransigence is hardly unique to the Middle East.

*Steps towards the participation of women.* Faced with a glaring lack of female representation in local and national political life, several strategies have been put in place. The quota system, which is applied in Palestine, reserves a minimum of two seats per council for women<sup>45</sup>. Jordan and Kuwait have chosen the direct nomination of one woman per council. At the same time, important campaigns in favor of women have been launched in Jordan and Syria.

Thus, municipal councils throughout the region face enormous difficulties, leading, in some instances, to their resignation, as in Jordan; in other countries, an even larger number of councils have renounced any form of concrete action.

#### IV.5. Local elections as an ideological and community platform

If it is necessary and healthy that a country's political life should rest on nationally constituted parties, it is not desirable that national issues override local concerns. Municipal elections are, after all, intended to create an efficient local authority management.

Lebanon provides an illustrative example. Although the number of national parties is negligible, elections are well and truly fought on religious community issues which are national in scope.

A curious development is the way in which local elections can become a forum for banned national parties or factions. Because local elections are considered less of a threat to the central government, they may not be as tightly controlled as national elections. Local elections therefore present an opportunity for disapproved or illegal parties

and ideologies to appear on the ballot, overwhelming local issues with far more potent national matters. Such was the case in Palestine when Hamas triumphed, and in Saudi Arabia when Shiites of the Eastern Province boasted of having won the election in their regional stronghold. Similarly, the victory of Hezbollah in South Lebanon used local elections to effect a national change, and in Islamic Republic of Iran the 2003 municipal elections in Tehran led to the return of the conservatives, and particularly of President Ahmadinejad, the city's mayor. Ironically, the 2006 municipal elections rejected his policies throughout the country, with the population going to the polls on a massive scale in order to vote for the opposition. This was also the situation in Bahrain, which was the scene of a very strong Shiite upsurge in November 2006.

#### IV.6. The role of the security factor and the delicate situation of the governments

*The religious community issue.* Many countries are currently the scene of deep-seated tensions, some attributable to the merging of religion and politics, others to centuries-old feuds between Islam's Shiite and Sunni communities. The latter is especially important where the Sunni have held power for a long time in spite of the presence of a strong Shiite minority, or indeed a majority, as in Lebanon, Iraq, and Bahrain. Saudi Arabia's government contends with a Shiite community that could deliver a 20% turnout – not the 5-15% which is generally reported. The central government there exercised strong control during the election in the Eastern Province where the Shiites are a clear majority, and where, it is useful to note, there are important oil-fields. Likewise, the King of Bahrain faces the risk of destabilization by the Shiite majority there, as the results of the recent parliamentary elections showed.

45. There are 15 seats in the cities, 13 in medium-sized towns and 8 in small towns according to the electoral law of 1996, amended in 2005.



The risk of destabilization is real. This is why the Lebanese and Iranian governments (the Persians in Islamic Republic of Iran are only in a majority of 51%) exercise such strong control over local governance.

*Kurdish nationalism.* The recognition of Kurdistan by the transitional Iraqi government, and the granting of extensive autonomy which even includes legislation, gave hope to the Kurdish communities in neighboring Syria and Turkey. It is clear that municipal elections provide a convenient means for Kurdish people in those two countries to agitate for a degree of autonomy comparable to that granted in Iraq.

*Religious extremism.* The other factor which must not be neglected is the rise of hard-line religious extremism. Such religious fanaticism characterizes several factions of fundamentalist Islam. Their avowed goal is to establish regimes based on a particularly narrow reading of religious texts. These groups are not only opposed to secular governments, but also to those that, like Saudi Arabia and Jordan, are already governed by the Sharia. Even these officially Islamic states are perceived by fundamentalists as being too inclined toward westernization. Some fundamentalists in Saudi Arabia refuse to vote in legislative elections because, they say, "God is the only dispenser of law."

## V. Conclusion

What emerges from this study is that decentralization, understood as the devolution of responsibilities, and financial and decision-making self-government, is not yet completely operational in the countries of the region, with the exception of Turkey. Currently, the majority of municipalities have little room for maneuver, subject as they are to a twofold dependency – formal and informal – on the State and traditional leaders.

At the same time, one should take into account the social organization and security environment of the region. Limited progress in the processes of decentralization should be considered in the overall context of tensions and conflicts, in the relations between traditional leaders, either tribal or religious-based, as well as in relation to the population at large.

All these factors help explain UNDP-POGAR's<sup>46</sup> more prudent approach to change that advocates a gradual pace of reform as part of a comprehensive strategy of restruc-

turing of the State, beginning with the strengthening of national legislatures. Broad awareness campaigns on local governance and effective institutions are also key.

Problems in service delivery and weak local management functions in general need to be addressed, as underlined by UNDP POGAR, through the development and strengthening of local capacities as well as of transparency.

The success of decentralization efforts depends on the selection and training of municipal civil servants and employees. That requires special focus and attention.

Local governments should be equipped with the adequate means to carry out their tasks i.e. the necessary fiscal and budgetary resources accompanied by the transfer of independent decision-making authority.

Finally, although many countries in the region are on the right track towards decentralization, it will take some time before these processes become fully operational.

46. See:  
[www.pogar.org/  
governance/  
localgov.asp.](http://www.pogar.org/governance/localgov.asp)

## Annex 1

## Great metropolises of the region

Country	Number of large cities (more than 1 M. inhabitants)	Total population of the three largest cities, 2006 (in M. inhabitants)	% population of the country in 2006	% population of the country in 2005 (1)	Increase of total country population 2005-2006 (in %)	Existence of a municipal specific structure in the three largest cities	Municipal organization
Iraq	3	10,83	37%	N/A	2,8%	No	One single municipality and councils as advisors in Baghdad and Basra districts
Iran, Islamic Rep.	7	17,27	25%	23%	0,0%	No	One single municipality with a main municipality and many councils and district municipalities under the first level
Jordan	1	1,9	34%	24%	1,8%	No, but possible reform for the large cities	Amman has a metropolitan structure
Kuwait	1	2,02	72%	71%	3,7%	No	Only one municipal council
Lebanon	1	1,97	55%	50%	0,8%	No	One single municipality, but for security reasons the 'Prefect' has the power
Palestine	1	1,43	38%	25%	5,6%	No	One single municipality
Saudi Arabia	4	10,86	43%	36%	2,4%	No	a) One municipality which supervises many municipalities of district on administrative matters only (Riyadh and Jeddah) b) one single municipality (Mecca and Damman)
Syria	2	4,87	25%	25%	2,6%	No	One single municipality with the administration in the districts
Turkey	6	22,01	30%	26%	1,4%	Yes	Metropolitan municipalities and others of first level
United Arab Emirates	1	1,42	30%	29%	4,4%	No	Unique structure : Dubai is managed as an enterprise under a 'General Director'
Yemen	1	1,92	9%	9%	2,9%	No	Special status for the Sana governorate
Total	<b>28</b>	<b>77,14</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>10,6%</b>	<b>2,56%</b>		

Source: World Bank Indicators.

## Annex 2

### Local democracy

Country	Municipal councils			Executive local authority			Indictment by the citizens or by the municipal council
	Form of scrutiny (proportional / majority)	One or several electoral districts	Number of periods and duration of the terms	Participation estimates	Mayor elected by vote	Mayor appointed by the municipal council	
Bahrain	Majority	Several	4 years	72% for 2006 (increasing) 51.3% for 2002	No	No	Yes (Ministry MHHF) (3)
Iraq (5)	Variable	Var.	Var.	79% in Kurdistan in 2001	Var.	Var.	Var.
Iran, Islamic Rep.	Relative majority	Unique	4 years	60% 2006 (increasing) 49.96% 2003	No	Yes (6)	No
Jordan	Majority	Several	4 years	58% in 2003 (decreasing)	No	No	Yes (8)
Kuwait (9)	Majority	Several	4 years	50% (decreasing)	No	Yes	No
Lebanon	Majority	Unique	6 years (unlimited)	33.3% in 2004 (decreasing)	No	Yes	No
Oman	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Palestine	Proportional (11)	Several	5 years	82% in 2005	No	Yes	No (12)
Qatar (14)	Majority (at firstround)	Several	4 years	30% in 2003 (decreasing)	No	Yes	No
Saudi Arabia	Majority	Several	4 years (1)	40% in 2005 (2)	No	No	Yes (The King)
Syria (16)	(List of candidates with fixed seats)	Unique except Damascus and Alep	4 years	29.3% in 2003 (decreasing) (17)	No	No (18)	Yes, Ministry of Municipal Affairs
Turkey	Proportional	Unique	5 years	71.75 % mayors 69.97% metropolitan mayors (65% in 2004)	Yes (relative majority, one round)	No (20)	No
United Arab Emirates	-	-	-	-	-	(4)	-
Yemen	Majority	Unique	5 years	65%	No	No	Yes by Ministry of local administration (21)

#### NOTES

- Only half of the councils are elected, the rest are appointed.
- About 18% of the potential voters, one third of them is registered in the electoral lists.
- Ministry of Housing, Municipalities and Environment.
- A Sharjah only, but the Municipal Council itself is not elected.
- There are several situations: Municipal Councils chosen among the Ministry of Municipalities and Public Works employees (MMPW) Basra; elected by universal
- Accumulation of jobs is forbidden for Minister, Vice minister, Congress Deputy and Director of Bank or Director of other public entity.
- Article 73 of the Municipal Council Law. The Council can accuse the Mayor who has to present his arguments in 10 days. The Council then decides if he is removed or not.
- Ministry of Municipal, Rural and Environment Affairs.
- In each Council 10 members are elected
- vote, Baghdad; chosen by a group of important citizens, Mosul.
- The election of the Mayor and that of the Mokhars take place together.
- The number 5 Law of 1996 for the councils' election was amended in 2004 and twice in 2005. From majority, the scrutiny became proportional.
- From 1976 to 1993 a great proportion of the Mayors were appointed by Israel.
- But the desitution has to be approved by the local Interior Ministry.
- Only by decision of the Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs.
- But a new more liberal law will be passed in 2007.
- 21% in cities, 34% in small towns and 33% in very small villages, while 66% in 1999.
- It should be done according to the new law.
19. It is in fact a council of the city.
20. But the Executive Council has elected and appointed members.
21. The government has to approve it.