



A Political Economy of the Middle East.
By Melani Cammett, Ishac Diwan, Alan Richards, and John Waterbury. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2015. 590 pp. \$57, paper.

This classic study of Middle East economics, which first appeared in 1990, remains by far the best single work on the topic, equally appropriate for a university student or the general reader. Originally produced by economist Richards and political scientist Waterbury, it has been updated this time with the help of Harvard academic Cammett and Diwan of the Paris School of Economics. They have preserved much of the original analytical structure—which has aged well—though the analysis has become noticeably less influenced by left-wing shibboleths.

Eight of the thirteen chapters cover the same topics as in the first edition, updated with new anecdotes and items as well as critical data. The authors first review

the basic background: demography (including the passing of the “youth bulge,” soon to be replaced by aging populations); water and food; and health and education. Turning to the political economy, the reader learns of the rise and fall of state-led development; the hopes for International Monetary Fund-World Bank-style structural adjustments that were betrayed by crony capitalism; and the impact of wars. The new chapters cover the role of Islam in economics; the rise of the Persian Gulf oil producers; social outcomes (i.e.: Why has growth in the national economy not translated into better standards of living for so many people?); a review of the various types of political regimes in the Middle East; and regional and global economic integration.

While the volume is organized by topic rather than by country, the authors weave into their study the profound differences among the region’s societies, arguing that they fall into three economic types: resource poor/labor abundant; resource rich/labor poor; and a few that are resource rich/labor abundant. The major conclusion is that most of the region’s governments “have long been either incapable of responding to the demands of their populations or unwilling to do so.”

In an age when academics often seem out of touch with reality—examining esoteric irrelevancies, more interested in political polemic than balanced scholarship, and afraid to appear outside the leftist political orthodoxy—this volume is refreshing, timely, and essential.

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