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# **Seismic Shift:**

## Understanding Change in the Middle East

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## Think Tanks

*Andrew Houk and Ellen Laipson*

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### Explanatory Note

**W**e reviewed a sample of the research produced by major US and European think tanks between 2005-2010. From an initial survey of 20 think tanks that have Middle East programs, 10 were selected for further review: three European, and seven based in Washington, DC.

Each literature review included a web-based search for relevant analysis, papers, transcripts, or summaries of events, and books published between 2005 to late 2010. In addition, we conducted interviews with eight experts from five think tanks, all with strong track records of writing on the Middle East. Most had prior government experience, and several were known for their distinct methodological approach, such as polling, women's issues, or the role of the military.

The think tanks varied in the centrality that reform or political change plays in their overall research agenda. Many think tanks focus on the policies of the US or EU because that is where they see their greatest influence and impact. Some think tanks, therefore, characterize their focus on the region as framed by US interests, or by regional security concerns. Others explicitly name reform and/or democracy as the animating principle behind their Middle East work, and that generally led to deeper and more sustained access to democracy activists. It did not necessarily lead them to draw dramatically different conclusions about the timing and likelihood of significant political change as compared to those for whom reform was treated as one of many topics.

Most think tanks work on discrete projects that may be developed with a particular funding partner, planned well in advance, and often produce new, written products a year or more after the launch of a project. Some think tanks are more flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances, and most think tank scholars participate actively in information exchanges and media events when dramatic developments occur. Most think tanks foster a culture

*where individual scholars express their personal, rather than institutional view, and few think tanks use a collaborative or team work mode for producing new analysis, so within one think tank, multiple views on prospects for change in the Middle East can be found.*

## Broad Judgments: 2005-2010

Think tank experts generally believed that the long period of authoritarianism in the Arab world was not sustainable, that gradual reforms from the top were not sufficient, and that change would more likely be violent than not. Few, however, knew where, when, and how change would occur. Analysts noted there was a growing sense of political awareness and activism among the populations during this period, but generally concluded that regimes retained sufficient resilience in the short to medium term. Yet if these two forces continued in their trajectories without meaningful political reforms, many concluded that the region could well face revolutions.

- *“To the extent that Arab regimes do not reform politically and economically, they will erupt in one form or another over the coming years... There is a demographic time bomb ticking in the Middle East, and it is going to sweep away a lot of Western-leaning regimes sooner or later unless true reform begins soon.”<sup>1</sup>*
- *“Unless Mubarak or his successor lifts the state of emergency, dismantles the Political Parties Committee, and allows open debate, Egyptians will miss their chance for gradual transformation – and start thinking, along with other Arabs, about hitting the streets.”<sup>2</sup>*
- *“A crack has emerged in the authoritarian pattern of the state-society relationship, and there is no way of reversing its dynamics... In a region with a widespread political culture of lament, passivity, and fear of authorities, there is something truly revolutionary about these events. The autumn of the patriarchs is approaching.”<sup>3</sup>*

Since 2005, think tank analysts interested broadly in the politics of the region have directed their research to explore the political strength and behavior of regimes and opposition forces, the role of external actors in promoting change, trends in political Islam and their implications for democracy, and the social and economic dynamics altering the landscape. The relative importance of these factors may vary from country to country: while political reform was the dominant issue in Egypt, in Yemen the issues were instability derived from weak governance and a toxic mix of water scarcity, population growth, insurgency, and the capacity of the state to manage the al-Qaeda threat. Other analysts continued to focus on the countries of greatest relevance to the Arab-Israeli peace process, or on US-security interests and relations with the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). For some of these researchers, political change and reform were a secondary consideration.

Coverage of Egypt was strong for a number of reasons:

<sup>1</sup> Larry Diamond. “Between Democracy and Stability” *Hoover Digest*. No. 1 (January 30, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Tamara Wittes. “Hosni Mubarak: Elections or No, He’s Still Pharaoh” *Slate.com*. March 3, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Amr Hamzawy. “Understanding Arab Political Reality: One Lens Is Not Enough” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. *Policy Outlook*. March 2005.

- As a major regional player and important US ally, Egypt's stability carries regional and global implications.
- Previous reforms and a robust civil society made Egypt a natural candidate for analysts examining peaceful, democratic, and popular movements in an authoritarian, Arab, and Islamic context.
- Growing socio-economic challenges revealed the regime's declining capacity to provide services and safety nets, and fed social unrest.
- The pending legislative elections in 2010 and presidential elections in 2011 provided a definitive time frame for political activists.

Coverage of Tunisia was stronger in European think tanks; few US think tanks have dedicated sustained attention to North Africa in general, or Tunisia in particular. (Intermittently, US think tanks cover Morocco, or energy issues or terrorism trends in North Africa.) A rare, in-depth working paper on Tunisia by a European analyst in 2009 identified indicators that unrest in Tunisia was present:

- *“At a closer look, however, the socio-economic situation appears neither as uniformly positive nor as sustainable as it is usually portrayed... Youth unemployment is on the rise... corruption and patronage are rampant... Popular discontent is also growing stronger, leading young people increasingly to turn to radical ideologies, and raising the possibility of a popular uprising. The recent social unrest over unemployment, corruption, and lack of equal opportunities in the southern mining region of Gafsa, for instance, has revealed the extent of rage within both the workers' movement and the wider population... According to activists, the desperation in the South which led to the Gafsa uprising is present everywhere... insofar as socio-economic development is unsustainable and inequalities are on the rise, it is questionable how long this will last.”<sup>4</sup>*

Overall, think tank experts largely agreed on the following conclusions:

- Regimes were unwilling, and perhaps unable, to enact deep political reforms without risking their collapse; reforms enacted over the past decade have been half-hearted and superficial.
- The United States and Western powers were inconsistent and ineffective in pressuring regimes to reform. Analysts speculated this is out of concern that political Islam was the only alternative political force, or the fear of chaos was sufficient to keep outside powers committed to the status quo.
- As extant opposition parties including Islamists were outmaneuvered or co-opted, meaningful reform movements would need to come from grassroots mobilization.
- Despite continued social unrest and a growing sense of political awareness and activism, the emerging informal opposition was not organized enough to bring about significant change.

<sup>4</sup> Kristina Kausch. *Tunisia: The Life of Others*. FRIDE, Project on Freedom of Association in the Middle East and North Africa. Working Paper No. 85 (July 2009).

During the time period 2005-2010, think tank analysts, therefore, saw that the most likely scenario for the near term was an increasingly precarious status quo. But several think tanks took more nuanced positions about prospects for change, and focused in particular on Egypt and various efforts to change the status quo. None saw a region-wide upheaval, or anticipated the contagion effect that occurred after the Tunisian revolt. There was, therefore, considerable tension in think tank analyses, acknowledging pressures for change and yet little momentum for change due to regime ambivalence about reform, failure of outside powers to use leverage and influence, the weakness of organized opposition, and the lack of organization of the growing informal opposition.

## Understanding Change

There are several analytic frameworks that think tank analysts have used, implicitly more than explicitly, to interpret politics in the Middle East since 2005.

Most Middle East experts hold a strong view that political change will only be successful and legitimate if seen as a local, indigenous process. This view was strengthened by the Iraq experience after 2003, although a minority of US think tanks would defend the proposition that US action to jump-start democracy in Iraq was salutary for the region as a whole. Think tank analysis about the role of outside actors in stimulating or supporting reform intended to shape policies in Washington or EU capitals may infer that the impact of aid or outside leverage is greater than regional experts personally believe. Getting the balance right is tricky: in the Bush to Obama transition, the perception that the US was no longer interested in the “freedom agenda” and reverted to the old stability argument was comparable to “throwing the baby out with the bathwater.”<sup>5</sup>

One think tank invoked Samuel Huntington’s “King’s Dilemma” theory, positing that limited top-down changes often intensify demands for more radical changes from below. Through this theoretical framework, think tank scholars concluded that even reformers within the regime are unlikely to cede real power and risk a total regime collapse.

- *“Incumbent regimes in the Arab world are as acutely aware of the dangers of runaway reform as they are of the necessity for change. Different regimes are following different approaches in an attempt to control the process of change, making sure that it will go as far as they want, but will not gain an unstoppable momentum.”*<sup>6</sup>
- *“One of the essential lessons of the ‘King’s Dilemma’ is that decompression is ultimately unsustainable, and by allowing for the construction of a strong civil society that advocates the transfer of power away from the monarch, the King [Bahrain] must eventually face a choice: suppress or relent. For now, King Hamad continues to search for another way.”*<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Michele Dunne. “The Baby, the Bathwater, and the Freedom Agenda in the Middle East” *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (January 2009), pp. 129-141.

<sup>6</sup> Marina Ottaway and Michele Dunne. *Incumbent Regimes and the ‘King’s Dilemma’ in the Arab World: Promise and Threat of Managed Reform* Carnegie Papers No.88 (December 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Edward Burke. *Bahrain: Reaching a Threshold*. FRIDE, Project on Freedom of Association in the Middle East and North Africa. Working Paper No. 61 (June 2008).

Another approach examines the changing relationships among elites upon whose cohesion the regime depends. Events such as mass popular protests or leadership succession may change the calculation for a segment of the elite, such as the military, to provide continued support for the regime. Military-regime relations were an important topic of analysis for several experts.

- *“The regime [Egypt] – consisting of the traditional bureaucracy, neo-liberal technocratic ministers, state security, business cronies loyal to Gamal, and a military less loyal to him – has become too large to function as a unitary actor. The one thing keeping the lid on is Hosni Mubarak.”*<sup>8</sup>

Another expert emphasized the fundamental importance of gauging fear when evaluating stability in a coercive regime. If a regime’s legitimacy is wholly dependent on coercion, an erosion of fear leaves little space for gradual reform, and inevitably leads to revolution.

- *“Mubarak has been forced to rely on coercion to control the Egyptian population. This is both expensive and risky. Indeed, the showdown between the regime and the opposition, especially the Muslim Brotherhood, over the elections only adds to an increasingly angry, polarized, and potentially radicalized political arena... It is entirely plausible that as the Egyptian leadership continues to brutalize its citizens to ensure its monopoly on power, it could trigger another round of violence.”*<sup>9</sup>

## Analytical Shifts

In 2005, the Arab world experienced a number of dramatic political developments that came to be called the “Arab Spring,” but the net effect was to usher in a period of disappointment and uncertainty about reform trends in the region. In 2005, historic elections were held in Palestine (the first local elections in 30 years), in Saudi Arabia (the first municipal elections in 40 years), in Egypt (the first multi-candidate presidential elections), and the Cedar Revolution in Lebanon (inspired by the assassination of Rafik Hariri in February). Think tank analysis generally considered these developments important milestones for the region.

But over the next four years, there were many setbacks and disappointments in reform and democratization efforts, and those analysts interested in the reform agenda became pessimistic, and aligned, perhaps reluctantly, with those who said that regimes would be able to sustain the status quo. The following are important incremental turning points or shifts in think tank analysis.

### 2006: Islamists as Early Beneficiaries of the Arab Spring

In early 2006, the electoral gains of Islamist parties in Egypt and Palestine led many think tank experts to acknowledge the extensive societal networks and mobilization capacity of the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas. An ongoing debate emerged about whether and

<sup>8</sup> Shadi Hamid. “Can’t We All Just Get Along?” *Foreign Policy*. June 2, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Steven A. Cook. *Egypt’s Weakness on Display in Elections* Council on Foreign Relations. November 29, 2010.

how Islamists would behave and change once in parliament or in other institutions of power. This issue engaged experts of diverse views about the compatibility of Islam and democracy. In the absence of any data to the contrary, it was widely assumed that Islamists were the only political force that could muster widespread support as an alternative to authoritarian regimes.

- *“Without the active participation of moderate Islamists, calls for political transformation in the Arab world are bound to remain whispers among tiny communities, irrelevant for the larger social fabric, and harmless to authoritarian regimes... democratic change will depend on the existence of large, popular, homegrown, opposition alliances – not outside pressure. To this end, the contribution of moderate Islamists is indispensable and overdue.”*<sup>10</sup>
- *“The Brotherhood’s greatest success, however, is understanding that formal politics are only a small piece of the puzzle of working toward political change in Egypt. The formal channels – represented by political party life – are sterile and heavily controlled. They seek to change the Egyptian government by changing Egypt. Those who are opposed both to the status quo and the Brotherhood should take note.”*<sup>11</sup>
- *“If fully free elections were held today in the rest of the Arab world, Islamist parties would win in most states. Even with intensive international efforts to support civil society and nongovernmental organizations, elections in five years would probably yield the same results.”*<sup>12</sup>
- *“Allow Islamists to compete and accumulate power, the argument goes, and they will have little incentive to radicalize... But this belief is dead wrong. Not only is it impossible to agree on a working definition of the word ‘moderate,’ but there is scant evidence that extremists really do moderate once they assume power.”*<sup>13</sup>

## 2007: Reassessment of Models of Political Change

By early 2007, think tank analysts generally concluded that authentic political reform in the Arab world would not originate from the incumbent power, but from as yet unidentified bottom-up societal forces. This conclusion was based on:

- The reversal of democratic reforms in Egypt;
- The crackdown on Islamists, culminating in March 2007 with the passage of 34 constitutional amendments, which consolidated the regime’s power and banned religious-based political activity; and

<sup>10</sup> Amr Hamzawy. *The Key to Arab Reform: Moderate Islamists*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Policy Brief No.40. August 2005.

<sup>11</sup> Jon Alterman. *Middle East Notes and Comment: Should the Party Be Over?* Center for Strategic and International Studies. December 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Shibley Telhami. “In the Mideast, the Third Way is a Myth” *The Washington Post*. Op-Ed. February 17, 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Steven A. Cook. “The Myth of Moderate Islam” *Foreign Policy*. June 16, 2008.

- The apparent reluctance of Western powers (US and EU) to encourage further reforms, in part due to the 2006 election results.

For democracy advocates, the minimal US response to Egypt's stalled reforms killed hopes for gradual top-down reform. For skeptics, it confirmed suspicions that previous reforms were no more than "reformulation of restrictive measures." Other analysts correlated the absence of international support with the declining credibility of moderate Islamists in the Muslim Brotherhood. All parties recognized that any political change that might occur would originate from home-grown movements, and not the establishment. In light of the state of the weak and divided opposition parties, the prognosis for political change remained poor.

- *"By resorting to outright repression of the Brotherhood, Mubarak is making a mockery of the American push for democracy in the Middle East. Turning a blind eye toward the ongoing crackdown undermines the credibility of an already shaky American commitment to democratization in the Middle East. It also cements the perception among Egyptians that Washington blesses autocratic regimes."*<sup>14</sup>

## 2008: Political Lockdown

The narrowing of space for political opposition inaugurated a period of uncertainty and stagnation, leaving analysts to speculate how the growing frustrations might manifest. Many new factors emerged in the political environment, such as youth activism, new information technologies, economic recession, and regional instability, but no one believed that any one of those factors would be transformative, in the short run. It is noteworthy that the relative importance of Islamists as a topic of think tank research and as an analytic factor in regional politics had contracted by 2008. The Islamists came to be seen as ineffective or co-opted, unlikely to be catalysts for political change.

- *"The multiple exclusion of youth, coupled with the insistence of the regime to bloc[k] all avenues of youth participation, threatens to radicalize youth activism. Thus far, youth activism has been moderate and reformist in tone and has relied exclusively on non-violent tactics. However, continued exclusion might lead to the emergence of more radical and militant groups among youth... Absent such a development, youth in Egypt, as in much of the Arab world, will remain a ticking time bomb."*<sup>15</sup>
- *"Already, different factions within and outside the regime are maneuvering to improve their prospects after President Mubarak leaves the scene. All of this is occurring, moreover, against the backdrop of deteriorating social and economic conditions that have been exacerbated by the global recession – an environment ripe for Egypt's Islamist opposition to press its anti-regime agenda and pursue political power."*<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Amr Hamzawy. "Burying Democracy Further in Egypt" *The Daily Star*. March 16, 2007.

<sup>15</sup> Dina Shehata. "Youth Activism in Egypt" *Arab Reform Brief*. October 23, 2008.

<sup>16</sup> Steven A. Cook. *Political Instability in Egypt*. CPA Contingency Planning Memorandum. No. 4. Council on Foreign Relations Press. (August 2009).

In April and May 2008, the eruption of mass labor strikes coordinated using social media signaled the emergence of new forces of opposition. Experts saw an emerging alliance of labor with more politically motivated activists, and saw in polling as well as through other means that Arab publics were increasingly focused on domestic grievances rather than foreign policy issues, such as Iraq and Palestine. Some analysts decided to shift their focus to labor and the use of social media as tools of opposition.

The growing potential of “new media,” such as blogs, Facebook, and Twitter, to facilitate communication and dissemination of information also began to attract the attention of analysts as a factor for change, especially after the recognition of their role during Iran’s Green Revolution in June 2009. One institution held a series of conferences in the region in 2008-2010 to examine new protests’ movements.

- *“New media is a new technology, but it has enabled the incredibly swift dissemination of information and given rise to a new, positive spirit of political curiosity and questioning... These developments... represent something even more exciting: a point at which it is not possible to turn back, only to move forward.”<sup>17</sup>*
- *“...In talking to activists all throughout the world, they took a lot of best practices away from Iran... it wasn’t successful in Iran in terms of achieving its immediate objectives. But it was successful in terms of inspiring activists in other parts of the world to think about the power of what technology can do to identify an entirely new set of challenges that they need to solve for as they’re advocating for basic freedoms and civil liberties.”<sup>18</sup>*
- *“Egyptians are... demonstrating creative outlets of resistance. Understanding that no one will bring change to Egypt but Egyptians themselves, many regime opponents are working for change at great personal risk...”<sup>19</sup>*

Many analysts observed that Egyptians viewed the upcoming leadership succession as the crux of retaining power for the regime, and a moment of opportunity for opposition to break from the political lockdown.

- *“When it happens, it will rock the world, at least briefly: ...Mubarak ...will leave office, either by his own decision or that of Providence, probably within the next three years. So far, few in the West have paid much attention. But Egyptians certainly are getting ready, and we should do so as well.”<sup>20</sup>*

<sup>17</sup> Mirette F. Mabrouk. *Changing the Channel: Egypt’s Evolving Media Landscape and its Role in Domestic Politics*. Saban Center Analysis Paper No. 15 (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution: May 2010).

<sup>18</sup> Jared Cohen, Richard N. Haass, and Eric Schmidt. “The Digital Disruption” (EVENT TRANSCRIPT) Council on Foreign Relations, New York. November 3, 2010.

<sup>19</sup> Dina Guirguis. *Political Change in Egypt: A Role for the United States?* Washington Institute for Near East Policy. Policy Watch #1719. November 18, 2010.

<sup>20</sup> Michele Dunne. “A Post-Pharaonic Egypt?” *American Interest*. (September/October 2008).

## 2010: Run-up to the Egyptian Parliamentary Elections

By the summer of 2010, analysts described the tension as “palpable.” The parliamentary elections were scheduled only months away, mystery shrouded Mubarak’s absence while receiving health care in Germany, ambiguity surrounded the military’s relationship with the regime’s scion, Gamal Mubarak, and the return to Egypt of potential presidential candidate, Mohammed El Baradei, infused a sense of inspiration among democrats.

- *With or without El Baradei, Mubarak’s reign will soon be over. The West, with great stakes in Egypt as a regional power hub, would be well advised to forge new alliances before it is too late.*<sup>21</sup>
- *Shadi Hamid recounts that Islamic blogger and journalist Ibrahim al-Houdaiby explained the significance of Mubarak’s illness in the summer 2010, that “Egyptians were able to not just contemplate, but visualize, an Egypt without Mubarak.”*<sup>22</sup>
- *“...the surprisingly positive reaction of Egyptian citizens to the seven-point initiative of El Baradei – which would make real political contestation legitimate... – suggests that the idea is gaining ground among the public ...if citizens on a large scale start acting as though they want and deserve open political contestation, we are looking at big change. And if that happens, the United States will have some tough choices to make about whether it values more its friendship with the regime or with the people of Egypt.”*<sup>23</sup>
- *“...There is, today, a critical mass for substantive change. The lines between economic and political reform are increasingly blurred, replaced by an enveloping sense that too much has gone wrong for too long... Egypt’s ruling elites have become almost comically out of touch with their own people. While they continue emphasizing their economic bona fides to the few who still care to listen, their own citizens are angry, growing angrier, and – more importantly – doing something about it.”*<sup>24</sup>

Several think tank experts gradually concluded that the Mubarak succession was a divisive point within the regime itself, but did not write explicitly about this shift. It was increasingly clear that the military would not accept the transfer of leadership to Gamal Mubarak, and this was causing an impasse at the leadership level.

- *“Many in Egypt’s entrenched military elite will not easily agree to surrender control to a civilian president with no credentials to lead country and army...A military coup is rather unlikely, as the army is loyal to Mubarak and keen to keep current arrangements in place. This may change, however, if the prospective*

<sup>21</sup> Kristina Kausch. *Why the West Should Relinquish Mubarak*. FRIDE. May 4, 2010.

<sup>22</sup> Shadi Hamid. “Can’t We All Just Get Along?” *Foreign Policy*. June 2, 2010.

<sup>23</sup> Michele Dunne. “Can Egypt Change?: Reviewing a Decade of Changes” *Foreign Policy*. July 23, 2010.

<sup>24</sup> Shadi Hamid. “In Egypt, Mubarak’s Regime May Be a Victim of Its Own Success” *The National*. July 29, 2010.

*succession outcome were to endanger the military elite's considerable rents and prerogatives.*"<sup>25</sup>

Some experts began to draw the conclusion that the Egyptian military saw its interests as separate from those of the Mubarak family, and some foresaw the prospect that the military would not fire on crowds of mass protestors.

- *"... Events over the course of the past five years have done much to undermine the pervasive sense of fear that runs through Egyptian society despite the leadership's best efforts to reestablish its deterrent. It is entirely possible that Egyptians – like the millions of Iranians who turned out into the streets to protest rigged elections in June 2009 – would rally around a charismatic figure armed with an attractive alternative vision of society. Under these circumstances, it is not at all clear that Egypt's commanders... or their conscripts would have the fortitude to kill large numbers of demonstrators."*<sup>26</sup>
- *"The relative liberalization of some Arab regimes, and their greater reluctance to use deadly force against striking nationals or other domestic demonstrators, may have turned some protests in an inward, rather than anti-American direction."*<sup>27</sup>

Many observers remained cautious in predicting significant political change, despite the rising popular demands for change. The regime had long proven its ability to navigate social upheaval and unpopularity. At best, analysts noted that while Egypt was unlikely to change, it was more possible than widely assumed. It was not until observing the response to the fraudulent election in December 2010, analysts began to sense that tensions were mounting at unprecedented levels. Reports that previously divided opposition groups were forming a shadow parliament was one such indicator from one analyst.

- *"Sectarian conflicts are among several other issues – economic dissatisfaction, police brutality and torture, and public safety problems – souring the attitude of Egyptians toward the government and keeping the internal situation at a simmer, if not a boil. A parliamentary election seen by Egyptians as having been stolen will turn the temperature up another notch."*<sup>28</sup>
- *"It would be misleading to say that Egypt is 'on the brink' – as several experts have recently claimed – although it may be... In opting to wipe out its opposition, and with such lack of subtlety, it has made a major and potentially debilitating miscalculation. The regime has lost whatever legitimacy it had left. More importantly, however, it has breathed new life into what was, just one month ago, an aimless, fractious opposition that couldn't agree on whether or not to boycott the elections."*<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Kristina Kausch. *Managed Successions and Stability in the Arab World*. FRIDE. Working Paper No.104. November 2010.

<sup>26</sup> Cook. August 2009.

<sup>27</sup> David Pollock with Cole Bunzel and Curtis Cannon. "Actions, Not Just Attitudes: A New Paradigm for U.S.-Arab Relations" *Policy Focus #104*. Washington Institute for Near East Policy. June 2010.

<sup>28</sup> Michele Dunne. "Opaque and Messy Elections" *Carnegie Commentary*. November 29, 2010.

<sup>29</sup> Shadi Hamid. "Egypt Election 'Blunder' by Mubarak's NDP" *BBC News*. December 2, 2010.

## Research Methods

Overall, the research sources and methods employed by think tanks do not vary significantly between institutions, although some believe that their field research methods are better than others. Great value is placed on language skills, frequent travel to the region, contacts with a wide spectrum of views in society, and, increasingly, an established presence and ability to conduct workshops and hold conferences with local partners.

Think tank analysts all emphasized the importance of balancing their attention to formal politics and interstate relations, with greater focus on societal issues and attitudes in the region. Future research will address issues such as employment, water, youth, education, women's issues, and informal politics. Most institutions expressed their intention to expand their capacity to network in the region, conduct opinion polls, and monitor non-English regional press and social media.