

On a different level, *PSME* illustrates how novel data have helped shape new lines of inquiry after the Arab Uprisings. For instance, access to qualitative and quantitative data on protests, Nermin Allam and her collaborators indicate, injected new energies into the study of contentious politics in the MENA, allowing scholars to examine the determinants, dynamics, and effects of protests (Chapter 3). Unlike past research that treated protests as mere markers of cycles of contention, MENA politics scholars are now pursuing a deeper interest in the act of protest itself, bringing to focus previously understudied phenomena, such as the role of emotions and affect in mobilization (pp. 63, 69). Ferdinand Eibl et al. point out in Chapter 6 that in the field of political economy, improvements in firm-level data from various countries opened opportunities for measuring the effects of “political overhead” on the success of private sector enterprises (Chapter 6, p. 142). Expansions in Arab world survey research, Lindsay Benstead and her coauthors show, yielded a host of new findings on popular conceptions of democracy, the determinants of support for Islamist parties, and the relationship between religiosity and views on gender relations (Chapter 9).

While *PSME* frames the Arab Uprisings as a transformative moment in the history of research production on MENA, contributors acknowledge that many recent scholarly advancements were grounded in literatures and research efforts predating the uprisings. In some cases, newer contributions nuanced or refined prior theories without necessarily overturning them. For instance, as Tarek Masoud et al. point out in Chapter 7, the Uprisings pushed scholars to revisit “Islamist moderation” hypotheses and longstanding debates on the determinants of Islamist groups’ electoral success. In the field of political economy, post-Uprisings research added greater depth to the established literature on “rentier state theory” (Chapter 6, pp. 144–5). In other words, the knowledge accumulated before the Arab Uprisings is anything but irrelevant to contemporary research efforts. In fact, some *PSME* contributors warn of the pitfalls of treating the Arab Uprisings as a clean break from the past. Rawan Arar and the coauthors of Chapter 10 critique the “presentist bias” in some recent analyses on migration and displacement, many of which overlook the historical dimensions of post-Uprisings patterns of population movement (p. 233).

Inevitably, some readers will question *PSME*’s choice of chapter themes and whether they adequately do justice to all relevant research trends in the field. On this count, the contributors themselves proceed with humility, acknowledging the inherent limitations and tradeoffs of any such choice (Chapter 7, pp. 159, 284).

Regardless of what the volume may have missed by ways of themes or citations, the key argument in *PSME*’s is delivered very persuasively: Regional expertise was

evidently a decisive factor in realizing MENA political science’s theoretical gains during the last several decades. It is in that sense that *PSME* is more than just a chronology of the field’s scholarship; *PSME* is an argument about how knowledge production and theoretical innovations occur. Specifically, connecting these diverse chapters is a broader narrative about how regional studies—once dismissed by some as an ineffective approach to studying politics—not only contributed to what we know today about the workings of important political phenomena; it led the way in many respects. For example, Lynch reminds us, rather diplomatically, that attempts by non-regional specialists to theorize the Arab Uprisings and politics surrounding them have largely faltered and that “the more enduring contributions mostly came from those with real area studies expertise” (p. 28).

More than that, the profound impact of interdisciplinary exchanges within Middle East Studies on the literatures reviewed in *PSME* is quite clear. Clark and her collaborators, for example, attribute newer innovations in the study of local politics in MENA political science to “the growth of interdisciplinary approaches, particularly the spatial turn in MENA studies” and the “cross-fertilization between political science, urban studies, anthropology, sociology, and geography” (p. 257). While the contributions of interdisciplinary approaches are not equally apparent across chapters, most of them acknowledge them implicitly by citing work from other disciplines. More significantly, *PSME* itself embodies that inter-disciplinary spirit to the extent that a few of its chapters are coauthored by scholars affiliated with disciplines outside of political science. This is all to say that *PSME* not only refutes the once prevalent view that area expertise and regional studies are dying currencies in political science; it shatters it into pieces.

Women and the Islamic Republic: How Gendered Citizenship Conditions the Iranian State. By Shirin Saeidi.

New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022. 288p. \$99.99 cloth.
doi:10.1017/S1537592723001238

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Women and the Islamic Republic offers an in-depth analysis of the role of non-elite Iranian women in state-formation processes both before and after the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Shirin Saeidi emphasizes the importance of citizenship practices in better understanding postrevolutionary state-building in Iran. She also sheds more light on the gendered legacies of the Iran–Iraq war that significantly influenced these practices. Saeidi’s extensive research uses a multimethod approach that includes 24 months of ethnographic fieldwork among Iranian female activists in Iran, Sweden, Germany, and the United Kingdom; in-depth interviews with former prisoners; her active

participation in their religious ceremonies and gatherings; and an analysis of their memoirs.

The book impressively illustrates the significant contributions of Iranian women to state-formation processes as both active citizens and state-makers in the postrevolutionary context. For the non-elite women of this study, their understandings of their own rights have been shaped by the Iranian regime's citizenship discourses that they have equally challenged. Saeidi examines their engagement in state-building strategies in diverse spaces, including prisons, war fronts, Islamic seminaries, and hospitals. Across its seven chapters, *Women and the Islamic Republic* provides new insights into female acts of citizenships and national resistance. Saeidi illustrates how women transformed postrevolutionary Iran by engaging with authoritarianism and redefining activism through their various acts of citizenship.

Saeidi discusses how Iranian women questioned the regime's definition of the "ideal" Iranian revolutionary woman, who is expected to be highly educated, successful in her career, and actively involved in society while remaining devoutly Muslim, wearing the hijab, marrying at a young age, and having numerous children. This ideal is exemplified by figures such as Marzieh Hadidchi Dabbaq (1939–2016), whom the regime presents as the epitome of an Iranian "superwoman." In chapter 2, Saeidi explores Dabbaq's background as an anti-Shah activist and Islamic revolutionary with close ties to Khomeini. After her training as a fighter in Lebanon, Dabbaq became the first female commander of the Revolutionary Guards in Iran while being a mother of eight children. The regime tends to favor women who share Dabbaq's characteristics, such as women who are members of the Hezbollah branch in Iran. These women who are wives and daughters of martyrs who lost their lives during the Iran–Iraq war have often been viewed as loyal and ideal citizens of the regime who reinforce the state's authority and legitimacy. However, although Hezbollah women may have been regarded as the most pious social groups in the initial postrevolutionary period, their position changed because they questioned the government's top-down Islamization projects.

Chapter 2 illustrates how Iranian women have challenged the regime's narrow definition of the ideal revolutionary citizen by highlighting the multifaceted roles they have played in Iranian society. This is further developed in chapter 5 where Saeidi illustrates how Hezbollah women also challenge the patriarchal and discriminatory gender discourses of the Islamic government, particularly in the exclusion of wives of martyrs from their national discourse since 2009. Rather than following the government's approach, as explained in chapter 6, Hezbollah women promote a Muslim framework that empowers women and advances their interests and rights, demonstrating the compatibility of feminism and nationalism.

Women and the Islamic Republic demonstrates the complexity of women's experiences in the revolutionary and postrevolutionary period, highlighting their diverse perspectives on citizenship in Iran. By comparing practices of female activists before and after the revolution in chapters 3 and 4, Saeidi effectively illustrates the various ways in which women challenged the regime's oversimplified portrayal of their roles and identities as citizens. One way of preserving their status as a revolutionary citizen beyond the regime's gender limitations and discrimination was to maintain a sense of spiritual and cultural continuity during and after the revolution by using various strategies. Saeidi calls these strategies "spiritual acts of citizenship" (p. 67)—interventions that emerged in response to the Islamic Revolution used by Islamic and leftist women to challenge national and international structures of power. Saeidi illustrates, in chapter 3, how women preserved their revolutionary identity through various spiritual acts of citizenship during the 1980–88 period, supporting their families and communities through the production of erudite poetry. This mirrors the strategies of leftist female activists before the revolution who were able to find solace and cope with the challenges they faced during the Shah's reign by reading poetry written by Hafez and Rumi. This form of literature was especially important for female prisoners who used it as a survival tool to prevent mental breakdowns during the rule of the Pahlavis. As leftist female political prisoners, women practiced self-preservation and did spiritual acts of citizenship to maintain a sense of balance and control over their own subject formation. Saeidi illustrates how such spiritual acts of citizenship reinforced the bonds of community members and shared identities, regardless of religious or political affiliation and of being Islamist or leftist—a split that emerged after the revolutionary period.

Chapter 4 continues the discussion around the Islamic Republic's gendered nation-building attempts and people's own negotiations of their positions through affect and emotions that inspired Iranians to take action through what Saeidi calls "ethically committed ways of belonging" (p. 108). The chapter discusses how such actions redefined gendered and emotional subjectivities of individuals and communities during a time of war and revolutionary fervor. Women sought to disrupt the regime's heteronormative conception of citizenship and nationalism during its process of nation-building. Despite being isolated by the sociopolitical context of wartime Iran, women used their bodies to rebuild politics by declaring their financial independence and demonstrating their moral commitments not only to the republic but also to themselves and others. Saeidi gives various examples of female doctors and female medical assistants during the Iran–Iraq war who had to navigate between being mothers and professionals serving their country. While separated from her

own children, one nurse whom Saeidi interviewed saved patients whom she regarded as her “children,” highlighting her identity not only as a mother but also as a carer of victims of the war and savior of the republic.

Chapter 4 also allows the reader to delve into prison memoirs, particularly those of political prisoners who were deliberately separated and isolated by the regime. Leftist Iranians were accused of being collaborators with Iraq’s Baath Party because they opposed the establishment of an Islamic Republic. As a result, many were imprisoned together with Iraqis who were accused of espionage. During their imprisonment both Iranian and Iraqi women formed deeper connections and friendships that disrupted the regime’s attempt to divide them as enemies. These emotional bonds were often formed through shared experiences of womanhood, such as losing a husband and becoming a widow, or through motherhood, as some children became orphans after losing their fathers.

In conclusion, *Women and the Islamic Republic* makes a significant contribution to the fields of political science, Iranian studies, gender studies, and anthropology and is an essential read for students and scholars in these fields. With her interdisciplinary approach, Saeidi sheds new light on the complex relationship between women, citizenship, and the Iranian state before and after the Islamic Revolution. Within the context of ongoing civil protests in Iran that are predominantly run and led by young Iranian women, Saeidi once again illustrates the transformative role women can play in authoritarian political contexts.

Resisting Backsliding: Opposition Strategies against the Erosion of Democracy. By Laura Gamboa. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022. 320p. \$105.00 cloth, \$34.99 paper. doi:10.1017/S153759272300169X

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Academic journals and popular media are peppered with analysis and commentary on democratic erosion or backsliding. Why is it happening? Where is it happening? Is it even really happening? In analyzing the phenomenon and attempting to answer these questions, most scholarship has tended to focus either on structural forces that create inhospitable territory for democracy or on the actions of would-be autocrats who get elected and proceed to dismantle democracy from within. Laura Gamboa’s *Resisting Backsliding: Opposition Strategies against the Erosion of Democracy* offers a valuable addition to this literature by shining light on the agency of the political opposition and how their strategic choices affect whether would-be autocrats succeed in their antidemocratic designs.

The book lays out a theoretical framework for analyzing democratic backsliding that divides the process into two sequential stages. First, backsliding requires the election of a chief executive with hegemonic aspirations. Examining

the Latin American region since the 1980s, the book examines why these would-be autocrats get elected in some cases but not others, pointing toward causes such as party system instability, poor economic conditions, and state dysfunction. These findings largely reinforce existing claims in the literature. Nevertheless, this careful analysis serves an important confirmatory function while also setting up one of the book’s main underlying claims: structural factors best explain the election of would-be autocrats, but agency and choice must be highlighted to understand what happens after they take office.

Gamboa’s insight is that the strategies embraced by the political opposition merit particular attention because they affect the opposition’s domestic and international legitimacy and shift the incentives and constraints faced by would-be autocrats. Two dimensions of opposition strategy are highlighted: (1) whether they operate within institutional channels (such as competing in elections or using the legislative arena to slow the autocrat’s agenda) or extra-institutional channels (coups, strikes, protests) and (2) whether such strategies have moderate (win a tactical victory) or radical (get the autocrat out immediately) goals. The main claim of the book is that radical, extra-institutional strategies such as coups, general strikes, and violent protests are particularly pernicious gambles for the opposition. If these strategies fail (and they often do), they delegitimize the opposition domestically and internationally. Equally troubling, autocrats often capitalize on the aftermath of these failed gambits by escalating repression and accelerating erosion. To empirically assess these claims, Gamboa conducts case studies of Venezuela and Colombia, supported by briefer comparison cases of Bolivia, Poland, Turkey, and Hungary.

The main case studies make compelling claims for centering the importance of opposition strategies in our analysis of the dynamics of erosion. The Colombian case highlights the synergies between strong judicial institutions and a restrained opposition. Álvaro Uribe came to power facing a weak opposition and launched repeated barrages on the Colombian constitution, attempting to expand and entrench his power. Ultimately, however, Uribe proved incapable of bending the country’s highest court to his will: his efforts to remove presidential term limits failed, and he was forced to leave office after serving two terms and eight years. Gamboa’s contribution to the analysis of this story is to explore how the relatively restrained choices of the opposition—which opposed Uribe only via moderate, institutional strategies—created a context in which the high court could hold the line. The opposition’s choices ensured that Colombian politics was not wracked by the kind of deep crisis and polarization that might have enabled Uribe to move against the court via more dubious means. By safeguarding their legitimacy, the opposition also enabled the court to tacitly align with their cause more easily. Although the opposition was weak, their