As a result of this campaign, morale plummeted within the civil service. Senior bureaucrats who had not been fired or resigned were said to be desperately seeking new positions in the private sector, and reports circulated widely of the exodus of educated Syrians to Lebanon and other countries outside the Arab world. Among the Damascene elite most generally, bureaucratic restructuring produced an atmosphere of instability, upheaval, and alienation as villagers and peasants became more visible and more influential in official institutions. Civil servants mobilized to oppose some Ba'athist reforms, notably efforts to trim bureaucratic salaries, but such efforts were largely ineffective.

Over the course of the first eighteen to twenty-four months of Ba'athist rule, the restructuring of the civil service was broadened to include all branches of the government bureaucracy that were perceived as hostile to the party's consolidation of a popular authoritarian system of rule. By the beginning of 1964, new guidelines had altered hiring and appointment policies for the judiciary, teachers, provincial authorities, and state-employed clerics. Internal security agencies and the police received particular attention. In a number of instances, Ba'athist officials exploited outbreaks of opposition to broaden its control over various state agencies. For example, following violent protests in January 1963 against the nationalization policies of the Ba'ath, in which mosques had been focal points of opposition, the Presidency Council arrogated to itself full authority to dismiss and appoint imams, preachers, and religious scholars for a period of three months. This time frame was seen as adequate to permit the regime to "make any shakeup it has in mind." The 1963 protests also provided a sweeping change of judicial personnel, providing an excuse to replace judges not appointed by the Ba'ath with those who possessed, "a complete understanding of the legislation required by the socialist transformation stage." The same tactic was repeated after the February 1966 coup by radical factions of the Ba'ath, when the government repealed on two days the immunity of judges against arbitrary dismissal, to "reorganize the judiciary in harmony with the struggle for its achievements achieved by the Syrian people."

Through these rather heavy-handed forms of political pressure and direct intervention, the leadership of the Ba'ath completely restructured the bureaucracy by the close of 1966. Far from neglecting the demands of citizens, Ba'athist politicians gave it immediate and sustained attention. It is noteworthy in this respect that the process of state bureaucratic reform preceded and outpaced a considerable degree of restructuring of Syria's political institutions, the gradual transformation of the National Council of Revolutionary Command into a national assembly, and the drafting of a new constitution. Until the Ba'ath leadership could be assured that the institutions of the state were well in hand, it lacked the administrative capacity to manage its broad agenda of political and economic transformation.

Constructing a Radical-Populist Political Economy

While restructuring the bureaucracy was essential to the Ba'ath's ability to govern, state reform was also a necessary starting point in the party's larger project of institutional restructuring and social transformation. These processes were widely supported within the party, despite disagreements about their implementation. Like preceding governments, Ba'athist leaders not only restructured the bureaucracy but significantly expanded the size and capacities of the state as well, creating new government ministries, increasing the number and size of state agencies, and adding thousands of civil servants to the public payroll. As in the past, moreover, state expansion was largely the result of deepening state intervention in the economy, in particular the dramatic expansion of the public sector that accompanied the Ba'ath's self-styled "socialist transformation."

It was this transformation more than any other factor during these years—including the regime's destruction of the Arab unity that contributed to the consolidation of a popular authoritarian system of rule and set Ba'athist practices apart from those of previous Syrian governments and failed populist regimes more generally. This moment was not the first since independence when struggles over the organization of the Syrian political economy formed the principal axis of social conflict. Yet for the first time such struggles caused a fundamental redistribution of social power from limited and capitalist elites to populist social groups. Here too the Ba'ath benefited from the degree to which the state had become implicated in the economy since independence, making available to it a well-established set of interventions norms. During the union with Egypt, the Syrian economy had been subject to forms of economic restructuring that fit easily within the repertoire of Ba'athist practices. Ba'athist leaders also benefited, moreover, from the norms of distributive justice and popular welfare that had become integrated into Syrian politics, as well
Restructuring the Economy
At the time the Ba'th seized power, Syria's economy bore the clear imprint of the political struggles of the post-independence period and the continuing contest to define an appropriate balance between state and market. In previous chapters I have traced the massive changes that accompanied shifts in the pattern of state intervention since 1945, especially the extent to which state intervention came to undermine the autonomy and power of Syria's capitalists and landlords. These changes had fundamentally transformed the institutional and regulatory contours of the Syrian political economy, but the balance of economic resources remained in private hands. During the brief socialist period from September 1961 to March 1963, business-dominated governments worked to restore the prerogatives of the private sector and to shift the trajectory of Syria's political economy away from a mixed-society toward a more centralized economic policy. Despite deep strains among Syria's capitalists and the opposition of workers, communists, and the Ba'th, this project was still very much underway at the time of the March 1964 coup.
By the time Ba'thists secured their hold on power seven years later, however, the Ba'th, which had inherited an economy that was too wrapped up in its daily survival to pay attention to the demands of building a radical populist state, had spent the eighteen months since the end of the U.A.R. struggling to reimpose a controlled-liberal political economy, fiercely resisted the Ba'th's economic and social policies. Their deeply pessimistic reaction to the rise of the Ba'th also reflected the lessons of the union, in particular what the business community had learned about the boundaries of possible accommodation between their interests and those of a committed populist regime. Little in this experience persuaded them to view the prospects offered by a Ba'th that Syria with much hope. In contrast to earlier periods, however, Syria's capitalists now proved unwill to stem the tide of social change to undermine the growing consolidation of the populist authoritarian system of rule. Having made good use themselves of the authoritarin tools they inherited from the United Arab Republic, Syria's former economic and political elite now confronted a government more than willing to deploy such tools against them.
the economy should be organized, and how these relations were to be constructed. It is also evident that differences within the Ba'ath over the pace and scope of economic restructuring and were relations with the private sector have obscured the extent to which this understanding was shared by a Ba'ath leadership that broadly supported the radical redesign of the Syrian economy.22 The outlines of this redesign took shape during the early months of Ba'th rule and were essentially settled by the end of 1963, permitting its implementation to begin in earnest in early 1964. The tone for what followed was set by Salih al-Din Bitar in his first policy address as prime minister less than a week after the coup. Bitar's speech, while thin on details and heavy on polemics, was nonetheless an important signal of government intentions, not least in defining the position that capitalists were expected to occupy in the new system of rule. He indicated that the economy would be organized along socialist lines and that economic policies would favor industrialization in both private and public sectors, as well as promote agrarian reform, workers' rights, and large-scale infrastructural development. The government, he asserted, "will protect the aims of the revolution by preventing capitalism from dominating the government."

However lacking in detail Bitar's statement might have been, its intentions were transparently clear. U.S. Embassy reports concluded—with much foresight—that the best capitalists could hope for now was "a mixed economic system under which the state will permit the private sector to operate in areas not directly related to the major economic interests of the state."23 Reactions to Bitar's pronouncement from the Chambers of Commerce were at best lukewarm.24 Privately, however, business reactions were far more critical. Capitalists, according to one report, "now fear the re-imposition of the nationalization decrees of July 1963, and the extension of these even to State control of foreign trade, their own subordination to state planning, and an increase in controls which the new state is bringing to which the state owes nothing."25 Assuming the worst, wealthy Syrians immediately began to transfer their money out of the country. Businessmen postponed investments and asked foreign creditors to make payments into offshore accounts.26 The Syrian pound fell dramatically against the dollar, and requests for import licenses shot up in anticipation of new controls on foreign trade.

Deeply concerned by the outflow of scarce capital, the government quickly sealed off control over the circulation of foreign exchange. The first decree issued by the National Command of the Revolutionary Council in early March 1963 included a temporary prohibition on large transfers of funds, but capital flight still accelerated. In response, the cabinet renationalized all banks on May 25. It ordered banks and the offices of money changers to be sealed, replacing their boards and directors with government appointees.27 The cabinet also replaced the governor and deputy governor of the Central Bank and dismissed a number of other top-level administrators of key economic agencies. Soon after, the government reestablished currency controls that had been removed less than a year earlier. The new regulations gave Syrians two weeks to exchange all foreign currency in their possession for Syrian pounds. Needless to say, compliance was far from perfect. In announcing these decrees, the regime castigated the bourgeoisie for its reactionary character and its destructive impact on the Syrian economy. To emphasize the commitment to halting capital flight, a number of prominent businessmen in Aleppo were arrested, fined, and forced to post bonds of as much as $100,000 to secure their release. These regulations were clearly reactive in character. In private interviews, senior Ba'thist Salih al-Din Bitar acknowledged that the nationalizations and currency controls were intended simply to "contain in Syria what little Syrian capital still remained in the country."28 Over the next two months, however, other measures were launched that confirmed the perception of a bound-based program intended to restructure the economy along populist lines. On June 23, a new agrarian reform law was announced that tightened limitations on landownership and extended easier credit terms to farmers.29

22. Bitar's statement was directed more toward the role that Norasists might play in the new government than at the Ba'th Party, which was seen at first as a useful check on both the Norasists and Syrian communists. In addition, unlike Ba'thists, including Bitar, hold private back-channel talks with some representatives of the business community in the early days after the coup and offered assurances concerning their economic plans. These discussions had no discernible impact, however. Flying blind through the winter, businessmen had no intention of waiting to see whether Ba'th could be trusted before withdrawing their capital. Damascus to Secretary of State, March 13, 1963, 507.04 and 565.04, RG395, 2/38, NA.
23. All banks had been nationalized in July 1963, but those owned by Syrians and Arabs were reconstituted after the coup. See Chapter 4, p. 131.
24. The nationalized banks were reorganized into six holding groups in August and subsequently merged into a single entity, the Commercial Bank of Syria.
25. Damascus to Secretary of State, May 31, 1963, 507.04, RG395, 2/38, NA.
peasants. On July 3 the Higher Planning Council was created and charged with overseeing and directing the activities of the Ministry of Planning. The ministry was to manage a network of local planning bureaus intended to extend the government's planning capacity more deeply into the provinces. On August 13 the government decreed that nationalized banks would be reorganized into five banking groups, a move that business leaders perceived as "making more difficult the securing of large loans by rich private merchants."29

Meetings between government representatives and business delegations could only have deepened the growing fears of the business community. In late March, Prime Minister Faisal and Minister of Economy Abd al-Karim Zahir received a delegation from the Chamber of Commerce of Damascus. One account of the meeting has the minister of economy casting his vision, describing them as crooks and idols asserting that in the future, it would be the government that would "direct economic policy to business men, and not vice versa."30 Direct meetings between U.S. Embassy officials and senior Ba'thist ministers continued the deep antagonism of the Ba'th toward businessmen. In one such meeting, Jamal al-Atasi, who then held the position of minister of information, denoted Syrian capitalism as "having learned nothing" from past experiences. "Their sole interest," Atasi claimed, "has been in quick-terms profits, and now [they] only concern is in getting their money out of Syria. To this [the Embassy officials] pointed out that telling a businessman as this government is in fact doing, that he will eventually be nationalized or lose his business in one way or another can never obtain his cooperation, ... Atasi paid lip service to the idea of a more cooperative approach to the private sector, but I deduced [the] definite impression that he is closed-minded on the subject of Syrian capitalism."31

This impression was further reinforced by the results of two party congresses that took place during the early fall of 1965. In September, the Regional Command of the Ba'th held its first congress since the March coup and endorsed a radical approach to economic restructuring as the party's official position.32 By the time the Sixth National Congress of the party convened in October, Ba'th's rough-hewn outline of Ba'thist intentions had been recent as a more elaborated statement of the party's determination to thwart Syria's political economy. The final resolutions of the Sixth National Congress are widely recognized as a critical point in the consolidation of Ba'thist radicalism, and they reflect the increasing antagonism of the Ba'th toward Syrian capitalism. Dismaying the possibility of an inclusive social pact, the party declared that on the basis of a "scientific analysis of economic and political conditions . . . the bourgeoisie is unable to carry out any positive task in the economic sphere." Furthermore, it continued, "the opportunism of the bourgeoisie qualifies it for the role of ally to the new colonialism. The workers, peasants, revolutionary civil and military intelligentsia, and the poor bourgeoisie were considered the proper forces for the achievement of the Socialist revolution in its initial stage."33

In furthering the marginalization of Syrian capitalism, the Ba'th also recommended the introduction of workplace democracy through worker self-management, advocating the restructuring of government agencies to permit "them to participate fully in the process of conversion to socialism." It emphasized the need for collectivization in agriculture as the "proper Sociala take-off point for the ongoing change in social relations," reinforced the urgency of economic planning, and stressed the need for popular mobilization and the formation of popular institutions to support the "party's goals of social and economic reform.

Capitalists against the State

Just seven months after the March coup, therefore, the broad contours of business-state relations had been defined in terms that left little possibility for a reconciliation between the two. At the same time, however, Ba'thist elites, like Nasser, were mindful of the private sector's importance to the national economy and periodically embarked on campaigns to bolster the sagging confidence of businessmen. These efforts, however, above all, impressed political theater: spectacles that are notable less for their intended effects than for what they reveal about the relationship between the Ba'th and the private sector during this early moment of Ba'th rule. Launched to create the appearance of conciliation, they underscored the tension between the Ba'th's core project of reconstructing a radical populist regime and its need to avoid an economic collapse that might place

29. American Consulate in Aleppo to Department of State, August 22, 1965, no. A9-t, 289/3349A, NA.
30. Embassy to Secretary of State, April 1, 1965, no. 928, 289/3349A, NA.
31. Embassy to Secretary of State, April 29, 1965, no. 720, 289/3349A, NA.
32. The Regional Command was the executive structure of the country's Ba'thist parties of the Ba'th. The congress, in which representatives of the National Command, with the term "national" referring to the Arab nation as a whole, of which indicated countries were mostly

this project at risk. They highlight both the mechanisms through which the business community struggled to retain a measure of influence over economic policy and the issues around which the business community mobilized. They also help to mark the narrowing boundaries of business influence and the shifting balance of political and social power in the country.

One of several "corollary" episodes occurred following the violent suppression of a coup attempt by Nasserist officers in July 1963 and the subsequent consolidation of General Anis el-Halaf as head of the National Council of Revolutionary Command (NCRC). Feeling that the Ba'th had at last secured some political breathing room—and hoping to engage business leaders in an anti-Nasserist coalition—Halaf invited a dialogue with the business community. Business groups took advantage of the invitation to publicize their opposition to the postwar reorganization of Syria's political economy. On August 1 the Damascus Chamber of Commerce issued a detailed memorandum criticizing the government's economic conduct, calling for the relaxation of exchange controls and the denationalization of banks and warning about the financial losses Syria would suffer should the government continue to intervene in private sector affairs. Halaf met with the Damascus chambers shortly afterward, and according to reports published in the party's newspaper, Al-Ba'th, he used the meeting to assure the party's commitment to social change. Comparing the tribulations of the Ba'th to those faced by the Prophet Muhammad in spreading the faith of Islam, he expressed his belief that the Ba'th would likewise prevail—sentiments that could hardly have soothed the fears of his audience.

Ten days later, Halaf, Bitar, and other cabinet ministers hosted a delegation of some fifty businessmen from Aleppo. Despite securing some concessions from Halaf on a number of minor issues, government representatives held firm on the larger questions of economic restructuring. Moreover, evidence suggests that businessmen involved in these discussions

35. According to Salih al-Din Bitar, who served yet again as prime minister after the July 1963 coup attempt, the regime was too secure to turn its attention toward economic affairs (interview with Secretary of State, August 14, 1963, n. 148, RG 59, 1963, NA). Following this date, the new cabinet announced that the principal goal would be socialist transformation, rather than the pursuit of union with Egypt (Birn, "Crisis of Principle and Policy," p. 154).

36. For example, a leading business journal that had been dormant for several years returned to publication in 1964 and published an unattributed article that quite openly criticized private sector businessmen about the regressive effects of nationalization on trade, production, and investment. See "On some points discussed publicly in Syria," Entilat, no. 20 (October 1963).


39. Aleppo to Department of State, March 18, 1963, RG 59, 1963, NA.

fully appreciated the extent to which the regime's radical-populist strategy of state building had undermined possibilities for compromise. As one participant in the August 23-25 meetings indicated, to satisfy the concerns of business, the Ba'th more... must now make important concessions with respect to their sacred docums of socialism at the request of their war enemies, the very capitalists and "separatists" whom they have so vigorously and bitterly attacked... Such concessions will not be easily won in the councils of the Ba'th Party. In other words, as early as July 1963, the strategic tension dividing the Ba'th and capitalists were simply too great to be overcome.

As a result, efforts to stabilize business-regime relations during the summer and fall of 1963 had scarcely any effect. With little expectation of a change in government policy, the business community found no particular reason to alter its behavior. Capital flight continued at a rapid pace, while new investment remained at a virtual standstill. By the end of the year, Syria was experiencing a marked foreign exchange shortfall, and the government began to acknowledge publicly that the economy was in crisis. In early January, the government introduced a widespread austerity program that included a 50% increase in tariffs on luxury imports and additional protections for local manufactured goods. Other measures soon followed. On January 9 the government introduced a system of ration cards for the purchase of essential goods, and on January 23 new restrictions tightened even further the already extensive regulations on the removal of foreign exchange from the country.

Syrian capitalists and other opponents of the Ba'th perceived the crisis as a critical turning point. Mounting evidence of Syria's economic difficulties, along with the imposition of new restrictions on foreign trade, prompted the Damascus Chamber of Commerce to present the government with a formal demand for the return to a "free economy," along with a particularly pointed attack on the Ba'th's economic policies. More significant, economic conditions helped crystallize an opposition coalition among businessmen and Islamists. Beginning in late February 1963, business groups and Islamic political groups, with some involvement of Nasserists as well, launched a nationwide series of protests, strikes, and riots that grew to become the most substantial challenge yet faced by the Ba'thist regime.
Like many such events, the immediate trigger for the "spring uprising" of 1984 was a series of relatively minor incidents that were aggravated by the government's heavy-handed reaction. Small-scale violence between Muslims and Christians occurred in the coastal city of Banias in early February followed by a commercial strike that shut down business in the nearby city of Hama. The government's response was immediate and harsh. Within forty-eight hours a small group of businessmen identified by the government as strike leaders had been arrested. Emergency military tribunals sentenced five merchants to prison terms, stripped them of their civil rights, and banned them from residence in Homs for a period of five years. Interior Minister Neil al-Din Al-Moosie accused the events in Homs as the precursor to a "general country-wide business protest" against the regime and promised to crack down on any further disturbances. Government newspapers attacked a similar chord, describing the strike as a "plot against the state." Business leaders protested the government's behavior to President Hafiz, but there are few indications that their grievances were addressed.

Following the events in Homs, regime officials once again took part in a dialogue with representatives of the business community, both public and private, hoping to lessen the tensions between them. As during the previous EID, however, the regime's modest attempts to conciliate the private sector must be read against its highly visible efforts to broaden popular support for its program of economic transformation. In early March, with the economy still in crisis, Economy Minister George Tumeh gave a national radio address supporting the nationalization of banks and blaming the capital flight and poor weather for the country's economic problems.

In celebrations on March 8 marking the RRD's first year in power, President Hafiz gave a speech emphasizing the gains of Syria's populist transformation.

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46. For a good treatment in Damascus to Secretary of State, March 13, 1984, N. 15059, RG952/185, NA. The session was described in press accounts as a "talk by Hama businessmen to show their support for the government in the midst of its difficulties."
47. "Business leaders protest the government's behavior to President Hafiz, but there are few indications that their grievances were addressed.""
the government's determination to enforce it, brought the 'battle of the beaches' in Damascus to a rapid end. Shops reopened, and a number of business leaders issued an apology to the government, along with a denial that their actions had been connected to events elsewhere in the country.

Significantly, the repression of business protests was not the only means used by the government to consolidate its system of rule. Even in the midst of a severe political challenge, the Ba'athist leadership remained attentive to issues of institution building. During the commercial strike and in the face of rampant speculation about the regime's survival, President Hafiz announced the completion of a provisional constitution. Included in the document were a number of significant changes, some of which seemed designed to blunt criticism of the regime as antidemocratic but the majority of which were clearly intended to broaden the regime's social base and place in its structure to accommodate the actions of various groups that were in favor of the regime.

The inclusion of the transformation of the NCR (Executive Presidency) into an executive presidency council, headed by General Hafiz, and as the creation of an elected National Council as the country's legislative authority. The National Council would be composed of its present members (that is, the NCR) as well as representatives from the popular sectors, such as workers, peasants, and women. And while the provisional constitution included language that affirmed the protection of private property and required that 'just compensation' for nationalized properties be highlighted the public ownership of all national resources, signaled out collective ownership to the basis of Syria's 'socialist society,' and gave the state explicit entitlement to 'nationalize by law every institution or project relating to the general interest to retain for just compensation.'

By the end of April, the uprising of spring 1982 was over. In the course of the next month, with the political situation firmly in hand, the regime's rhetoric underwent a temporary shift in tone. A few months later, the number of those who had taken part in opposition activities, in exchange for

51. In an interview in May 1982, Senior Place Director or Secretary of the national command of the NCR, told a delegation of British parliamentsmen that this council would not be a real parliament. The party leaders would maintain their power, and the council would still be the council that would only have appointed representatives, in the organization of the government. But it had not yet been confirmed. In [121] it admitted that the purpose of the temporary arrangement was to keep the National Council in power. He believed that this was right, and that it was in any case a government of a single man or a group. He was the embodiment of the UK, and he was the embodiment of the UK.

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expressions of support for the regime. A new cabinet was formed, once again with Safat al-Din Bitar as prime minister, which made a number of overtures to the business community. On May 25 Bitar gave a major economic policy address that provided for an explicit division of economic horizons between the private and public sector, the creation of a new joint sector, and assurances that socialist transformation would happen as a more gradual pace and would include room for the private sector to play a role. In November the Presidency Council abolished the Marital Law Tribunals and National Security Courts that had been created in early 1965.

While the government's reparative measures were immediately responsible for the uprising's swift collapse, the failure of Syria's capitalists to achieve meaningful political gains illustrates that only the dynamics of social change in Syria and the patterns of capitalists' mobilization but also the extent to which Ba'th practices of state building had transformed the balance of social power since March 1963. They also call into question the dominant narrative of these events as captured in the secondary literature. Without exception, this literature treats the uprising as evidence of the continuing social power of Syria's capitalists in the period after the coup. In Rabino-


Yet to some contemporary observers, including those based in the U.S. Embassy, the uprising and its aftermath did not constitute evidence of capitalists' social power. Rather, they were viewed as indicators of capitalists' increasing isolation from Syrian society and political openness, the increasing influence of populist discourse in Syrian politics, and, by implication, the relative success of the Ba'th in establishing the credibility of its commitment to these ends, particularly among social groups that had previously been

excluded. One assessment of the uprising from a U.S. diplomat noted the inability of capitalists to look beyond their own interests long enough to sustain an alliance of opposition forces. Observing that the "most potent" source of antiregime mobilization was the Ba'th's "disregard and contempt for Islam," this assessment added that "as merchants strike progress, religious issues tended to fade while with careful assistance by [the gov-


ment] of further provocation and with surprisingly narrow minded and shortsighted concentration of business elements on [their] own special grievances without reference to or apparent concern for social progress and change." A second report, from a British diplomat, concluded that "the days of private enterprise in Syria are past. The wind of change in the region is moving toward State control, and I cannot believe that, even should it enjoy a brief return to power, private enterprise will ever again for the dominant influence in Syrian economic development." Seen in this light, the spring uprising stands out as a defining moment in the dynamic of government-capitalist relations in Syria during the early period of Ba'th state building. Viewed by many Syrians as a critical test of the Ba'th's power and support, both within the military and among the population at large, its outcome marks a turning point in the consolidation of the Ba'th's populist authoritarian system of rule. The confrontation exposed severe cracks in the social and political power of capitalists. It also exposed the regime's determination to organize its system of rule around a repressive, exclusionary, and increasingly radical populist coalition. Ba'th elites did exhibit some willingness to make economic compromises in response to the concerns of the private sector. At the same time, however, they continued to restructure the Syrian economy and accelerated their efforts to construct popular institutions such as the National Council. Indeed, the Ba'th's response to economic crisis, capital flight, and evidence of the economy's continuing reliance on the private sector was not compensatory and conciliatory but increasing state control over economic resources, the strengthening of Ba'thist political institutions, and a further sharpening of its radical populist identity.

Beginning in early January 1965, the regime announced a series of extreme "socialist decrees" that brought the bulk of large and mediumsized industries in Syria under government control. During the course of the month, some twenty-two firms were fully nationalized, including a number of those in which the government already held a minority share; an additional twenty-four firms were nationalized, and sixty-one firms were


2. Scholars in Syria have used the word "nationalization" in economic contexts to refer to the transfer of control of businesses from state to private sector. In this article, I use "nationalization" in a political sense, referring to the transfer of control of businesses from the state to private sector.

3. For a summary of the Ba'th's "socialist" decrees, see: "Economic Policy," in: 'Document in Secretary of State, May 14, 1964, no. 4-593, RG59/1964, NA.


nationalized 75 percent. Boards of these firms were dissolved and replaced with workers self-management guidelines approved in May 1963. Sharp warnings from the regime against opposition accompanied the decrees. New military barracks were established to back up these threats and ensure compliance with nationalization measures. To underscore the popular dimensions of the decrees, peasants and workers were transported to Damascus for government demonstrations.

The government's initiatives continued throughout the spring. In mid-February, thirty-nine import-export firms were nationalized and placed under the authority of SIMEX, the state-owned import-export organization. Along with a list of commodities over which SIMEX was given a trade monopoly, the government emphasized that businesspeople caught "hoarding or smuggling food items" would receive severe punishments, including life imprisonment and possibly the death penalty. In early March, oil and fuel distribution firms, including foreign-owned firms, were nationalized and placed under the authority of the General Petroleum Authority. On May 4, the government nationalized fifteen cotton-ginning factories, "the last plants of the modern industrial sector still in private hands," and shifted responsibility for the export of wheat, cotton, barley, and their by-products to the Government Cereals Office and a newly formed Cotton Marketing Authority, a more "crucial to Syria since well over half its foreign exchange is generated from their sale." Within months, the government also established the General Organization for the Public Industrial Sector and the General Organization for Cereals and Flour Mills, which, along with SIMEX and the Cotton Marketing Authority, created the administrative infrastructure to manage state-owned enterprises.

The socialist decrees and extant measures that followed left important areas of economic activity in the hands of the private sector—including thousands of small, workshop-based, light manufacturing enterprises, low-

67. Ibid.
experience of 1963, when a previous effort to reorganize Syria's political economy brought about the collapse of the United Arab Republic, the Ba'th remained committed to avoiding such a fate. It succeeded in imposing these changes on the resistant private sector. Chambers of Commerce and Industry continued to submit memoranda to the government demanding liberalization. Merchants and Islamists would again mount a series of commercial strikes in May 1967, but these too would quickly be suppressed. The balance of social power in Syria had decisively been retained.

Despite these political gains, the public sector did not emerge overnight as the engine of Syrian economic development. Nevertheless, the impressive goals established by the private sector in both the first and second five-year plans (1961–65 and 1966–70), the private sector remained the major contributor to Syria's economic growth for most of the decade. During the fiscal year—kicking in mind that the bulk of nationalizations took place near the end of the plan period—the public sector failed to meet its investment target by almost 50 percent. The private sector, on the other hand, accounted for 11 percent of its planned investment.

During the second plan period, the public sector again failed to meet its investment target, but the private sector's share of total investment plummeted from almost 70 percent in 1965 and 1966 to 47 percent the next year, dropping to a low of 20 percent in 1967. Although government statistics are not entirely reliable, it seems likely that the public sector did not contribute more than half of fixed capital formation until the late 1960s at best. Thus, while the rhetoric of radical anticapitalism, revolution, and class conflict was useful for the mobilization of popular social groups and the consolidation of the regime politically, the Ba'th's reorganization of Syria's economic was not motivated in an intent to eliminate markets or construct a Soviet-style command economy.

Reorganizing Syrian Agriculture

Reorganizing Syria's political economy involved not only nationalizations but also the elimination of private agricultural production. As part of the 1963 nationalization, all state-owned land transfer (sales and leases) to private owners, as well as the encouragement of socialist collective and cooperative agriculture. This was done to increase the amount of private property held by small-scale farmers. The stronger nationalization reform of 1965 was a growing emphasis on rural cooperatives and new agricultural collectives as the organizing framework for agricultural production. Land reform under the Ba'th was intended to redistribute land to farmers, but it did not result in the large-scale development of cooperatives. Instead, the state was the central actor, and the shift was evident in the increasing allocation of state resources toward these ends, as well as the growing reliance on land reform as a means for the reorganization of agricultural production.

Agricultural cooperatives were first established in Syria in the 1920s. Their numbers increased more quickly during the United Arab Republic period but showed negligible growth during the second period that
followed. After March 1959, however, the cooperative underwent unprecedented expansion, a process that has continued essentially to the mid-1990s. By the early 1970s, the number of agricultural cooperatives in Syria had grown from about 200 in 1959 to about 1,000, with 134,000 members. By 1975, there were more than 3,000 cooperatives, covering almost 25 million hectares and involving more than 500,000 peasants, of whom 60,000 were women. Cooperatives were supplemented by peasants' associations, and by 1970 more than twelve hundred associations had been established, with more than one million members. In addition, the first small-scale collective state farms were formed in the Ghouta, just outside Damascus in 1963, later expanding to other regions. By the end of the decade they covered some 250,000 hectares.

Underlying these changes were a series of government regulations and incentives supporting the restructuring of agricultural production. These included a requirement introduced in the June 1963 agrarian reform law that peasants receiving expropriated land must be members of cooperatives or collectives. Financial facilities for cooperatives were strengthened in 1966 when the Agricultural Bank was reorganized as the Bank for Agricultural Cooperatives. In late 1967, a decree authorized the establishment of the General Federation of Agricultural Cooperatives to centralize the administration of this increasingly important sector of the rural economy. In addition, cooperatives that originally provided rather limited services to members gradually expanded their roles, becoming the central point for state interventions ranging from participation in training courses to advice on crop management, the provision of credit, and access to equipment.

As this summary suggests, Syria's agricultural sector became much more deeply involved during the 1960s within a network of institutional arrangements that were not only production oriented but also explicitly intended to reorganize relations between peasants and the state. Even though the vast majority of land continued to be privately held, the nationalization of marketing, supply, distribution, credit, processing of crops, and other functions on which the agricultural economy depended meant that the...
effects of the Ba'th's restructuring were felt far throughout the agricultural economy. Moreover, as I discuss in the next section, the Ba'th's emphasis on reorganizing agricultural producers was only part of a much broader strategy for reshaping Syrian society along populist lines.

**Popular Institutions and the Reorganization of Syrian Society**

Alongside its efforts to restructure the state and the economy, the Ba'th undertook an equally ambitious drive to reorganize Syrian society. Within the first year following the March 8 coup, Ba'thist leaders began to reshape structures of interest representation to place in practice the institutional frameworks needed to mobilize a populist political coalition and permit the more intensive forms of intervention and control that were central to the consolidation of a populist authoritarian system of rule. Over the course of the next several years, and particularly in the period following the February 1966 coup, Ba'thist elites would develop a full-blown state-corporatist apparatus, encompassing not only existing professional associations, youth groups, and trade unions but also a large number of newly formed "popular organizations," political structures such as the National Council, and paramilitary groups such as the National Guard and Workers' Militias. In this domain as in others, however, Ba'thist elites had available to them and made ready use of a substantial body of legal precedent, established means, and prior experience. They relied heavily on well-worn corporatist techniques of social management couched in the same mix of populist and Leninist discourse that served to justify their policies more generally.

The initial targets of Ba'thist restructuring were workers and peasants, the two core "pillars" of the new socialist society (with students, intellectuals, and the army representing three additional "pillars"). Both groups were seen as critical elements of the Ba'th's popular coalition, yet both were perceived, for different reasons, as problematic sources of support. Labor unions had been thoroughly reorganized as a result of the 1959 labor law, had lost additional autonomy as a result of legislation passed during the secessionist period, and had been virtually purged of communist members. The initial impulsion of the regime was to view workers as natural allies, strengthen the independence of the unions, and accord workers a meaningful role in support of its broader project of social transformation. For militant activists within the Ba'th, union organizations and publications were useful instruments for lobbying the party to move in more radical directions.

As the same time, unions were understood to be, at least potentially, politically unreliable. They remained sites of strong support for the Nasserist opposition and, to a smaller degree, for the Syrian Communist Party. Unions stood out as having the capacity to make organized demands on the government and to mobilize challenges to the hegemony of Ba'thist power. The key concerns shaping Ba'thist policies toward labor, therefore, was how to transform a highly mobilized political force into a tractable instrument of the regime, while ensuring that the government retained the capacity to keep unions under control. After an initial period in which engagement seemed to outweigh control in the Ba'th's relations with labor, the emphasis shifted toward a more focused strategy, rendering labor a passive and politically demobilized but stable source of regime support.

Peasants were also seen as logical, indeed necessary allies of the regime, given the rural origins of the emerging generation of Ba'thist elites. Yet a large majority of peasants remained politically inactive. Others were responsive to the Islamist-sectarian critique of the Ba'th, whereas beneficiares of land reform under the U.A.R. were inclined to support the Nasserist opposition. Moreover, the post-accession split between Akram al-Hassani's Arab Socialist Party and the Ba'th had cost the latter one of its most potent political entrepreneurs, a man who had been particularly effective in generating support among the rural poor. In contrast to labor, therefore, the Ba'th's peasant "problem" revolved around strategies for transferring the political loyalties of peasants to the party, raising their levels of political mobilization, and carefully managing their incorporation into the political arena.

Controlling Workers

Ba'thist efforts to engage the labor movement in Syria began in earnest only in late 1963, when the NGRD circulated preliminary versions of a law intended to restore to labor rights lost during the secessionist period. Promulgated in February 1964, the new law was widely viewed as broadening the authority and autonomy of labor unions. It restored the principle of leadership by election rather than appointment, called for new elections to be held within six months, and provided modest protections for unions against some forms of state interference. As in the past, however, these rights were offset by the continuation of the corporatist controls established almost twenty years earlier in the Uniform Labor Code of 1946. And the Ba'th proved no less willing than its predecessors to use its authority to re-

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77 A summary of the decree's provisions is included in U.S. Embassy Damascus to Secretary of State, March 24, 1964, 1964-P-20, RG 59, 1964, NA.
press labor activism. During the spring uprising of 1964, for example, a threatened strike by the twenty-thousand-member Syrian Teachers' Union led to the dismissal of the union's executive council and the appointment of provisional councils made up of party loyalists. In late August 1964, the six-month interim period before elections was extended for an additional six months, a delay intended to permit the Ba'th to bring the General Federation of Trade Unions under its complete control. During this interval, a new board was appointed, made up largely of individuals with no prior experience in the labor movement. The regime also undertook a reorganization of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. In early October 1964, Amir al-Hafez (now serving as prime minister) appointed veteran labor leader Ali Talibini as his minister of labor and social affairs. In January 1965, just as the government was launching its sweeping nationalization measures, Talibini oversaw a major purge of his senior staff, resulting in the dismissal or transfer of almost ninety ministry officials. These changes, one observer noted, "is a pattern in that they strengthen the control of the Ministry and its officials, and hence the Ba'th party, over the people they hope to organize. Enthusiasm for the goals and programs of the Ba'th revolution was apparently more important in the personnel reshuffling than technical competence." 78

Immediately following his appointment, Talibini began a high-profile round of speeches, factory visits, and other events on behalf of Ba'thist candidates in the upcoming elections. His efforts had little effect, however, and Ba'thist candidates were soundly defeated in the first round of voting. On February 11, 1965, elections were held for the membership of the Damascus Sporting and Weaving Unions, which had about twelve thousand members and nine thousand eligible voters. With about eighty thousand individuals 79. These incidents were stepped up with the wave of social unrest that preceded the spring 1964 uprising discussed above. U.S. Embassy reports indicate that the regime's willingness to use firmer methods of persuasion testifies to the need to ensure leadership among educated professionals for training Syrian youth. H. S. Embassies, Damascus to Secretary of State, April 8, 1964, Despatch 414, RIGS/16818, NA.

79. In spring 1964, Ba'thist military chief al-Hali was appointed president of the GFTU. He used his position to transform the federation into a source of pressure on the regime from the left. Rajeev and others in the party were unsuccessful in holding union elections while Hali was in charge of the GFTU.

80. Talibini had most recently served as president of the Syndicate of Railway Workers but had been involved in national union affairs since the late 1940s. He was presented as a model for the Ba'thist worker bureaucrat, and much was made of his relative lack of formal education and his personal modesty. Damascus to Department of State, October 12, 1964, ms. 3114, RIGS/92278, NA; and January 5, 1965, ms. 4351, RIGS/92278, NA.

81. Damascus to Department of State, ms. A-157, RIGS/1718, NA.

rial workers belonging to unions nationwide, the Damascus local was one of the largest and most powerful in the country. By a majority of well over two to one (seven thousand to eighteen hundred), members voted in a pre-Nasserist show opposed by the government, defying the handpicked candidates of the ministry. 81

Defeated candidates appealed to the government to annul the election results, but Talibini and Hafez both refused. Rather than overturn such a powerful expression of worker dissent, Talibini quickly altered his strategy and took more aggressive measures to ensure that election results elsewhere in the country would turn out more favorably for the regime. In Aleppo, Latakia, and other cities, Nasserist candidates were subsequently defeated through a combination of police intimidation and fraud, resulting in a clean sweep for Ba'thist candidates in elections for the local councils of government workers unions, postal workers (a Nasserist-leaning local in Latakia), bank employees, employees of the tobacco monopoly, electric utility workers, and others.

At the regional and national level, control of union leadership was reinforced by an amendment to the selection procedures for union officers which preceded the February elections. In late January, the government changed requirements such that officials needed only to be "representatives" of local unions rather than their elected officials, which opened the possibility that union officials could be appointed as will by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. Passing its newly established powers into effect once regional elections had been completed, the ministry announced the formation of a new executive committee of the GFTU and named Khalid al-Jundi, a senior Ba'thist associated with the militant wing of the party, as provisional president. His position was narrowly ratified through elections in April.

For all intents and purposes, these measures completed the corporatist integration of the labor movement into the Ba'th's system of rule as a subordinate and responsive element of its ruling coalition. During the course of the following year, Jundi worked to broaden the role of the GFTU in such areas as workers' education and training and the settlement of worker grievances.

80. Damascus to Department of State, February 12, 1965, ms. A-615, RIGS/19277, NA. Officers elected from the U.S. Embassy were among members of diplomatic missions invited to observe the Damascus elections. The U.S. observers reached the conclusion that because all candidates supported the Ba'th's economic program, the election results should be seen as "an interesting measure of sympathy toward the Ba'th regime from workers who generally approve its socialist programs." The elections could not be taken to mean that the regime had lost control but that much work remained to be done "before labor can be counted on as an effective instrument of Ba'th socialism."
a dense array of organizational structures at the domestic, regional, and international levels. Although rural society was hardly bereft of institutions, it was much less integrated than labor into the political arena. These circumstances left the Ba'th with the triple task of creating new, politically reliable institutions for the mobilization and management of peasants at the national level, centralizing existing local-level institutions to bring them more firmly under the regime’s control; and neutralizing or removing from existing institutions those whom the Ba’th perceived to be antagonistic toward its project of social restructuring. These tasks were complicated by the relative lack of support for the Ba’th among peasants in general, a condition that had become more acute following Ḥakim al-Ḥawwā’ī’s withdrawal from the party.

The government’s response was to construct a bilateral, national peasants’ organization, establishing the General Peasants’ Union (GPU) in December 1964. The GPU was explicitly modeled along the pyramidal and hierarchical lines of the GFTU, was administered according to similar procedures, and became the GFTU’s counterpart as the umbrella organization representing village-level and regional affiliates.62 Following an extended period of “preparatory work”—essentially purging unreliable peasant officials around the country and replacing them with Ba’th loyalists—the first national congress of the GPU was held in Damascus in late September 1965. According to Rabinowich, who class interval memoirs of the organization, the presence of pre-reform rural elites within local peasantry organizations during this preparatory period compelled the Ba’th to “abandon even the semblance of peasant control of the union” and to ensure that party supporters were appointed as union leaders of provincial and national GPU councils.63 By the time planning got under way for the second national congress, however, sufficient control had been established to permit the election of GPU leadership at these levels of the organization. Elections were held in April, and the second GPU congress convened in late July.

As the GPU became consolidated, it underwent a process of role expansion and administrative reorganization similar to the GFTU, taking on political training functions like those provided by the GFTU for workers.64

84. As noted above, Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Affairs Dr. Ahmad Shuman was credited with bringing about the creation of the GPU. Shuman had been a graduate student in the United States and held U.S. Embassy officials that he had modeled the GPU after the farmers’ organizations he studied there, notably the National Farm Bureau. See Rabinowich in Department of State, January 8, 1964, 445-A-342-482, 452-A-592-58, US. For the test of the charge creating the GPU, see “Wahat al-Minbar,” op. cit. See J. B. (Joseph B.) Stow, The general peasants’ union in Syria), Armoni ‘Al ‘Arab 8, 83-10 (1963), 90 (211-21).
the end of the decade, the GPU counted some 1,650 village-level associations made up of 130,000 members, 24 district-level associations, and a regional federation in all 13 provinces of the country. Although these membership figures reflect impressive growth over a period of five years, they still represent a minority of agricultural labor. Nonetheless, regime statements at the time of the 1970 congress of the GPU emphasize its satisfaction with the success of the Peasants' Union in linking the regime to rural populations and in serving as a vehicle for the downward communication of government policy.

Peasants and workers were hardly the only social groups subject to the organizational processes recounted here. The Ba'ath established similar kinds of paramilitary structures for other "pillars of Syria's social base," including women, workers, low-income earners, "revolutionary youth" (Shababat al Ba'th), and students, although the post-February 1963 regime had a harder time consolidating its grip over student affairs than it did in other areas. Professional associations, including those representing journalists, lawyers, engineers, doctors, businessmen, and others, were also subjected to growing levels of government intervention and control, though they remained a somewhat greater degree of independence than the national federations and occasionally organized low-level protests against the regime.

What is most striking, however, is the collective impact of the changes brought about by the Ba'ath in the organization of Syrian society and in relations between individuals and the state. Within a relatively short span of time, and drawing heavily on the endowment of institutional practices and forms inherited from its predecessors, the Ba'ath radically transformed the organizational landscape of Syrian society. Between 1963 and 1970, it created and was able to consolidate a wide range of new institutional frameworks for the integration of citizen and regime, weaving a variety of officially controlled organizational networks into an overarching populist authoritarian system of rule.

### Successful Authoritarianism

Consolidation, of course, should not be misinterpreted as leading inevitably to high levels of institutional efficacy. Migdal and others have provided ample warning about the risk of confusing the presence of expansive state structures with a high degree of state capacity. Certainly, Ba'athist institutions were plagued by the many inefficiencies common to peripheral, land-developing, post-colonial states—though to the extent their task was to stabilize Ba'ath rule, it can be argued that they were, indeed, effective. Such caution is important, yet they must also be placed in the context of what the Ba'ath accomplished during its first six years in power. From its beginnings as a "small, reactive, and conspiracy-minded" group of coup makers, despite its deeply vulnerable and often hidden early years in power, the leadership of the Ba'ath successfully implemented the most sweeping transformation of Syrian policies, society, and economy in the history of the twentieth century.

After Syria's defeat in the June 1967 war, the Ba'ath's political elite became increasingly entangled in a power struggle pitting a military faction headed by General Hafez al-Asad against the ruling civilian faction led by Salih Jadid. The key issue dividing these groups concerned whether the defeat signaled a need to accelerate and broaden the process of social transformation, the view of Jadid and his supporters, or to moderate the pace of social change and move Syria in the direction of a national security state capable of carrying on the confrontation with Israel, the view of Asad and his fellow dissidents. As we now know, this was to prove the last major schism within the Ba'ath until the present. Asad's gradual seizure of power between 1968 and 1970 secured the dominance of the national security perspective. His rise showed the pace of social change. It shifted the central concern of the government from furthering Syria's social transformation to the broadening and deepening of its ruling coalition. It also inaugurated the longest period of stability among Syria's rulers that the country has known since independence.

The system of rule that Asad took over in November 1970 clearly restricted the dramatic transformations the country had experienced since March 1963. Asad took charge of a system of rule publicly and a supportive instrument of repression. The political economy had been thoroughly reorganized along populist lines and the state apparatus restructured, while Syrian society was subject to increasing levels of management, intervention, and control. In the relatively short span of seven years, the distribution of social power in the country had been radically altered, marginalizing the social groups that had dominated the country for much of its modern history and bringing to the center of power social groups that had
long survived on the fringes of Syrian economic and political life. These revolutionary changes consolidated the populist identity of the Syrian state, decisively shifting its developmental trajectory in ways that continue to affect how its leaders respond to such contemporary issues as economic liberalization, political reform, and economic development.

I have argued that these transformations constitute the formative experiences of Syrian politics during the 1960s and contribute to a deeply revisionist reading of the dynamics of authoritarian state formation, both in Syria and more generally. By shifting attention away from the inextricable political realities that dominate the secondary literature and toward underlying processes of institutional and social transformation, this account focuses on the economic and institutional factors that permitted the Ba'th to overcome the dilemmas that typically constrain the consolidation of a populist authoritarian system of rule. It emphasizes the intentionality of Ba'thist political elites, highlights the strategic and structural factors shaping Ba'thist policies, and stresses the importance of the institutional resources available to the Ba'th in carrying out its plans. In the process it provides considerable evidence of state formation by design rather than by accident.

This account also establishes both the conditions under which the consolidation of a populist authoritarian system of rule is possible and the dynamics of social change through which the process is carried out. Syria's lack of integration into global capitalist networks reduced the barriers that such ties impose on the populist restructuring of a political economy. Pressures to move toward a more accommodationist, inclusive strategy of state building were also mitigated by the economic and political imperatives associated with securing a populist system of rule. The need to reorganize the allocation of national resources in support of the Ba'th's project of social transformation helped to structure interactions between the Ba'th and local capitalist groups in the form of a zero-sum conflict. The importance of mobilizing while controlling key social groups such as labor and peasants pushed the Ba'th toward a repression-corporatist style of political incorporation. In this context, the well-developed repertoire of authoritarian and corporatist practices, populist norms, and state institutions the Ba'th inherited represented a resource endowment that greatly facilitated its efforts to reshape the Syrian policy and economy. Earlier experiences of populist authoritarianism during the union with Egypt had already crackled under the pressures of dependence economic and political arrangements. The union made available to the Ba'th a model for the construction of a populist authoritarian regime that was largely consistent with its strategic requirements and its political outlook.

By the time the Ba'th seized power in 1963, therefore, it benefited from an economic and institutional environment that was exceptionally favorable for the consolidation of a populist authoritarian system of rule. But starting conditions alone do not determine outcomes. How the Ba'th exploited these conditions is also critical in explaining its success. What stands out in this regard was the ability of the party's leadership to put in place the broad outlines of its strategy of rule very soon after it seized power and then to expand and consolidate the effort, working with its allies and to advance this strategy despite deep, occasionally crippling internal divisions. There was no question that the political realities and power politics that dominate conventional accounts of this period were important factors in the dynamic of Ba'thist rule. I have shown, however, that to explain the broader dynamics of Ba'thist state formation, we need to look elsewhere, to the larger processes of social and economic transformation brought about by the Ba'th and to the conditions that made these transformations possible.

In making these claims about Syria's experience, I also make the general but often overlooked point that multiple trajectories are open to populist authoritarian elites. The constraints that have been identified as decisive obstacles to the consolidation of populist authoritarian systems of rule can, in fact, be overcome. The dilemmas of populist authoritarian consolidation do not always defeat the efforts of political actors working to secure their power and establish a durable system of rule. This conclusion does not undermine explanations about why populist authoritarianism failed to become consolidated in specific cases. It does undermine, however, the argument that the trajectory of failed consolidation is universal and inevitable. Syria's experience has shown us that this notion is false, no matter how much we might wish it were otherwise.
Syrian politicians, including Hafez al-Assad, have gone to great lengths in recent years to legitimize their commitment to state-managed development following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Moreover, in the three decades of Asad’s leadership, the dominant political class that emerged out of the intra-party struggles of the 1960s has transformed the state into a highly profitable source of rents, giving added impetus to the perpetuation of existing economic and political arrangements. Within the contours of a populist political economy, new forms of corrupting alliances and business networks link the state elite and local capitalists in a wide range of thoroughly profit-seeking activities.

The end of the cold war generated political as well as economic reactions, but these effects too have been muted. In the wake of popular uprisings that overthrew the socialist dictatorships of Eastern Europe, Syria’s regime did not take modest steps to provide new, albeit managed, opportunities for political participation. In 1990, the government enlarged Syria’s legislative, the National Council, by about a third, and it increased the number of seats that could be held by politicians not associated with the Ba’ath Party. Such changes have been largely not entirely cosmetic. Official rhetoric has come to include inversions references to the value of pluralism, as well as to the importance of avoiding changes that might disrupt “social peace”—a term that has acquired particular prominence in the past several years. Parliamentary elections in May 1993 did return a small number of private sector representatives to the National Council for the first time since 1973. However, many of the seats set aside for Independents in 1993 were won by members or affiliates of the ruling party. And the next year President Aissawon reelection to a fourth term in office with the alleged support of 99.9 percent of voters. Assembly elections held in December 1995 again returned an overwhelming majority of Ba’athist representatives. More generally, the constitution promulgated by the Ba’ath in 1958 remains operatively in place, including the requirement that members of popular organizations must constitute a majority of representatives. In addition, the Ba’ath Party itself

1. The Ba’ath movement’s role in the Second World War and the role of its political and military leaders in the Arab Spring.

2. The Ba’ath movement’s role in the Second World War and the role of its political and military leaders in the Arab Spring.

3. The Ba’ath movement’s role in the Second World War and the role of its political and military leaders in the Arab Spring.

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8. The Ba’ath movement’s role in the Second World War and the role of its political and military leaders in the Arab Spring.
remains the most powerful formal political organization in the country—notwithstanding the symbolic modification of single-party politics through the creation of a national front government in the early 1970s. The party’s role in Syrian life has clearly undergone change over the years. Today it functions largely as a major component of the regime’s clientelist system and is viewed more opportunistically than ideologically. Yet it continues to serve as an important arena of socialization and mobilization, imposing itself heavily on Syrian society through semimandatory participation in organizations ranging from youth movements for grade-schoolers to summer camps, student groups, and the popular organizations. Collectively, these make the party a critical actor in the reproduction of the system’s populist identity, even among those who regard the Baath with deeply felt cynicism.

As this suggests, the defining features of a populist policy arise out in the introduction continue to shape the political logic of Syria’s authoritarian ruling elite. An emphasis on redistributive economic policies, a political coalition that relies heavily on a core of populist social groups, and the use of populist transformational discourse as the basis for political mobilizations, legitimation, and institutional building persist as essential elements of Syria’s system of rule. The high profile accorded to radical discourses stands out in particular, perhaps because such discourses have been so thoroughly displaced elsewhere by the developmental failures of state socialism. Yet Syria’s media, its popular organizations, as well as the official statements of key party officials and government ministers continue to be infused by appeals to socialism, the needs of the masses, and the forward march to revolution. Several years after history was alleged to have ended with the decisive victory of liberal market capitalism, much of Syrian political discourse remains archaically revolutionary in tone. What one scholar has called the “triumph” of liberal economic ideas in the developing world remains a distant, as yet unattained, and meaningful aspiration for many Syrians.

These powerful elements of continuity are not intended to suggest that Syria’s political economy or its system of rule have been static and unchanging over the past thirty years. Within the boundaries of its populist authoritarian identity, there have been substantial modifications in structure, practice, and discourse. It has been pushed to adapt to post-cold war shifts in its strategic environment and to respond to the challenges posed by the ongoing Arab-Israeli peace process. In its most far-reaching attempt to accommodate new circumstances, the regime has responded to domestic economic difficulties by appropriating and adapting global norms favoring market-based strategies of economic development. Syria’s economy, like many in the developing world, was deeply and adversely affected by the debt crisis of the 1980s. The crisis was exacerbated by sharp declines in the flow of Arab foreign aid and by exceptionally high levels of military spending as a percentage of gross domestic product. As a result, the regime’s capacity to sustain the flow of benefits both to itself and to its clientelist networks declined. Those whose fortunes were linked to the public sector suffered disproportionately severe cuts in their standard of living. Subsidies on basic commodities were reduced, and public sector wage increases lagged well behind the rate of inflation.

In response, the government initiated a selective process of economic reform—undertaken without the involvement of the IMF and driven more by the political logic of regime persistence than by the economic logic of neoclassical growth theory. Economic reform expanded the role of the private sector and eased some constraints on private and foreign investment. More recently, the regime has moved to reestablish sound relationships with international lending organizations, repairing long-standing re- ars with the World Bank in mid-1997. Efforts by the regime to reestablish the private sector were met, however, with a new wave of government guidance, with a partial reversion to state socialism. There has been an explicit abandonment of state-owned enterprises in Syria, and leading Syrian policymakers have discussed the prospect of such moves in the future as “transitional.” The private sector has been further, though not fully, incorporated into the system of rule, but it remains a policy holder, a subordinate participant in the process of economic policy

making. It is the state, not capital, that defines the private sector's terms of engagement and the boundaries of its participation.

As modest as they are relative to changes elsewhere, these processes of adjustment and adaptation certainly have the capacity to bring about more fundamental modulations in Syria's system of rule. They hold out the possibility that Syria could move decisively toward a government and more pluralist set of economic and political arrangements. Perhaps more than any other challenges the regime has faced, the combination of four factors-economic pressures, strategic realignment, the peace process, and new, decentralized information technologies—could, potentially, overturn the equilibrium established between 1963 and 1970 and permit a wider-ranging realignment of the system of rule. If this were to happen, Syria could experience a significant political change within the Baath Party and among the radical opposition. Partly to suppress open expression of internal dissent, no major party congress has been held in the past decade.

What is striking about the adjustments of this period, however, is not the extensity to which they have destabilized existing arrangements but the extent to which Syria's populist authoritarianism has shown itself able to accommodate them. The regime has consistently exhibited flexibility and adaptability in redefining the terms of inclusion and in reorganizing its economic and foreign policies. It has treated the boundaries of the system as plastic, tractable, and open to modification, thus far avoiding the sharp, either/or choices that might expose it to pressures for broader change. Yet its flexibility too has limits. The imperatives of reproducing the populist authoritarian system of rule have tended to define the boundaries of feasible change within Syria's political economy, and anything perceived to threaten this imperative is dealt with quite brutally. Despite its willingness to accommodate a significant measure of change, therefore, the "sacred turf" of Syria's populist "political kingdom" remains fundamentally intact.14

As a consolidated and adaptive system of rule, radical populism in Syria has developed along a trajectory that defies the widely held view of populism as an inevitably unstable foundation for a state-building project. In contrast to what Latin Americanists have portrayed as the modular experience of failed populist state formation, Syrian populism has instead become consolidated within a "politico-social and organizational infrastructure" that exerts a powerful and ongoing influence on everyday politics and policymaking.15 And if Syria's experience forces us to rethink the possibility of successful populist authoritarian state formation, it remains the case that this particular trajectory is not equally accessible to all would-be populist elites. In Latin America, the generic dilemma that constraint efforts to build a populist system of rule turned out to be a decisive one. In Syria, they did not. Clearly, the capacity to overcome the dilemmas of populist authoritarian consolidation is unevenly distributed. It is linked, I have argued, to a distinctive set of structural and institutional features and the ways in which these influence the strategic choices of actors, institutions, and economic structures do not in and of themselves explain the specific choices of political actors, but they exert a profound influence nonetheless. They shape a strategic repertoire in ways that make particular choices accessible and place others out of reach, increasing the potential gains to be achieved by pursuing a given strategy and reducing its potential costs.

Among the structural conditions that I have taken into account in this volume, Syria's relative isolation from transnational capitalist networks deserves special weight and has particular theoretical implications. Syria's lack of embeddedness in a larger capitalist system at the moment of independence opened up possibilities for confronting and marginalizing local capitalists that might not have existed otherwise. Certain, the experience of failed populist state building in other cases is regularly explained, at least in part, by the causal connection between embeddedness in international capitalist networks of exchange and constraints on the extent to which populist politicians can discount the interests of local capital. High embeddedness is thus widely argued to correlate with a high level of constraints on the part of populist political actors. Syria's experience, at least, seems to confirm the negative of this relationship. Low embeddedness correlates with a lack of restraint on the part of radical populist political elites concerning the extent to which the economy could be reorganized and capitalists could be marginalized. Such correlation leaves unanswered whether low embeddedness caused the radicalism of Syrian populists, but it certainly

14. How we have known about a regime's "sacred turfs" has been flagged. Leaving the dynamic and volatile balance of what still appears to be a coherent system of rule and accepting that such "sacred turfs" are often matters of perception is, at least, an intriguing point that has been reached once the regime can be said to have discarded the institutional, conditional, and distributive arrangements that are the defining features of a populist authoritarian system of rule. See, for example, T. McEvoy, "State as State: Market," in The Politics of Economic Adjustment in Ghana, Zambia, and Nigeria, ed. T. McEvoy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 89.

contributed significantly to the creation of a strategic environment in which radical populism was seen as a viable political option.

Attributing this degree of significance to Syria's low embeddedness has theoretical implications that extend beyond the specifics of the Syrian case. Several variants of development theory argue that the embeddedness of developing states in a global capitalist system is a key factor in the rise of authoritarian regimes in the periphery. They focus in particular on forms of authoritarianism whose purpose is to bring local economies into alignment with the interests of foreign capital.8 Implanted in such arguments is the sense that absent foreign capital, absent global capitalism, more democratic developmental trajectories would become available.8 Syria's experience suggests that such views are overly simplistic. While variation in the forms authoritarianism might take is highly consequential—populist forces exhibit sharply different social, economic, and political dynamics than their bureaucratic authoritarian counterparts—it must be acknowledged that low embeddedness may be just as likely a high embeddedness to facilitate the formation of authoritarian systems of rule. Hence, it is not right, therefore, in suggesting that the insertion of an economy into a world market can have constraining effects on the forms of authoritarianism that are available to state elites.8 But the consequences of less thoroughly embeddedness in world markets may be less constrained authoritarianism, not the emergence of liberal democracies. Variation in the extent to which decisions

16. Even for Syria, whose subordination to local politics to the requirements of global capitalism would seem a tough position to support, this logic has generated deep, profound, and profound implications for the economics of developing states. One such argument, as noted in the introduction, is that Syria has not departed from all. In this view, the more complete institutionalization of Syrian capitalism between 1981 and 1988 is simply the by-product of state capitalism in Syria, and it is in the interest of capitalism to use it to influence the organization of Syria's political economy. It is basically right, for the logic of its long-term development is congruent. 17. The system is relatively obvious. According to Svenkerud, Stephan, and Stephan, an economy that is based on the interactions between state and society is not merely a system of social relations, but a system of social relations that is tied to the structure of the state. Economic development is achieved through the interaction between the state and the economy. Development is not merely a matter of economic growth, but also of social development. 18. In this view, the state is the focus of the economy, and the economy is the focus of the state. Economic development is achieved through the interaction between the state and the economy. Development is not merely a matter of economic growth, but also of social development. 19. It may be that a bread would establish a bell case in which low and high levels of embeddedness and instability into global markets are both associated with the emergence of authoritarian regimes—populist for states with low levels of embeddedness and low economic

sparking states are embedded in world markets clearly shapes trajectories of authoritarian state formation but does not seem to support the expectations that less embeddedness equals more democracy. These qualifications are important, but such macrolevel variables leave many questions unanswered. Establishing the domestic factors that determine how a particular state is positioned relative to world markets can help clarify the dynamics of the authoritarian state. How does the constitution of state institutions and societal identity as populists, bureaucratic, or something else? The argument presented here has treated Syria's low embeddedness as one of several case independent variables, but it also explains the conditions of a particular history, taking into account Syria's experience as a semicolonial state as well as its limited resource endowment, small domestic market, and high levels of regional instability. This argument thus offers greater independence to the effects of domestic-level factors—structural and constitutional—in explaining both the position of a state within the international system and its trajectory of state formation.

At a more general level, development theory from Gunnar Myrdal and Paul Baran to Peter Swag and the USAID has conveyed a rather limited sense of the range of developmental trajectories available to late-developing states. For theorists associated with forms of dependency theory, situating such states in the periphery was considered sufficient to explain a wide range of political, economic, and social dynamics—and to predict developmental possibilities as well. More recent development theory—and not only the triumphalist writings of the immediate post-coalition period—has been able to show that processes of economic, cultural, and political convergence at work in the effects of globalization and the move toward market-based economic arrangements. Like their predecessors, convergence theories also rest on the notion that developmental trajectories are limited and that domestic social, economic, and political dynamics can be explained in terms of movement toward or divergence from the global norm.

Here too, however, Syria's experience seems to confirm expectations. Although Syria's recent experiences of selective liberalization might be read as evidence that no state can escape the hegemonic growth strategy of the late twentieth century, the Baath has been able to carve out autonomous autonomy from global capital, on the one hand, while appropriating discourses of democracy and markets, building them to suit the needs of an authoritarian and interventionist regime, on the other. Clearly, the apparent use of late-developing states, whether based on their identity as

for states with higher levels of embeddedness—whereas mid-range levels are associated with more pluralistic political arrangements.
peripheral or their status as "in transition," marks a wider array of difference than might typically be assumed. Syria's development trajectory reinforces the lesson that such differences are tremendously consequential for an understanding of the political economy of development. It also serves as an imagined within the rigid typologies of either dependency or convergence.

The alternative I have pursued has been to construct a hybrid, middle approach consistent with what Evans and Stephens have labeled the "new comparative political economy," including its emphasis on historical contingency in accounting for developmental trajectories and the domestic determinants of social change. Yet the argument posits this approach further. Through a focus on the interactions among state institutions, economic structures, and political agents, I have worked to integrate, rather than counterpose, agent-based and institutional frameworks. My approach provides an analytic context that links the macrohistorical and the methodological individualism in explaining the Za'atari's high capacity to consolidate a popular authoritarian state. It also seeks to move institutional approaches from a state to a more dynamic conceptualization of institutions, to treat them not simply as variables but as dynamic variables whose values can shift rapidly within a given case. What more fixed conceptualizations of state institutions might have missed, therefore, moves to center stage once institutions are treated as dynamic and fluid.

I have expressed this perspective more concretely by focusing on processes of state expansion in Syria after 1945, the dramatic shifts that took place in postcolonial patterns of state intervention, and the effects these had on the strategic choices of political actors. I have argued that these variables were critical in defining the organization and reorganization of social relations. In neo-functionalist Syria, they shaped opportunities for popular mobilization and economic governance. In the absence of these opportunities, social movements would have been organized and what forms of organization were available would have been stunted. Shifts in the patterns of state intervention after 1945 reshuffled the opportunity set of political actors and affected their capacity to achieve their aims. These changes contributed to and helped structure the redefinition of social and economic


22. They helped establish a national market and defined the terms under which the market operated. State expansion created a political arena in which control over the project of building an inclusive social pact—a project inaugurated by capitalists—could be captured by populist reformers. By facilitating new understandings of the relationship between state and society defined in universal terms of citizenship, state expansion deeply compromised the capacity of landlords and capitalists to manage the process of popular mobilization.

As the time, many, if not all, newly independent late developers experienced rapid state expansion following independence. On its own, therefore, the growth of postcolonial state structures is too simplistic a phenomenon to tell us much about how Syria's trajectory of state building diverged from that of many other poor, peripheral late developers to result in a consolidated, populist authoritarian regime. Combined with its low level of embeddedness in a global market system, however, the outcome is less surprising. As I noted above, low embeddedness had a significant influence within Syria's political arena, removing from consideration an entire domain of relations that often constrain the choices of political actors, including state bureaucratic elites. But there were more direct implications of low embeddedness for the organization of state-capital relations, the most important of which was that the resources needed to finance state growth and to manage a process of popular incorporation could be secured from only one source: local capitalists.

Disengagement from global markets meant that state expansion was also a process of expanding state control over local capital. Domestic expectations about what the role of the state should be in leading Syria's transition from an agrarian to a capitalist economy were reinforced by the hegemonic, state-centric development strategies of the period, imposed into Syria via the same carriers of global norms as those who transported them throughout the developing world. These included not only staff missions of the IMF and the World Bank, or international consultants such as Sahli and Associates, but also the socialist discourse of state planning that in many respects were consistent with the interest of Western institutions in building state capacity. Yet unlike in many other cases, the construction of a state apparatus with the capacity to implement the import substitution, managed development strategies favored in the 1950s was built at considerable cost to the Syrian private sector. This critical dynamic imbued state-capital relations in Syria, with a deep structural tension virtually from the earliest moments of independence. It charted the economic role of the state by managerial and regulatory directions at first and later toward direct forms of state control over productive resources. It gave state bureaucrats a direct and immediate

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rationale to use state agencies to secure a stable, predictable flow of revenues through the continual expansion of state management of the economy. Competition for the control of capital between newly autonomous state entities and capitalists contributed heavily to the polarization of Syria’s political arena. And as shown in some detail, the expansion of social regulation tended to track the expansion of economic intervention. As levels of economic management grew, the state became a central mechanism for the construction of an inclusive social pact. As these processes transformed Syria’s political arena, capitalism, populism, and landed elites redefined their political strategies and alignments, contributing significantly to the polarization that had already by early 1950s to the collapse of Syrian politics and the formation of the United Arab Republic. These shifts in the scope and depth of state institutions over a short period of time, under given structural circumstances, exerted a profound influence on the political dynamics of postindependence Syria. Without taking account of the structural quality of Syria’s institutional environment, the impact of these shifts on the strategies of political actors, these dynamics are difficult to square or explain. Typically, however, new institutional arrangements limited themselves to integrating institutional variables into theoretical frameworks from which they were felt, often inaccurately, to be missing. Institutions themselves are treated as givens. Since institutional equilibria are designed to be durable, there will be many instances in which it is reasonable to treat them as such. Yet during critical periods of transition, when an equilibrium has been destabilized, not least moments of decolonization and postindependence state building, such formulations risk overlooking one of the central variables shaping political outcomes, that is, the effects of institutional transformation on the collective choices of political actors. These transformations became particularly important during instances of divergence, instances in which structural conditions and institutional environments are not in alignment. Asmanifest in the juxtaposition between the agrarian structure of Syria’s economy and interventionist industrializing archetypes of the state apparatus, the tensions that accompany uneven rates of change on the part of institutions and economic structures always inevitably emerge as powerful sources of social conflict. In the Syrian case, these conflicts—often violent struggles between a defense-based elite, populists, reformers, and authoritarian capitalist industrializers—brought about the disintegration of the existing political order. Through the union with Egypt, they created the conditions that shaped a new equilibrium along populist authoritarian lines after March 1963.

Institutional equilibria come apart, and a dynamic approach to institutions is needed to capture such processes and account for their effects. How new institutional equilibria are formed and consolidated is the other, equally critical part of the equation. If institutional equilibria theories hold out promise for explaining processes through which given institutional formations become opened up for reorganization, they leave open the dynamics through which new formations are consolidated. The framework adopted here helps to explain the capacity of the Baath to overcome the dilemma that typically constrains the consolidation of a populist authoritarian system of rule. Yet how this capacity is translated into a concrete set of institutions and practices, the strategies through which a particular set of capacities is deployed, remains to be explained. What accounts for the particular choices that Baath elites made in bringing about the populist transformation of Syria’s state, economy, and society? Here too the argument advanced in this book highlights the structural and institutional imperatives associated with populist state building as one guide to understanding the behavior of Baathist politicians. Above all, this process required transform- ing the identity of state institutions, bringing the state apparatus under the control of the party, and making the state bureaucratic a reliable instrument of Baathist rule. Once these aims had been accomplished, it became feasible to mobilize and control large segments of Syrian society and to reorganize political institutions. Similarly, the imperative of restructuring the economy along populist lines cemented an antagonistic relationship between the Baathist state and Syria’s private sector, leading to the decisive marginalization of capital.

Is it simply the case, then, that the Baath’s leadership did what was necessary to secure its grip on power? If so, then how did the leadership know what was necessary, and why did it work? State building is one of these tasks that requires assembly, and instructions do not come printed on the side of a box. As I have argued, however, the Baath’s leaders brought into power a fairly well-developed understanding of the state they hoped to construct. The lessons Baath elites absorbed through their participation in previous cycles of social conflict and from their negative experiences of the United Arab Republic had reinforced their commitment to a radical form of populist state building. They also operated within an environment that had become well endowed with populist norms and authoritarian practices of governance. These experiences and lessons represented a critical legacy available to the Baath as it moved from opposition to government.
Thus, there is a clear "path-dependent" quality to the Ba'th's strategy of state formation, both in the narrower sense of that term—that the decisions taken by Ba'thist elites were constrained by the consequences of previous choices—but also in the sense that certain kinds of choices invoked lower costs and generated increasing political returns by moving along an established path. The appropriation of existing approaches to state building thus increased the efficiency of the Ba'th's strategies of governance, institution building, social mobilization, and economic management. Precisely because the scale of the transformations intended by the Ba'th was so large, the advantages of exploiting known political technologies and mechanisms increased. The legacies available to the Ba'th did not determine that it would inevitably succeed. The dilemmas that constrained the consolidation of a populist authoritarian system of rule are both real and consequential. Yet this legacy did embody a powerful set of facilitating conditions. In the absence of compelling external constraints, it provided the means for the Ba'th's leadership to establish a new institutional capillary. Combining radical populist means and sharply authoritarian practices of governance, the Ba'th succeeded in building a durable populist authoritarian system of rule and in shaping the aggrandizement of Syria's state, society, and political economy for decades to come.

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