

THE ARAB WORLD'S DEMOCRACY DEFICIT: ANOMALY OR HARBINGER?

For decades the Arab world has puzzled outside observers by its lack of progress toward democracy, despite rapid urbanization, rising literacy, and a growing middle class. The term “Arab exceptionalism” was coined to describe this. The pro-democracy Arab uprisings of 2011 seemed to end this exceptionalism, but autocracy soon reasserted itself. Moreover, democracy seems to be in retreat everywhere, raising the question “can the Arab world help us understand the weakening of democratic practice?” This course will explore the evolution of Arab autocracy over the past half century with consideration of the critical role of outside powers in shaping outcomes.

I do not have firm answers to the Arab democracy puzzle. I have written about it and know the relevant literature well. So, I propose to be a *sherpa* rather than a *guru*. I also want to be able to adjust the trajectory of the course to respond to your interests without abandoning the central focus. My preference is for an interactive format, but that will depend on the number of participants.

I do not want to burden those of you pressed for time with ‘required’ readings. Readings are optional, and I have appended a brief, initial list. I will follow with more as I develop this syllabus. Should you feel flush, the single best source available for purchase is Elbadawi, Ibrahim and Samir Makdisi (ed.s) Democratic Transitions in the Arab World, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge UK, New York, 2017. An excellent analytic overview of the global problem is Teorell, Jan, Determinants of Democratization: Explaining Regime Change in the World, 1972-2006, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge UK, New York, 2010.

Course Schedule

Week One: the Cold War and the ‘inevitability of democracy’

Week Two: the democracy deficit in the Arab world—major explanations

Week Three: the post-colonial social contract and the Nasserist paradigm

Week Four: rentier states and ‘crony capitalism’

Week Five: Aborted transitions; liberals against Islam

Week Six: Youth unemployment and the 2011-20 Arab uprisings

Week Seven: the impact of third- or external parties

Week Eight: reprise and looking ahead

Initial readings and figures

Arab exceptionalism graph

World democracy graph

Patel, David S. "The Great Thaw in Arab Domestic Politics", Middle East Brief, n. 140, Crown Center, Brandeis University, February, 2021

Gouda, Moamen and Shima'a Hanafy, "Islamic Constitutions and Democracy" ERF (Economic Research Forum) Working Paper, n. 1429, Nov. 2020 (Cairo)

Cianetti, Licia and Sean Hanley, "The End of the Backsliding Paradigm", Journal of Democracy, vol. 32, n.1, January 2021, pp. 66-80

Mounck, Yascha and Stefan Foa, "The End of the Democratic Century", Foreign Affairs, vol. 97, May-June, 2018, pp. 29-36

LEADER: John Waterbury has been a student of Middle East politics since 1958, with long periods of residence in Morocco, Egypt, and Lebanon; he has taught at Princeton University and was president of the American University of Beirut, 1998-2008.

MONDAYS: 1:00 to 3:00 p.m., 8 weeks beginning September 27 through November 15

MAXIMUM: 60