

ISRAEL IS THE ONLY DEMOCRACY IN THE MIDDLE-EAST

Liberal democracy

A liberal democracy is a form of representative democracy in which elected representatives who hold power are limited by a constitution or laws that emphasise protecting individual liberties, equality and the rights of minority groups.

Israel is the only liberal democracy in the Middle East, and the only state in the region to have a parliament of Jewish, Arab, Christian and Muslim politicians.

Israel is a parliamentary democracy consisting of legislative, executive and judicial branches. Israel's Declaration of Independence grants all its inhabitants equality of social and political rights irrespective of religion, race or gender.

The political system is based on the principle of separation of powers, in which the executive branch (the government) is subject to the confidence of the legislative branch (the Knesset) and the independence of the judiciary is guaranteed by law. The Knesset is elected for a tenure of four years.

Israel is not a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) but is regularly chastised by it.

“Since its inception in 2006, the UNHRC has released a total of 103 resolutions. Astonishingly, 56 have focused on criticising Israel. The UNHRC has held a total of 21 special sessions to address dire humanitarian crises throughout the world. One has addressed Sudan, another Sri Lanka, another Ivory Coast and another Libya – while 7 of the 21 special sessions have irrationally targeted Israel.” **Ido Aharoni**

Jordan

Jordan is a constitutional monarchy. The reigning monarch is the head of state, the chief executive and the commander in-chief of the armed forces. The king exercises his executive authority through the prime ministers and the Council of Ministers, or cabinet. The legislature has 75 members, all of whom are directly appointed by the King, while the House of Representatives has 150 elected members. Jordan is not a liberal democracy.

Lebanon

Lebanon is a Republic. Politics in Lebanon are based on a post-civil war imposed sectarian system. The presidency is reserved for a Christian, the Prime Minister post for a Sunni and the post of parliament speaker for a Shi'ite.

Due to divisions within the sectarian groups Lebanon has been without a President for over a year and a half and a national dialogue aimed at ending the power vacuum has not resulted in progress. Several parties, including Hezbollah, have boycotted parliament. As a result, parliament has been paralysed. The ongoing Syrian civil war has led to increased polarisation in the country, while both Iran and Saudi Arabia wield influence through the rival alliances. Lebanon is not a liberal democracy.

Egypt

The politics of Egypt is based on republicanism, with a semi presidential system of government. Following the Egyptian Revolution of 2011, and the resignation of President Hosni

Mubarak, executive power was assumed by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, which dissolved the parliament and suspended the constitution.

In 2012, Mohamed Morsi was elected Egypt's fifth president but was deposed by army chief General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi who was subsequently elected as Egypt's sixth president in 2014. Egypt is not a liberal democracy.

Iraq

The federal government of Iraq is defined under its current Constitution, approved in 2005, as an Islamic, democratic, federal parliamentary republic. The federal government is composed of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, as well as numerous independent commissions.

The Prime Minister is the direct executive authority responsible for the general policy of the State and the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The cabinet is responsible for overseeing their respective ministries, proposing laws, preparing the budget, negotiating and signing international agreements and treaties, and appointing under-secretaries, ambassadors, the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces and his assistants, Division Commanders or higher, the Director of the National Intelligence Service, and heads of security institutions. Iraq is not a liberal democracy.

Iran

Iran is a theocracy. Iran's constitution requires its laws and regulations to be based on Islamic criteria. The supreme leader exerts ideological and political control over a system dominated by clerics who shadow every major function of the state.

The supreme leader has the final say on major policy decisions, either directly or through a network of groups appointed by him. He also serves as commander-in-chief of the armed forces. He picks six of the twelve members of the influential Guardian Council and appoints the head of the judiciary. Iran executed 700 people in six months in 2015. Iran is not a liberal democracy.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy. It does not possess a legally-binding written constitution and no political parties or national elections are permitted.

The Basic Law of Saudi Arabia, adopted by royal decree in 1992, states that the king must comply with Sharia (that is, Islamic law) and the Quran. Legal punishments include decapitation, amputation, flogging, stoning, crucifixion etc., The Islamic State (ISIS) and Saudi Arabia prescribe near-identical punishments for a host of crimes.

According to *The Economist's* 2010 Democracy Index, the Saudi government was the seventh most authoritarian regime from among the 167 countries rated. Ironically Saudi Arabia is a member of the UNHRC. Saudi Arabia is not a liberal democracy.

United Arab Emirates

According to human rights organisations, the UAE is violating a number of fundamental practices. For example, the UAE does not have democratically-elected institutions and citizens do not have the right to change their government or to form political parties.

Executions, flogging and stoning are legal forms of judicial punishment in the UAE due to Sharia courts. The UAE is also a member of the UNHRC. The UAE is not a liberal democracy.

Oman

Oman is an absolute monarchy whereby the Sultan of Oman is not only head of state, but also the head of government. Executions, flogging and stoning are legal punishments. Oman is not a liberal democracy.

Qatar

As with Oman, except Qatar is a member of the UNHRC.

Bahrain

Bahrain has had only one Prime Minister since the country's independence in 1971, Khalifah ibn Sulman al-Khalifah, the uncle of the reigning King Hamad ibn Isa al-Khalifah. As of 2010, roughly half of the cabinet ministers have been selected from the Al Khalifah royal family, including the Minister of Defence, Minister of Interior, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Finance, and Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs. Bahrain operates under Sharia law and is not a liberal democracy.

Turkey

The politics of Turkey takes place in a framework of secular parliamentary representative democratic republic. However: *“Turkey’s democracy is in crisis. Prime Minister Erdoğan is advocating the reversal of important democratic reforms his own party championed just a few years ago.”*

Freedom House

Syria

Political power in Syria has long been held by a small mainly Alawite elite. Since 2011 Syria has been enmeshed in a bitter civil war. Syria is not a liberal democracy.

Palestine

The overarching government of Palestine is the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organisation) Executive Committee (Fatah), which is supposed to represent all Palestinians as well as those abroad.

Hamas, which is the dominant Palestinian party, is not represented in the PLO. The PLO Executive has been largely dysfunctional for many years due to continued absence of Palestinian National Council elections. PLO President Mahmoud Abbas was elected to serve until 9 January 2009 but he extended his term for another year and remains in the position today. Palestine is not a liberal democracy.

JLL

The Arab Middle East is missing the cultural tools for building inclusive, unified states

“Middle Easterners depend on their kin group for all things. Opposition, rivalry and conflict are thus seen to be in the nature of social life. Success, power, wealth, honour derives

from triumphing over opposition groups. Failure to triumph means the loss of power, wealth and, above all, honour. The pervasive and continuous conflict in the Middle East – between clans, tribes, sects, and religions – is a manifestation of this culture. Middle Eastern history is largely a record of tribal conflicts and displacements, expansions and conquests, and invasions and dynastic replacements. “The Arabs are not in a wretched state – they are in a tribal state, and they are doing what they have been doing since time immemorial: conquering each other, demanding allegiance and living in a state of perpetual war,” writes analyst Hussain Abdul-Hussain. “The only difference now is that the Arabs are feuding in cities, and on TV and social media instead of in the desert.”

The Arab Middle East is missing the cultural tools for building inclusive, unified states. The West saw violent upheaval for millennia before it began stabilising with acceptance of modern organising principles, such as constitutionalism and rule of law, in the past few hundred years. Unfortunately, there are few signs that the Middle East will follow suit anytime soon.”

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