

ARTICLE

Reimagining Democracy in the Arab World: From Liberal Form to Social Justice

Raed Atef ^{1,*}

¹ *Independent, Ramallah, Palestine*

*Corresponding author. Email: raed.drra@gmail.com

Received: 25 June 2026, Revised: 8 July 2026, Accepted: 13 July 2026; Published: 15 July 2026

Abstract

This article critically examines the applicability of Western liberal democracy in Arab and Global South contexts, arguing that its procedural emphasis often fails to produce substantive outcomes in terms of justice, inclusion, and redistribution. Drawing on a qualitative multi-case comparative design, the study analyses five Arab countries, Jordan, Lebanon, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, and Tunisia, using Critical Discourse Analysis and comparative political economy. The findings reveal that democratic practices in these contexts remain largely formalistic, centred on elections and consultative institutions that rarely translate into meaningful shifts in power or wealth distribution. Instead, political systems tend to reproduce elite dominance through electoral recycling, performance legitimacy, and controlled public discourse. A key finding is the persistent absence of social justice as a governing principle, which weakens public trust and reduces democracy to symbolic participation. Marginalized groups, including women, youth, and minorities, are frequently included in political rhetoric but excluded from meaningful decision-making, reinforcing structural inequality. The study also identifies a significant mismatch between imported liberal democratic models and local socio-cultural realities characterized by collectivist norms and embedded identities. In response, the article proposes an alternative framework of "solidarity democracy," grounded in social justice, collective empowerment, and culturally embedded governance. This model connects political rights with economic equity through practical mechanisms such as empowered local councils, participatory budgeting, citizen assemblies, transparency systems, accountability mechanisms, and institutional protections for marginalized groups. The study concludes that democracy in the Arab world should be reimagined not as an imported institutional template, but as an endogenous project rooted in local histories, cultural values, and social needs.

Keywords: Liberal democracy; Social justice; Arab world; Elite dominance; Political participation; Solidarity democracy

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, liberal democracy has emerged as the most globally promoted political model, particularly championed by Western governments and international institutions. It is commonly associated with individual freedom, human rights, regular elections, and the peaceful transfer of power. With the rise of globalization and digital communication, liberal democracy has been framed as the most "civilized" and "rational" form of governance, marketed as a prerequisite for development and stability in the Global South, including Arab countries [1]. However, this generalized application often overlooks the specific historical, cultural, and social realities of these societies. It also fails to account for the deeply embedded structures of economic and political domination that continue to reproduce dependency under the guise of democratic reform. In many contexts, liberal democracy has not served as a tool for justice or emancipation, but rather as a mechanism for legitimizing regimes dominated by narrow elites who act in the interest of class or regional powers, leaving most people excluded from meaningful political agency [2]. In the Arab world, efforts toward "democratic transition", whether initiated from above or sparked by grassroots movements,

have frequently led to fragile or hybrid systems [3]. These systems often suffer from institutional fragmentation, economic distress, and a widespread loss of public trust [4]. Rather than transforming power structures, democratic forms are often used to recycle old elites, maintaining existing inequalities in wealth and political access [5].

The central concern of this article is that liberal democracy, as adopted or imposed in Arab and other Global South countries, does not adequately serve the values, priorities, or development needs of these societies. It emphasizes individual liberties in isolation from collective rights, and it consistently neglects social justice—a core component of any meaningful democratic vision. In such systems, citizenship is reduced to the act of voting, while the deeper structures of inequality and elite control remain untouched [6]. Many Arab countries exhibit what may be called "formal democracy," characterized by symbolic elections, restricted parliamentary powers, and sectarian or tribal pluralism. These practices often entrench rather than challenge social divisions. Poverty and inequality remain unresolved, with wealth concentrated among a small elite class that cloaks its dominance in religious authority, tribal loyalty, or claims of economic efficiency [7]. This article thus raises a fundamental question: Is liberal democracy, as modelled in the West, suitable for fostering justice and equality in Arab and Global South contexts? If not, what alternatives exist? How can democracy be reimagined to centre social justice and collective empowerment rather than simply individual freedoms? To answer these questions, the article adopts a critical lens drawing on three major intellectual traditions:

- The Marxist critique of bourgeois democracy, which views liberal democracy as a system designed to protect capitalist interests rather than to promote popular liberation. In this view, "freedom" often refers to property rights and market access, not equal opportunity or shared prosperity.
- The postcolonial critique, which contends that Western democratic frameworks carry a legacy of control and hierarchy, disguised in neutral legal and political language.
- The cultural critique of liberal hegemony, which argues that liberal individualism can erode social cohesion and ignore cultural identities, thereby weakening democracy's legitimacy in non-Western contexts.

Under this framework, social justice, fair distribution of wealth, and group-based rights are seen as essential to any real democratic project. Democracy should not be limited to electoral procedures; it must also ensure that all voices, particularly those of marginalized groups, are heard, and that essential human needs such as housing, education, employment, and healthcare are addressed. A democracy that fails to alleviate poverty, reduce inequality, or hold power accountable is fundamentally flawed, regardless of the transparency of its elections [8]. However, this article does not reject democracy as a political ideal; rather, it argues for a reconfiguration of democratic practice that moves beyond procedural institutions toward a locally embedded model combining political rights, social justice, and collective empowerment. The proposed framework of "solidarity democracy" is conceptualized as a gradual transformation process rather than an immediate replacement of existing systems. This transformation can occur through progressive legal reforms, decentralization of decision-making authority, strengthened local participation, civic empowerment initiatives, and institutional mechanisms that enable citizens, particularly marginalized groups, to influence public decisions.

The article investigates the following questions:

- To what extent is Western liberal democracy suitable as a governance model in Arab and Global South countries?
- How do imported democratic frameworks contribute to reproducing inequality and elite dominance?
- What alternative models of democracy can emerge from within Arab and developing societies?
- How can political freedom be linked to social justice in these alternative models?
- What roles do marginalized groups, such as the poor, women, and minorities, play in building a democracy that is inclusive and locally grounded?

To explore these questions, the article draws on empirical cases from Jordan, Oman, Lebanon, the UAE, and Tunisia—countries selected for their diverse political structures (monarchies, republics, and hybrid

regimes) and differing trajectories of democratic reform. These cases serve as illustrative examples of how liberal democratic forms have been adapted, resisted, or instrumentalized across varying contexts. The key objectives of this article are to:

- Critically examine the liberal democratic model from social, cultural, and political perspectives, highlighting its contradictions in the Global South.
- Analyse how formal democratic practices in Arab countries have been used to maintain elite control and generate superficial legitimacy.
- Propose an alternative theoretical framework grounded in justice, collective empowerment, and redistribution of wealth and power.
- Present empirical illustrations from five Arab countries to demonstrate the limits of the liberal model and the potential for locally grounded alternatives.
- Open a broader dialogue about the “possible democracy” for the Arab world—one that centres inclusion, cultural relevance, and freedom for all, not just a privileged few.

In summary, this article challenges conventional assumptions about liberal democracy’s universality and argues for an alternative democratic paradigm rooted in justice, solidarity, and local empowerment. Rather than presenting solidarity democracy as an idealistic alternative detached from existing political realities, the article views it as an incremental pathway toward substantive democracy through institutional adaptation, inclusive participation, and the integration of social justice into democratic governance. The next sections present the theoretical framework, the methodological approach, and key findings, followed by a discussion and conclusion offering recommendations for future democratic reform.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Democracy, as a concept and practice, has undergone significant evolution. Classical political theory often defines democracy as “government by the people, of the people, and for the people,” yet this definition has been reshaped in the modern era, particularly by the dominance of the liberal democratic model rooted in the West [9]. Today, democracy is frequently equated with a set of procedural benchmarks such as multiparty elections, separation of powers, and civil liberties [10]. This formalist focus, however, has drawn increasing criticism for masking persistent inequalities and elite dominance, what scholars term restricted or formal democracy [11]. To better understand this divergence, Table 1 outlines a typology contrasting liberal democracy and alternative/solidarity democracy across five dimensions: participation, economic equity, cultural integration, institutional legitimacy, and elite accountability. Unlike a purely normative alternative, solidarity democracy is conceptualized here as an institutional framework that seeks to transform democratic principles into concrete governance mechanisms. It combines collective participation with rights-based protections, linking political empowerment to social justice, economic redistribution, and accountable decision-making structures.

Table 1. Comparing Liberal Democracy and Solidarity Democracy

Dimension	Liberal Democracy	Solidarity Democracy (Alternative)	Institutional Mechanisms/Solutions
Participation	Voting, elections, individual rights	Collective participation and inclusive decision-making	Citizen assemblies, participatory budgeting, empowered local councils, and direct community involvement in policymaking
Economic Equity	Market-based economy, limited redistribution	Focus on fair distribution of wealth and social services	Redistribution policies, social protection programs, equitable access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities

Cultural Integration	Universal norms, individual identity prioritized	Local traditions and collective identity respected while protecting individual freedoms	Context-sensitive institutions that integrate communal values with constitutional rights and pluralistic participation
Institutional Legitimacy	Based on formal institutions and legal procedures	Based on social justice, public trust, and responsiveness	Transparent governance, citizen oversight, accountability mechanisms, and responsive public institutions
Elite Accountability	Often limited; elites maintain power through institutions	Emphasizes breaking elite dominance	Independent monitoring bodies, transparency requirements, leadership rotation, and mechanisms preventing elite capture

Source: Authors own work

Critiques of liberal democracy, particularly from Global South scholars, argue that its institutions are not universally transferable because they emerged within the historical development of capitalism, secularism, and the modern nation-state. Applying these models to societies characterized by tribal, sectarian, or neo-patrimonial governance often creates a disconnect between institutional design and sociopolitical realities [12]. A central critique distinguishes democracy as procedure (elections, political parties, and constitutional rules) from democracy as substance, including social justice, redistribution, and citizen empowerment. Scholars Held argue that democratic legitimacy cannot rest solely on procedural compliance, while Kollektiv and Kollektiv contend that democracy should be assessed by its capacity to improve material and social conditions [13]. Within the Arab world, this critique is particularly relevant. Elections and formal democratic institutions frequently coexist with elite monopolies over political authority, economic resources, and identity-based narratives [14]. Piliavsky describes these systems as "state societies," where centralized authority employs democratic institutions primarily to legitimize exclusion rather than broaden participation [15]. Liberal democracy also privileges the autonomous individual, often overlooking the collective identities and structural conditions that shape political life [16]. Arab scholars therefore advocate democratic models that recognize cultural authenticity, communal solidarity, and social justice while preserving individual freedoms [17].

Another major criticism concerns democracy's relationship with neoliberalism. Elections, political parties, and media increasingly operate within unequal economic systems in which wealth and influence shape political outcomes [18]. Similarly, Piketty argues that contemporary democracies frequently reinforce rather than reduce economic inequality. These concerns are reflected across Arab states, where electoral reforms have rarely produced meaningful socioeconomic transformation [19]. Instead, poverty, unemployment, corruption, and unequal resource distribution often persist because political reforms remain disconnected from economic justice [20]. In response, solidarity democracy offers an alternative that combines democratic participation with social justice and equitable redistribution. Democracy is evaluated not only by electoral competition but also by its ability to deliver education, healthcare, decent work, dignity, and inclusive development [21]. This perspective reflects many Arab protest movements, where demands extended beyond political freedoms to include economic justice and human dignity [22]. However, as Offe notes, such movements often encounter entrenched elites capable of co-opting reform [23]. Accordingly, solidarity democracy requires institutional safeguards against elite capture, including transparent decision-making, independent accountability institutions, civic participation, and equitable access to political processes. These mechanisms seek to transform participation from symbolic inclusion into meaningful influence over political and economic decisions. Recent studies similarly argue that democratic transitions frequently reproduce existing hierarchies, while performative democratic institutions may strengthen

authoritarian resilience rather than genuine reform [24]. Consequently, democracy must be reconceptualized as both a moral and institutional project that integrates individual rights with collective well-being, social justice, and locally grounded political realities.

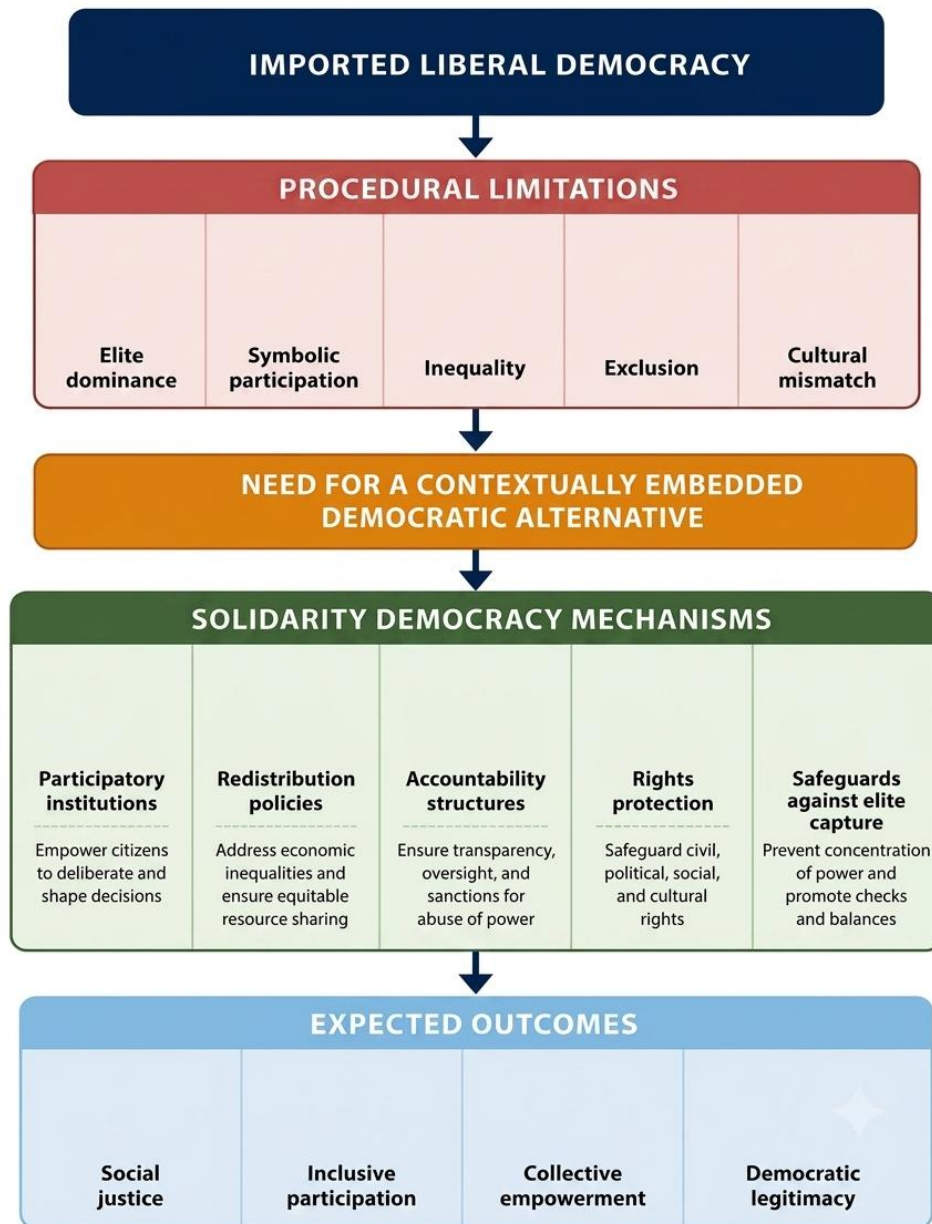


Figure 1. Analytical Framework of Solidarity Democracy

Source: Authors own work

While critiques of liberal democracy are essential, a balanced assessment must also recognize its foundational achievements. The expansion of political rights, institutional checks on authoritarianism, and global normative standards are not insignificant. However, without contextualization and adaptation, these gains remain fragile and superficial in many Global South settings. Ultimately, the task is not to discard democracy, but to pluralize and decolonize it—to reclaim it as a means of genuine empowerment and collective justice [25].

3. METHODOLOGY

This article adopts a qualitative, multi-case comparative design anchored in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and contextual political economy. Given the article's aim to critique liberal democratic models in the Arab world and explore locally grounded alternatives, this approach enables a deeper examination of how language, ideology, and material structures interact to shape political imaginaries and governance outcomes [26]. The qualitative comparative approach is particularly appropriate because it facilitates systematic examination of both shared regional dynamics and country-specific institutional configurations while preserving the historical and political context of each case.

3.1. Case Selection Rationale

Five countries, Jordan, Oman, Lebanon, the UAE, and Tunisia, were purposefully selected based on their variation in regime types (monarchies, republics, and hybrid political systems), regional diversity, and different historical trajectories of political reform and democratization. Tunisia represents a case of formal democratic transition following the Arab Spring, whereas the UAE and Oman illustrate stable monarchical governance with limited electoral competition. Jordan represents a constitutional monarchy characterized by gradual political reforms, while Lebanon provides an example of a consociational political system facing persistent governance crises. The comparative design follows a most-different systems logic, whereby countries with distinct political institutions are examined using common analytical dimensions to identify recurring patterns in democratic discourse and governance. Rather than comparing democratic performance alone, the analysis evaluates how liberal democratic principles are interpreted, institutionalized, contested, or adapted within diverse Arab political contexts.

To ensure analytical consistency, all five cases were compared across seven common dimensions:

- regime type and political authority;
- democratic institutions and electoral arrangements;
- elite structures and power distribution;
- citizen participation mechanisms;
- social justice conditions;
- inclusion of marginalized groups (women, youth, ethnic and religious minorities, and low-income populations); and
- compatibility between democratic discourse and local cultural, religious, and historical contexts.

These dimensions provide a transparent comparative framework that allows both convergence and divergence across cases to be systematically examined while remaining aligned with the article's research objectives [27].

Table 2. Comparative Profile of Selected Cases

Country	Political System	Democratic Institutions	Elite Structure	Major Social Justice Challenges	Relevance to Research
Jordan	Constitutional monarchy	Parliament with limited executive accountability	Royal and political elites	Youth unemployment, political participation, refugee pressures	Illustrates gradual reform under monarchical governance

Oman	Absolute monarchy	Consultative Council with limited legislative authority	Centralized ruling elite	Citizen participation, economic diversification	Demonstrates state-led governance with limited democratic institutions
Lebanon	Consociational republic	Electoral democracy with sectarian power sharing	Sectarian political elites	Governance crisis, inequality, sectarian exclusion	Examines democratic institutions constrained by elite bargaining
UAE	Federal monarchy	Advisory institutions with limited electoral participation	Federal ruling families	Migrant rights, political participation, representation	Provides contrast between governance effectiveness and limited democratic competition
Tunisia	Semi-presidential republic	Competitive elections and constitutional institutions	Political parties and emerging elites	Economic inequality, political instability, youth inclusion	Represents post-Arab Spring democratic experimentation

Source: Authors own work

3.2. Data Sources and Selection

The analysis draws on multiple forms of secondary data to strengthen triangulation and comparative validity, including:

- Peer-reviewed academic literature on democracy, governance, political economy, and social justice in the Arab region.
- Official government reports, NGO publications, and international democracy assessments (e.g., Freedom House and Arab Barometer).
- Political speeches, official policy documents, constitutional texts, legal frameworks, parliamentary statements, and mainstream media coverage published between 2011 and 2023.

Documents were selected through purposeful sampling to ensure thematic relevance, ideological diversity, and representation across countries, institutions, and time periods. Political speeches and policy documents were included when they explicitly addressed democratic reform, political participation, governance, citizenship, social justice, or state legitimacy. To facilitate systematic comparison, all documents were coded using a common analytical framework. Initial open coding identified recurring themes across the dataset, followed by focused coding based on predefined analytical categories derived from the research objectives and theoretical framework. These categories included: representations of democracy and governance; elite legitimacy and authority; citizen participation and political inclusion; social justice and distributive equity; treatment of marginalized groups; state–society relations; cultural and religious framing of democracy; and narratives supporting or challenging liberal democratic models.

Using identical coding categories across all five cases ensured consistency in interpretation while allowing country-specific differences to emerge through comparative analysis.

3.3. Analytical Tools and Frameworks

The study integrates three complementary analytical approaches.

- **Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA):** Used to uncover how language, symbolism, and discursive practices serve to legitimize elite power while simulating participatory democracy [26]. The analysis specifically examined rhetorical framing, ideological assumptions, patterns of inclusion and exclusion, representations of political actors, and the relationship between discourse and institutional power.
- **Comparative Political Analysis:** Enables systematic cross-case comparison to identify patterns and variations in how democratic ideals are framed and enacted [28]. The predefined comparative dimensions provided a common analytical structure for evaluating similarities and differences across the five countries.
- **Contextual Political Economy:** Political economy analysis examined how historical legacies, economic interests, class relations, and state institutions influence democratic development. Postcolonial and Marxist approaches inform a structural critique of power asymmetries, class dynamics, and the colonial residues embedded in liberal democratic templates [29].

The integration of these approaches allows discourse, institutional arrangements, and structural conditions to be analysed simultaneously, providing a comprehensive understanding of democracy beyond procedural or electoral definitions.

3.4. Focus on Marginalized Actors

Consistent with critical and participatory epistemologies, the study emphasizes how marginalized groups, including women, youth, low-income communities, migrants, and ethnic/religious minorities, are either excluded from or tokenized within political discourses. Their representation, or lack thereof, serves as a critical indicator of democratic authenticity and inclusivity [30]. Particular attention was given to whether policy narratives positioned these groups as active political participants or passive beneficiaries of state action.

3.5. Reflexivity and Researcher Positionality

Given the interpretive nature of the study, researcher positionality is crucial. This research is conducted from a standpoint that is both regionally grounded and critically distanced, informed by familiarity with Arab political contexts but also shaped by normative commitments to equity and justice. Reflexive practice involved continuous comparison across diverse data sources, awareness of interpretive assumptions, and deliberate engagement with competing scholarly perspectives to minimize researcher bias [31].

3.6. Validity and Limitations

The study achieves credibility through triangulation, drawing from diverse sources and disciplines to enhance depth and reliability [32]. Cross-case comparison using standardized analytical categories further enhanced consistency and transparency. While the analysis relies solely on secondary data, this limitation is mitigated by the richness of discourse materials and the theory-driven approach. No primary interviews were conducted, which may limit the immediacy of grassroots perspectives, but the focus on public discourses allows for insights into elite framing and public political narratives. The findings are not statistically generalizable but are intended to contribute to critical theoretical debates and inform alternative democratic imaginaries.

3.7. Justification

This methodological approach directly supports the article's core objectives by:

- Moving beyond procedural democracy to examine democracy as lived experience and ideological construct [33].

- Employing non-Western epistemologies to critique-imposed models and advance collective rights-based governance [34].
- Utilizing systematic comparative analysis across diverse Arab political systems to identify indigenous democratic alternatives grounded in social justice, cultural legitimacy, equity, and inclusive governance [35].

4. RESULTS

This section presents a comparative analysis of democratic discourses and practices across five Arab countries. The findings show that although democratic institutions, such as elections and parliamentary structures, exist in different forms, they rarely produce meaningful power redistribution or inclusive governance. Instead, elite dominance persists through legal, rhetorical, and institutional mechanisms, while the exclusion or tokenistic inclusion of women, youth, and minorities further weakens democratic legitimacy. The analysis also reveals tensions between externally promoted liberal democratic models and the culturally embedded political realities of many Arab societies. Consequently, the findings advocate for a locally grounded model of democracy that prioritizes social justice, equity, and collective empowerment [32]. Table 1 summarizes the main challenges and corresponding conceptual alternatives identified across the five case studies.

Table 3. Summary of Democracy Challenges and Alternatives

Theme	Key Insights	Examples / References
Formal Democracy Lacks Redistribution	Democratic procedures in Arab countries are mostly formalistic and fail to ensure real power sharing or wealth redistribution.	Jordan & Lebanon: Elite recycling [36]; UAE & Oman: Performance legitimacy [37].
Elites' Monopoly in Politics	Political and economic power is monopolized by elites using rhetoric, security narratives, media control, and legitimacy from development projects.	UAE & Oman rulers' legitimacy through development [38]; Control over media [39].
Absence of Social Justice	Social justice is largely absent, undermining democracy's legitimacy and fuelling frustration, despite economic hardships and disparities.	Tunisia's post-Arab Spring struggles [40]; Gulf muted debate [41].
Marginalized Participation Weakens Democracy	Marginalized groups are excluded or tokenized, limiting genuine political participation and weakening democratic legitimacy.	Women, youth, minorities sidelined [42]; Rhetorical inclusion [43].
Imported Democracy vs. Culture	Western democratic models often clash with local social and cultural norms, leading to disengagement and political apathy.	Collective loyalties vs. individualism [20]
Alternative Social Collective Democracy	Advocates for democracy rooted in social justice, collective empowerment, and culturally embedded practices rather than imposed models.	Calls for organic, local democracy [34,35]

Source: Authors own work

Table 2 presents a cross-case comparison of the five countries, highlighting similarities and differences in democratic participation, elite dominance, social justice, inclusion, and cultural compatibility.

Table 4. Cross-Case Comparison of Democratic Patterns Across the Five Cases

Theme	Jordan	Lebanon	UAE	Oman	Tunisia
Participation	Limited electoral participation under constitutional monarchy	Elections constrained by sectarian power-sharing	Limited electoral participation; consultative governance	Consultative participation under monarchy	Competitive elections with declining public trust
Elite dominance	Royal and tribal elites dominate	Sectarian elites dominate institutions	Ruling families dominate governance	Centralized ruling elite	Political parties and emerging elites compete but remain influential
Social justice	Employment and refugee pressures	Economic crisis and inequality	Development with uneven redistribution	Economic diversification challenges	Persistent unemployment and regional inequality
Marginalized groups	Limited political inclusion	Sectarian and socioeconomic exclusion	Symbolic inclusion of women and youth	Limited participatory opportunities	Greater civic participation but uneven representation
Cultural compatibility	Tribal traditions shape participation	Sectarian identity shapes politics	Consensus and performance legitimacy	Traditional authority and consensus	Liberal institutions coexist with local political culture

Source: Authors own work

Overall, the five cases demonstrate important differences in how procedural democracy is institutionalized. Tunisia represents the strongest example of electoral democratization, although its institutional gains remain constrained by socioeconomic challenges. Jordan and Lebanon retain electoral institutions but continue to reproduce elite dominance through tribal and sectarian political structures. By contrast, the UAE and Oman rely primarily on performance legitimacy, administrative effectiveness, and economic development rather than competitive electoral accountability [37,44].

4.1. Formal Democracy Lacks Redistribution

The cases examined show that democracy in many Arab countries remains largely procedural and symbolic, centred on formalistic practices such as periodic elections, parliamentary councils, and limited party pluralism [45]. However, these mechanisms rarely translate into genuine redistribution of political power or economic resources [36]. Instead, these electoral rituals function as a facade that masks entrenched elite control. For example, in Jordan and Lebanon, elections predominantly serve to recycle longstanding elites, who retain power through entrenched tribal affiliations and sectarian networks [46]. This cycle effectively blocks meaningful political renewal and prevents new actors from entering the political arena. In

contrast, in monarchies like the United Arab Emirates and Oman, the legitimacy of rulers derives less from electoral participation and more from what scholars' term "performance legitimacy"—the delivery of economic development and technocratic governance [37]. Here, the emphasis is on maintaining economic stability and growth, which substitutes for political accountability and sidelines power-sharing [44]. This model prioritizes stability over participatory governance, limiting democratic deepening.

4.2. Elites' Monopoly in Politics

Across all five cases, ruling elites—whether entrenched traditional elites or emergent groups—maintain a monopoly over political and economic decision-making [47]. This dominance is sustained through multiple strategies aimed at constraining pluralism and dissent. These include:

- The use of religious and nationalist rhetoric to foster identity-based loyalty and frame dissent as disloyalty or a security threat [48].
- The consistent invocation of security and stability as justifications for restricting freedoms and repressing opposition [49].

In the UAE and Oman, elites reinforce their rule by showcasing tangible development achievements that pacify calls for political reform [38]. Moreover, tight control of media and the public sphere enables elites to shape dominant narratives, marginalize critical voices, and manufacture consent [39]. This managed political environment sustains an elite-dominated "democracy" that obscures real power rotation and broader inclusion [50]. Although elite domination is evident across all five countries, the mechanisms differ substantially. Jordan and Lebanon primarily rely on historical political networks, tribal affiliations, and sectarian bargaining, whereas the UAE and Oman reinforce elite legitimacy through economic performance, centralized governance, and state-led development narratives [38]. Tunisia exhibits greater political competition than the other cases, yet elite influence continues through party politics and institutional fragmentation [40].

4.3. Absence of Social Justice as a Common Denominator

Despite diverse political systems, a shared challenge across the region is the lack of social justice as a guiding principle in governance and policy-making. This deficit critically undermines democracy's ability to meet citizens' needs and expectations [51]. In Tunisia, which ignited the Arab Spring and embraced political transition, successive governments have struggled to address persistent economic hardships, including high unemployment and regional inequalities [40]. These failures have eroded trust in democratic institutions and deepened public frustration. In contrast, Gulf monarchies such as the UAE and Oman maintain highly centralized control over public discourse, effectively muting debates on social justice and redistribution [41]. Beneath the veneer of state-led prosperity lie growing class and regional disparities that remain largely unaddressed in official policy. Across these contexts, the disconnect between democratic discourse and economic equity reduces democracy to an empty formality, divorced from the real aspirations and material needs of the majority. Cross-case comparison indicates that social justice deficits manifest differently across political systems. Tunisia experiences visible public contestation over unemployment and regional disparities, whereas similar socioeconomic inequalities in the Gulf monarchies are moderated by state welfare policies and tightly managed public discourse [41]. Jordan and Lebanon occupy an intermediate position where economic pressures coexist with institutional constraints on effective redistribution [51].

4.4. Marginalized Participation Weakens Democracy

A prominent pattern across the case studies is the systematic exclusion of marginalized groups, including women, youth, ethnic and religious minorities, and economically disadvantaged populations, from meaningful political participation. Structural barriers embedded in legal frameworks, electoral systems, and social norms limit these groups' ability to influence political decision-making [42]. Rather than serving as genuine stakeholders, marginalized groups are frequently tokenized through official rhetoric without receiving substantive political empowerment. Several regimes promote women's empowerment and youth engagement primarily to enhance international legitimacy or satisfy external benchmarks, while implementing few reforms that expand their actual political influence [52]. In some Gulf states, appointing

women to advisory councils' functions more as a symbolic gesture than as genuine participatory governance. The degree of exclusion varies across cases. Tunisia provides relatively greater civic opportunities for women and youth despite persistent implementation gaps, whereas Jordan and Lebanon continue to face structural barriers rooted in tribal and sectarian political arrangements. In contrast, participation in the UAE and Oman largely occurs through consultative or appointed institutions rather than competitive democratic processes, resulting in symbolic rather than substantive inclusion [43]. Consequently, elite-dominated public spheres and controlled media continue to weaken democratic legitimacy, reinforce social inequalities, and encourage political disengagement [53].

4.5. Imported Democracy vs. Local Cultural Realities

The findings also reveal a fundamental mismatch between Western liberal democratic models and the social-cultural contexts of many Arab countries [54]. The post-2011 Tunisian experience and reform efforts in Jordan illustrate that concepts like political individualism and competitive elections do not always resonate with local populations [55]. Political culture in many Arab societies remains collectivist, heavily shaped by tribal, sectarian, and familial loyalties that prioritize communal cohesion over individual political competition [56]. This cultural framework creates a disconnect between formal democratic institutions and citizens' political behaviours and expectations [57]. As a result, many citizens distrust formal political processes and become reluctant to engage politically. Rather than encouraging meaningful participation, the adoption of liberal democratic models can reinforce political alienation and public disillusionment when they fail to reflect local social realities, cultural values, and lived experiences [58]. These findings suggest that cultural compatibility differs considerably across the five cases. Tunisia has attempted to reconcile liberal democratic institutions with local political traditions, whereas Jordan and Lebanon continue balancing imported democratic mechanisms with entrenched communal identities. The Gulf monarchies instead derive legitimacy primarily from traditional authority, consensus-building, and state performance, illustrating alternative governance logics that differ from Western liberal democratic assumptions [54].

4.6. Counter-Example: Tunisia's Incremental Democratic Gains

While challenges are widespread, Tunisia's democratic transition following the Arab Spring represents a notable partial success. Despite economic difficulties and political instability, Tunisia achieved relatively open elections and a vibrant civil society for several years [40]. This case demonstrates that democratic reforms aligned with grassroots demands and inclusive political engagement can yield meaningful institutional changes. However, persistent socioeconomic inequalities and political polarization continue to threaten these gains, underscoring the limits of liberal democratic frameworks when unaccompanied by social justice [40].

4.7. Toward an Alternative Social Collective Democracy

Given these realities, the findings advocate for a democracy rooted in social justice and collective empowerment rather than the superficial adoption of imported frameworks [34]. This alternative explicitly links political rights with equitable economic redistribution and meaningful community participation in decision-making. Emerging from each country's cultural, social, and historical context rather than external imposition, solidarity democracy reimagines governance as a collective project founded on equality, shared responsibility, and social justice [59]. Operationally, it combines representative institutions with participatory mechanisms such as local councils, citizen assemblies, participatory budgeting, and community development committees that enable citizens to shape public priorities while preserving constitutional governance [34, 59]. To prevent elite domination, solidarity democracy incorporates transparent participation rules, rotating leadership, independent oversight bodies, citizen monitoring, open decision-making, and regular public accountability. At the same time, collective participation is balanced with constitutional protections for freedom of expression, minority rights, gender equality, religious freedom, and due process, ensuring that collective interests do not suppress individual rights [35]. Transition should occur gradually through expanded local participation and civic dialogue in the short term, decentralization and institutional reforms in the medium term, and long-term integration of participatory governance with equitable redistribution and

accountable public institutions [34,35]. Such a contextualized model offers a viable pathway toward more inclusive, legitimate, and socially just democratic governance across Arab societies.

5. DISCUSSION

This study critically examines democracy in Arab contexts, showing that although many states have adopted liberal democratic institutions—including elections, parliaments, and consultative councils—these mechanisms largely remain procedural rather than transformative. Across Jordan, Lebanon, the UAE, Oman, and Tunisia, democratic institutions rarely achieve meaningful political redistribution, social justice, or inclusive governance. Instead, procedural democracy often coexists with entrenched elite dominance, supporting arguments that imported liberal democratic models may legitimize existing power structures rather than challenge them. These findings reinforce the view that democracy should be assessed by its substantive outcomes in justice, inclusion, and redistribution rather than procedural compliance alone [32,11]. Despite differences in political systems, all five cases demonstrate persistent elite control. In Jordan and Lebanon, elections frequently reproduce tribal and sectarian elites, while the UAE and Oman derive legitimacy primarily from economic performance and administrative effectiveness rather than electoral accountability. Although Tunisia has experienced democratic transition, continuing economic inequality and institutional instability have constrained democratic consolidation. Across these cases, procedural reforms alone have proven insufficient to transform underlying political and economic structures.

Elite dominance is reinforced through media control, religious and nationalist rhetoric, security narratives, and development-based legitimacy, reducing political participation to symbolic engagement rather than meaningful influence [14]. Similarly, the absence of social justice weakens democratic legitimacy, as illustrated by Tunisia's post-uprising economic challenges and the Gulf monarchies' limited public debate on redistribution [40]. Marginalized groups, including women, youth, and minorities, remain largely excluded from substantive political participation despite increasing official rhetoric promoting inclusion [53]. The findings further reveal a persistent mismatch between imported liberal democratic models and local sociocultural realities. Political life in many Arab societies continues to be shaped by communal identities, tribal affiliations, and religious traditions that differ from the individualistic assumptions of liberal democracy, reducing the legitimacy of externally promoted institutions [54]. Accordingly, this study proposes solidarity democracy as a contextually grounded alternative that combines political participation with social justice, equitable redistribution, and collective empowerment through participatory institutions while safeguarding constitutional rights and accountability [35,59]. Although international organizations can provide valuable support, democratic reforms are more likely to succeed when they strengthen locally generated institutions rather than impose externally designed governance models.

5.1. Implementation Challenges and Institutional Safeguards of Solidarity Democracy

Although solidarity democracy offers a promising alternative to procedural democracy, its implementation faces significant political and institutional challenges. Entrenched political and economic elites are likely to resist reforms that redistribute authority and resources, while weak administrative capacity, limited decentralization, and low civic participation may hinder effective implementation. External political and financial pressures can also encourage standardized governance models that do not adequately reflect local historical, cultural, and institutional realities.

To address these challenges, solidarity democracy requires strong institutional safeguards that prevent elite capture while ensuring democratic accountability. These include transparent decision-making, rotating leadership, independent oversight bodies, citizen monitoring, public access to information, and regular accountability mechanisms. Equally important, participatory governance must operate within constitutional frameworks that protect freedom of expression, minority rights, gender equality, religious freedom, and due process, ensuring that collective decision-making complements rather than compromises individual rights. For policymakers, democratic reform should prioritize participatory governance, social justice, accountability, and the meaningful inclusion of marginalized communities through locally embedded institutions. Expanding community councils, citizen assemblies, participatory budgeting, civic education, and

civil society engagement can strengthen public trust and democratic legitimacy while linking political participation to equitable socioeconomic development. Ultimately, sustainable democratization requires moving beyond imported institutional models toward context-sensitive democratic systems that balance collective responsibility, individual rights, social justice, and inclusive political participation.

6. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that liberal democracy, when adopted as an imported model without critical adaptation, often fails to address the structural challenges facing Arab and Global South societies. Rather than fostering empowerment and inclusion, such models frequently reinforce existing inequalities, elite monopolies, and superficial rituals of participation. Elections and consultative bodies may exist, but without meaningful redistribution of power or resources, they serve more as symbolic gestures than genuine democratic mechanisms. Across the five case studies, Jordan, Oman, Lebanon, the UAE, and Tunisia, this democratic deficit manifests not only in limited political inclusion but also in persistent social injustice and public disillusionment.

The core argument emerging from this research is that democratic transformation must be locally grounded, socially just, and collectively imagined. It must respond to cultural realities, historical trajectories, and the daily struggles of ordinary citizens, not simply replicate institutional forms from Western contexts. To move in this direction, the study offers a practical roadmap of reform strategies categorized into short-, medium-, and long-term actions to support policymakers, reformers, and civil society actors in building more inclusive and culturally responsive democratic systems. In the short term, efforts should focus on piloting participatory governance initiatives such as community councils and participatory budgeting, strengthening grassroots organizations, promoting media pluralism, and encouraging dialogue among governments, civil society, academics, and religious leaders. International organizations should support locally driven democratic innovations rather than promote standardized institutional models.

Over the medium term, reforms should institutionalize citizen assemblies, youth councils, civic education, affirmative representation for marginalized groups, and stronger public accountability through independent oversight institutions, citizen monitoring, and digital transparency platforms. Legal safeguards protecting civil society, journalists, and dissenting voices are equally important for ensuring meaningful democratic participation. In the long term, democratic oversight should become embedded within national development planning through decentralization, equitable redistribution, transparent governance, and inclusive policymaking. A culturally grounded model of solidarity democracy should connect political participation with social justice, shared responsibility, and equitable economic development while strengthening regional dialogue on democratic renewal.

Rather than representing an immediate replacement for existing political systems, solidarity democracy should be understood as a gradual process of institutional transformation. Its implementation requires progressive decentralization, transparent and accountable public institutions, constitutional protection of individual and minority rights, and policies that integrate democratic participation with social justice and equitable redistribution. Through incremental reforms and locally driven institutional innovation, solidarity democracy can evolve within existing political systems while reducing opportunities for elite capture and strengthening democratic legitimacy. While these recommendations are necessarily ambitious, they are not utopian. Democratic reform in many Arab countries is constrained by political realities and institutional resistance. Consequently, meaningful change is more likely to emerge gradually through local governance innovations, civic engagement, legal reform, and sustained collaboration among public institutions and civil society.

This article contributes to contemporary democracy scholarship by shifting the debate from institutional imitation toward contextual democratic innovation. Rather than assessing democracy solely through the adoption of Western institutional models, it demonstrates the importance of designing democratic systems that reflect local histories, cultural values, and social realities. By proposing solidarity democracy as a context-sensitive framework, the article advances an alternative model that integrates participatory

governance, social justice, accountability, inclusion, and culturally embedded institutions. Ultimately, democracy should not be viewed as a fixed institutional formula to be imported but as a dynamic and evolving process rooted in solidarity, dignity, justice, and collective empowerment. Democratic systems that emerge from local realities rather than external templates are more likely to achieve lasting legitimacy, meaningful participation, and sustainable governance for Arab societies.

Acknowledgement: The author acknowledges the use of the free version of ChatGPT for language editing and for translating the text from Arabic to English

Funding Statement: This study received no funding from any party.

Author Contributions: The article was developed and written by a sole author.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Conflict of Interest Statement: The author declares no conflicts of interest associated with this article.

REFERENCES

- [1] Awashra, R., & Awashreh, M. (2012). Accountability: A lingering dilemma for Palestinian non-governmental organizations (NGOs). *International NGO Journal*, *7*(4), 64–72.
<https://doi.org/10.5897/INGOJ12.018>
- [2] Wojtasik, W. (2024). *Electoral manipulation in liberal democracies*. Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek.
- [3] Edor, M. (2024). *Navigating Democracy: Perspectives on Western-Style Democracy in Africa* (Master's thesis, Illinois State University).
<https://doi.org/10.30707/ETD2024.20240618063948814138.999974>
- [4] Ayoub, M. (2024). *What Follows the Fall? Investigating The Shifting Landscape of Political Violence in the Wake of Regime Breakdown* (Master's thesis, The American University in Cairo (Egypt)).
<https://fount.aucegypt.edu/etds/2320/>
- [5] Brown, J. (2025). Oligarchy, Populism, Democracy: Re-conceptualizing Democratization and De-democratization in the Neoliberal Era. *Socialism and Democracy*, 1–22.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08854300.2025.2469962>
- [6] Holston, J. (2021). *Insurgent citizenship: Disjunctions of democracy and modernity in Brazil*. Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400832781>
- [7] Corimanya, E. (2025). *THE FREE MARKET MYTH: Unveiling the Illusions of Economic Justice: Exploring Failures, Inequalities, and Alternative Futures in a Globalized World*. Alternative Perspectives.
- [8] Salter, M. (2024). *The fading light of democratic capitalism: How pervasive cronyism and restricted suffrage are destroying democratic capitalism as a national ideal... and what to do about it* (Working Paper No. 24-062). Harvard Business School. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009587655>
- [9] Głogowski, P. (2021). *The European Citizens' Initiative: A new model of democracy in the European Union?* (Doctoral dissertation, Uniwersytet Wrocławski). Uniwersytet Wrocławski Repository.
- [10] Tsai, T. H., & Tsai, C. H. (2024). Democratic values and democratic support in rapidly consolidated democracies: The case of Taiwan, 1995–2020. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00219096241257690>
- [11] Mota, A. (2019). *Collective action and political transformations: The entangled experiences in Brazil, South Africa and Europe*. Edinburgh University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474442985>

- [12] Heller, P. (2022). Democracy in the global south. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *48*(1), 463–484. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-090220-025117>
- [13] Kollektiv, P., & Kollektiv, G. (2023). Paradoxes of democracy. In *Subversive performance in the age of human capital* (pp. 129–165). Cham: Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-35739-8_5
- [14] Ayubi, N. (2003). *Political Islam: Religion and politics in the Arab world*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203401521>
- [15] Piliavsky, A. (2020). *Nobody's people: Hierarchy as hope in a society of thieves*. Stanford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781503614215>
- [16] Mizel, O. (2024). Dancing over the sands: Transformations in Arab tribal identity and the conflict and accommodation between Arab tribes and the state. *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights*, *1*(aop), 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718115-bja10128>
- [17] Hanafi, S. (2023). *Studying Islam in the Arab world: The rupture between religion and the social sciences*. Taylor & Francis. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003435372>
- [18] Ramesh, A., Pavlov, M., Goh, G., Gray, S., Voss, C., Radford, A., ... & Sutskever, I. (2021, July). Zero-shot text-to-image generation. In *International Conference on Machine Learning* (pp. 8821–8831). PMLR. <https://proceedings.mlr.press/v139/ramesh21a.html>
- [19] Piketty, T. (2021). Capital and ideology: A global perspective on inequality regimes. *British Journal of Sociology*, *72*(1), 129–135. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12706>
- [20] Guazzone, L., & Pioppi, D. (2022). *The Arab state and neo-liberal globalization: The restructuring of state power in the Middle East*. Garnet Publishing Ltd.
- [21] Capeheart, L., & Milovanovic, D. (2020). *Social justice: Theories, issues, and movements* (Revised and expanded edition). Rutgers University Press. <https://doi.org/10.36019/9781978806894>
- [22] Boutros, V. (2023). *Beyond democratization: The Arab Spring uprisings in participants' own words* (Doctoral dissertation, University of California, Irvine). University of California eScholarship Repository. https://www.polisci.uci.edu/files/docs/theses/2022-23/2023_boutros_valerie.pdf
- [23] Offe, C. (2019). New social movements: Challenging the boundaries of institutional politics (1985). In *New social movements* (pp. 255–294). Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-22261-1_12
- [24] Salaudeen, A. A., & Muhammed, A. A. (2024). Democracy, development and Africa: A conceptual and empirical review. *International Journal of Anthropology and Ethnology Research Development*, *5*(6). <https://harvardpublications.com/hijaerd/article/view/170>
- [25] Andrias, K. (2024). Constitutional clash: Labor, capital, and democracy. *Northwestern University Law Review*, *118*, 985–1040. https://scholarship.law.columbia.edu/faculty_scholarship/4368
- [26] Fairclough, N. (2013). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language* (2nd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315834368>
- [27] Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- [28] Landman, T. (2008). *Issues and methods in comparative politics: An introduction* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- [29] Harvey, D. (2005). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199283262.001.0001>
- [30] Fraser, N. (2008). *Scales of justice: Reimagining political space in a globalizing world*. Polity Press.
- [31] Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2018). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- [32] Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

- [33] Parvin, P. (2018). Democracy without participation: A new politics for a disengaged era. *Res Publica*, *24*(1), 31–52. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11158-017-9382-1>
- [34] Powell, J. A., & Toppin Jr., E. (2021). Uprooting authoritarianism: Deconstructing the stories behind narrow identities and building a society of belonging. *Columbia Journal of Race and Law*, *11*, 1–35. <https://doi.org/10.7916/cjrl.v11i1.8019>
- [35] Bloom, P. (2024). The possibilities of radical democratic management. In E. Weik, C. Land, & R. Hartz (Eds.), *The handbook of organizing economic, ecological and societal transformation* (pp. 275–294). De Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110986945-014>
- [36] Andrias, K., & Sachs, B. I. (2020). Constructing countervailing power: Law and organizing in an era of political inequality. *Yale Law Journal*, *130*, 546. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3779656>
- [37] Ibrahim, S. I. (2021). *Political systems and revolution: The cases of Egypt and Tunisia* (Doctoral dissertation, Universiti Malaya). <http://studentsrepo.um.edu.my/12815/>
- [38] Ahmed, G., Al Amiri, N., & Abudaqa, A. (2024). Strategic leadership and economic transformation: The United Arab Emirates (UAE) model. *Journal of Global Business Research and Practice*, *1*(1). <https://doi.org/10.70273/RSFK3414>
- [39] Asomah, J. Y. (2020). Democracy, the public sphere, and power elites: Examining the Ghanaian private media's role in political corruption. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, *37*(3), 221–237. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15295036.2020.1774069>
- [40] Kuznetsov, V. (2022). The Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia and the birth of the Arab Spring uprisings. In J. Foran, J. F. Kurtz, & B. G. Williams (Eds.), *Handbook of revolutions in the 21st century: The new waves of revolutions, and the causes and effects of disruptive political change* (pp. 625–649). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-86468-2_29
- [41] Bukhari, S. R. H., Khan, A. U., Noreen, S., Khan, M. T. U., Khan, M. N., & Haq, M. I. U. (2024). Echoes of change: Navigating political turmoil in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. *Kurdish Studies*, *12*(2), 6603–6631. <https://doi.org/10.53555/ks.v12i2.2883>
- [42] Morgan, J., & Kelly, N. J. (2021). Inequality, exclusion, and tolerance for political dissent in Latin America. *Comparative Political Studies*, *54*(11), 2019–2051. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414021997163>
- [43] Sabbi, M. (2024). "Seductions" of the international? Strategic propping of Rwanda's image in international society. In K. Omeje (Ed.), *The foreign policies of East African states* (pp. 112–137). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003507222>
- [44] McEvoy, J., & Aboultaif, E. W. (2022). Power-sharing challenges: From weak adoptability to dysfunction in Iraq. *Ethnopolitics*, *21*(3), 238–257. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449057.2020.1740715>
- [45] Hayward, E. (2019). *States and group rights: Legal pluralism and the decentralization of judicial power* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania).
- [46] Simoens, M. C., & Leipold, S. (2021). Trading radical for incremental change: The politics of a circular economy transition in the German packaging sector. *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning*, *23*(6), 822–836. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1523908X.2021.1931063>
- [47] Avin, C., Lotker, Z., Mizrachi, A., & Peleg, D. (2019, January). Majority vote and monopolies in social networks. In *Proceedings of the 20th International Conference on Distributed Computing and Networking* (pp. 342–351). <https://doi.org/10.1145/3288599.3288633>
- [48] Khan, S. A. (2025). *The global shift from promising pluralism to an exclusionary nationalism: Ideas, policies and power relations at the global level*. <https://doi.org/10.33774/apsa-2025-gg980>
- [49] Giroux, H. A. (2024). *Theory and resistance in education: Towards a pedagogy for the opposition*. Bloomsbury Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350458529>

- [50] Agarin, T. (2020). The limits of inclusion: Representation of minority and non-dominant communities in consociational and liberal democracies. *International Political Science Review*, *41*(1), 15–29. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512119881801>
- [51] Rahman, M. M., & Al-Azm, A. (2023). Social change and transformation in the Gulf Region. In M. M. Rahman & A. Al-Azm (Eds.), *Social change in the Gulf Region* (Vol. 8, pp. 1–xx). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-7796-1_1
- [52] Johnson, L. (2025). *Are we on the same page? A look at diversity, equity, and inclusion at a small liberal arts college* (Doctoral dissertation, Antioch University). ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- [53] Kamperman, S. (2024). Gateways and anchor points: The use of frames to amplify marginalized voices in disability policy deliberations. *Written Communication*, *41*(3), 513–538. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07410883241245256>
- [54] Aliboni, R., & Guazzone, L. (2004). Democracy in the Arab countries and the West. *Mediterranean Politics*, *9*(1), 82–93. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1362939042000205574>
- [55] Alaoui, H. (2022). Pacted democracy in the Middle East: Tunisia and Egypt in comparative perspective. In M. Catusse & K. Karam (Eds.), *Political participation in the Middle East and North Africa* (pp. 137–156). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-85068-4_8
- [56] Chokr, M. A. (2022). *Tribes, memory and politics in Iraq* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Westminster). WestminsterResearch. <https://westminsterresearch.westminster.ac.uk/item/v5qz9>
- [57] Flinders, M. (2009). Bridging the gap: Revitalising politics and the politics of public expectations. *Representation*, *45*(3), 337–347. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344890903040684>
- [58] Benhabib, S. (2013). *The democratic disconnect*. Transatlantic Academy. <https://www.transatlanticacademy.org/publications/democratic-disconnect>
- [59] Battilana, J., Yen, J., Ferreras, I., & Ramarajan, L. (2022). Democratizing work: Redistributing power in organizations for a democratic and sustainable future. *Organization Theory*, *3*(1), Article 26317877221084714. <https://doi.org/10.1177/26317877221084714>