

# Democracy and Arab Political Culture

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In-Depth Reports

**T**he collapse of the Soviet bloc and the end of the Cold War have come almost too swiftly to be registered. As Czechoslovakia's dissident-turned-President Vaclav Havel has said, one no longer has even the time to be astonished. No less striking than the demise of Soviet power has been the global sweep of the democratic idea as more and more societies, from Uruguay to the Ukraine to Tiananmen Square, after the long hiatus of dictatorship, take the first steps toward realizing the Enlightenment ideals of democratic self-government first enunciated in the American Revolution.

Yet as striking as this global democratic revolution has been, equally striking has been its failure thus far to stir the Middle East. Indeed, except for democratic Israel, the Middle East seems to be the only region in the world untouched by the democratic revolution sweeping the globe. Throughout the Middle East, despotisms of various hues hold sway. Where limited forms of democracy have been introduced, in Jordan and Algeria, the result has been electoral support for fundamentalist forces, whose commitment to democracy is either questionable or non-existent.

This phenomenon cries out for explanation, and few are better equipped to offer that than the author of this monograph, Professor Elie Kedourie, one of the master scholars of modern Middle Eastern history. Through his long and prolific career Professor Kedourie has skillfully combined deep knowledge, sober analysis and elegant prose to produce a shelf of volumes that will long endure as classics of Middle Eastern studies. His hallmark learning, perspicacity and grace are abundantly in evidence in this study of democracy and Arab political culture.

True to his calling, Professor Kedourie approaches this subject historically, examining the political traditions of Islam, the introduction of Western ideas in the 19th century and the ways in which those ideas took root, or failed to do so, in the region. He deftly places the vicissitudes of the present in the context of the enduring influence of the past.

As we look toward a new, post-Cold War world, Professor Kedourie's masterful tour d'horizon will prove valuable to policy makers, scholars and laymen who wish to better understand the tangled ideas and tragic conflicts that have bedeviled the Middle East and undermined progress down to our own time.

• 405 pages

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**RECOMMENDED**

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