



Article

Political Pluralism in the Middle East and North Africa

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Peter Mandaville’s report charts the efforts of civil society leaders to protect democracy amid antidemocratic forces.

If freedom is a constant struggle throughout the world, the Middle East and North Africa are major theaters of that struggle. How do people fight for their human and civil rights amid repressive governments and interventionist forces that manipulate world affairs for their own interests?

Peter Mandaville, a longtime expert on religion, international affairs, and the Muslim world, engages with these questions in his report [Political Pluralism in the Middle East and North Africa](#). The report draws upon what he calls “voices of civil society advocating for democracy, pluralism, and a rights-based politics” to assess how democracy thrives and survives under adverse conditions. In assessing the problem, Mandaville writes:

Civic space has been all but shut down in a number of key states; elsewhere the social fabric of religious,

ethnic, and cultural diversity has been frayed to the point of destruction; and key external actors who earlier welcomed the dawning of a new era of people power in the region have today once again aligned themselves with authoritarianism and geopolitical polarization in an uncertain search for security. Proxy wars between regional powers further fan the flames of social conflict.

Mandaville's report includes important conclusions from a series of conversations organized by the Hollings Center for International Dialogue, including [this March 2018 convening](#) of experts on Morocco, Egypt, and Tunisia.