THE CENTURY FOUNDATION

Reviving the Quest for Universal Rights

Overcoming Religious Objections and Other Taboos That Stymie Political Debate

APRIL 10, 2019 — THANASSIS CAMBANIS

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Violent repression has steadily increased in the Middle East since the popular uprisings that began almost a decade ago. In most cases, those uprisings have failed to create democratic or accountable political systems. People have been murdered, silenced, imprisoned, and subjected to genocide, along with a litany of other horrors. Such violence is not new to the Middle East, and over the years, periodic genocides have attracted widespread attention. In Iraq, for example, the Anfal genocide of the 1980s killed tens or even hundreds of thousands of Kurds, and more recently, the Islamic State attempted to exterminate the Yazidis. But these horrors are not exceptions, for Iraq or for the region. Instead, they are part of a sustained, ubiquitous, and indiscriminate assault on everyone's rights.

The Middle East has not yet resolved how to assign equal rights to people who claim different or multiple identities. Violence and exclusion are among the costs of this failure. People in the contemporary Middle East have faced persecution because of their religion, or their interest in keeping religious matters private; their sexuality; their ethnicity; their gender; and various other identity markers. They have also faced persecution for their political opinions—even those as basic as the desire to elect their own leaders. The accretion of all these wrongs makes it impossible to claim that the rights under attack pertain only to particular populations or identity groups.

The Middle East's crisis is part of a global phenomenon. Europe and the United States have struggled with resurgent white supremacist and other nativist groups, and a violent backlash against foreigners and immigrants, despite a long history of universalism and assimilation. The times might seem dispiriting, not just in the Middle East but everywhere. But the crisis creates an opportunity to rethink and reinvigorate concepts too long taken for granted, including citizenship, belonging, and the right to claim rights. Faced with ruling regimes that are overtly racist, misogynist, discriminatory, or spasmodically violent and repressive, people are asserting their rights to a different kind of citizenship. Advocates of rights have made their case in a variety of new spaces, from the academy to journalism, from politics to activism, from the grassroots to the elite. They are making robust arguments, radical in their contexts: that exclusion or discrimination against any citizen undermines the rights of all citizens; that citizenship can be established through practice, not just by law; that any polity based on ethnic or sectarian identity is doomed to fail its citizens; and that quests for rights that only address the rights of some privileged groups aren't really quests for rights at all.

This report can be found online at:https://tcf.org/content/report/reviving-quest-universal-rights/

The research and interviews in *Citizenship and Its Discontents: The Struggle for Rights, Pluralism, and Inclusion in the Middle East* are meant as conversation starters. The concepts and case studies taken up in this project, two years in the making, offer insight to citizens, observers, analysts, policymakers, activists—really anyone with a stake in the question of how best to govern pluralistic societies that protect universal rights and give space for individual identity. All our inquiries were shaped by a vigorous debate within our working group, which had anything but a uniform point of view. Some of us were strong advocates of secularism or universalism. Others were grounded in the problems facing specific groups of people within the region, or addressing the inequities in one particular conflict zone. Some argued for a flexible approach that sought rights and representation in organic bottom-up experiments, or practical ad hoc legal and political tools that would solve local problems rather than create conceptual frameworks. In all cases, however, the working group members were interested in expanding the space for rights and representation. We met in Beirut and New York City while developing the reports and interviews released here, and discovered that we disagreed as often as we found common ground. The working group includes policy analysts, academics, activists, journalists, researchers, and writers who span multiple fields and disciplines. All consider themselves supporters of rights and the rule of law, but follow those bedrock principles to different views of how to most effectively promote more widely shared rights, better governance, and a concept of citizenship that is more rewarding for the individual citizen and for the wider polity.

A Global Crisis

The very concepts of rights, inclusion, and pluralism have been under sustained attack in the Middle East for several generations. The assault is as much ideological as political. The Middle East's struggle with exclusionary forces has followed a specific historical course, connected to the region's trajectory from colonialism to independence. These exclusionary forces are not, however, unique to the Middle East. The erosion of concepts that are key to a liberal vision of society is a worldwide crisis. Universal rights, respect for diversity rather than reluctant tolerance, individual freedoms and liberties in a context of social protection—these are not exclusively liberal projects, but they are crucial ideals that today are under attack from many quarters.

The Middle East took center stage in the struggle to define rights during the mostly unsuccessful popular uprisings that began in 2010. The challenge has been especially acute because of the negative role of states—in some cases too weak to provide effective frameworks of law or identity, in others strong enough but rapacious and repressive. Different identity communities have shaped the competition for political power. And in the decades since, the Arab state system began its precipitous decline in the late 1960s, and various revanchist and authoritarian forces have argued for the primacy of identity-based politics—often religious—as the sole source of rights and legitimacy. Other approaches have lost their relevance, including secularism and universalism.

Western Europe and the United States during the last decade have embarked on some of the same fundamental debates about rights, belonging, and citizenship that have long gripped polities in the Middle East. Attempts to answer questions about how to handle immigrants, police abuse, and the appropriate redress for racist practices have quickly led to root causes and concerns. States and citizens have to adjudicate where rights come from, how to define citizenship, who has the right to belong, and how to craft a shared identity without erasing individual experience. How a society or government answers these core questions determines its essential character, as well as how it resolves debates over immigration and assimilation, religion and the state, rights and responsibilities.

Citizenship and Its Discontents arose from the perception that an interconnected set of crises was stymieing the most basic discussion of rights, responsibilities, and freedoms. During a decade of popular Arab uprisings and authoritarian relapse, calls for just and fair governance were often overwhelmed by talk of legitimacy, God, majority prerogatives, and minority protections. In the liberal states of the European Union and North America, bedrock commitments to human rights and universal jurisdiction

evaporated before narrowly defined, short-term national interests and fear-based identity politics. Promising, novel concepts like shared sovereignty and the responsibility to protect barely made it past the embryonic stage. Europe's migration crisis put a spotlight on the growing popularity of right-wing nativist movements that are often violent. Donald Trump's success in the 2016 U.S. presidential election cast a similar light on what was an already sizable and growing constituency of anti-immigrant, unabashedly racist white supremacist politics. From Viktor Orbán's Hungary to Trump's America, majoritarians and authoritarians directly oppose the core tenets of a liberal and inclusive society. In their politics and their rights-stripping policies, the new identity-based movements challenge the teleological hope, nursed by many idealists and reformers since World War II, that the arc of history is steadily moving away from violence and exclusion and toward healthier, safer societies.[1]

The West's open confrontation over liberal shibboleths follows a path already trodden in the Middle East. Authoritarians and democrats have cyclically fought for power for at least a century. Identity-based politics—at turns religious, ethnic, or sectarian—have played a pivotal and usually corrosive role, working in conjunction with the forces of authoritarianism, militarism, and majoritarianism to choke off any meaningful discussion of equality and universal rights. Regressive political forces also benefited from conservative and traditional tendencies in society. Repressive government systems have displayed remarkable resilience, and it is possible that authoritarian misrule might be far more sustainable than many observers expected. But the Arab uprisings demonstrated that no amount of repression can indefinitely stave off challenge or question. When the governed demand a better lot, especially in the more fragmented and identity-driven polities of the Middle East, a discussion of rights, inclusion, and pluralism will inevitably follow.

Any attempt to improve or reform the systems of governance in the Middle East will have to address questions of religion and identity. Authoritarian rulers have long made it practice to trample any semblance of rule of law or good governance, failing in almost every case even to deliver basic services like water and elementary education. At the same time, entire categories of people have suffered great harms on a communal basis, because of their religion, ethnicity, or gender. Perceived membership in a certain identity group, even if an individual does not themselves subscribe to that identity, can subject a citizen to rights-stripping, violence, or death. Concepts like citizenship are neutral vessels in the Middle East, sometimes defined so minimally—or withdrawn so easily—as to be meaningless.[2] Millions live without the protection of citizenship at all, generation after generation, while millions more live without any benefits or official protection despite nominal citizenship in one or another of the region's problematic states.

The first step to redress this profound systemic failing is to re-open a conversation about rights, and directly address those forces that insist on violent suppression of any such discussion: religious majoritarians, military dictators, and divine-rule monarchs. Conservative Middle Eastern societies include many constituents who subscribe to the views and philosophies of their authoritarian rulers, from local tribal chiefs to heads of state. Some communal groups primarily define themselves on an ethnic, religious, or sectarian basis, and they assert compelling claims about communal threats and interests. Majorities—often historically oppressed by colonial powers and then by homegrown despots—advocate for their own perceived communal rights. These currents and many more form an undeniable and legitimate strain of public discourse, although their rights to make claims should not automatically translate into the right to dictate the nature of the state or its policies.

Toxic Majoritarianism

Concerns about equality, majorities, and minorities have played a critical role in interventions and government formations in the Middle East at least since France sent troops in 1860 to protect the Christians of Mount Lebanon. Yassin al-Haj Saleh's contribution to the project *Citizenship and Its Discontents* grew out of an essay he published in Arabic in 2013 that critiqued what he calls Bashar al-Assad's "minority politics," which frames rights as a matter of protecting minorities from the majority rather than engaging

in a common struggle for equality. The problem Haj Saleh tackled then, and has continued to tackle in various writings ever since, is entirely topical and concrete: how to resist the mass murder of Syrians by Bashar al-Assad. It is also an abstract and timeless problem: how to protect vulnerable human beings without erasing their identity—that is, to allow people the freedom to embrace communal identities if they so desire, but without connecting their political or civic rights to any communal identity. That conundrum informs all the inquiries in *Citizenship and Its Discontents*.

In conflicts everywhere, not just in the Middle East, people are often threatened with violence because of their perceived identity, usually as members of a religious or ethnic community. However, policies that seek to protect communities against such threats by according them communal rights—essentially, framing the rescue of individuals, usually a minority, on the basis of their membership in a threatened identity group—often end up accelerating violence and fragmentation.

On the other hand, the application of universal rights doesn't always illuminate a clear path to justice. There's an endless list of cases where threatened human beings want equal rights or protection because of a strongly held identity that people want the freedom to embrace on their own terms. These identities often overlap and often arise from entirely incompatible or unrelated types of categories. The Islamic State, for example, killed people on the basis of their religion (including Christians and Yazidis), their sect (Shia Muslims), their practice of religion (secular Sunnis), their sexuality (people perceived as LGBTQ), or their politics (people who worked for the Iraqi security forces, and people who opposed Islamic State rule). These categories can overlap and intersect. Some opponents of the Islamic State sought protection only for some of the types of people threatened by the Islamic State. Only a universal rights regime would protect all of the Islamic State's victims, but it's not obvious what type of rights regime also protects the freedom of people to live their different, multiple identities in the same place, under the same rule of law.

Similar questions about identity and rights arise for people of mixed heritage, non-Arabs in the Arab world, or of heterodox political or social views, such as secularists or atheists in heavily religious societies. The permutations are endless, and in the real contest for security and legal standing, people want to lay claim to their particular identities while at the same time having equal rights. Not everyone excluded from the full basket of rights agrees with the principle of universalism. And majoritarians who believe themselves entitled to determine what share of rights are to be accorded to others, and on what basis, often object vehemently to any whiff of universalism whatsoever—because with universalism, the legitimacy of majority dominance evaporates.

What has been remarkable in the Middle East is the success of authoritarian, identity-based, and religious politics at marginalizing alternative ideas from the public sphere and from the core of state power. Secularism and liberalism took a beating almost from the start of post-colonial independence. Few of the new independent leaders in the Middle East came to power on a promise of liberalism, but many did embrace secularism, at least rhetorically. This association with some of the first and worst dictators in the region, who claimed a secularist mantle, deeply tarnished the case for secularism. One strain of Islamist politics proliferated beginning in the 1970s and succeeded at framing much of public debate. In the generation that followed, criticism of religious law and sectarian dominance became taboo even in societies where a sizable share of the population was made up of people—some pious, some not—who privately believed that a non-religious state could best protect space for personal piety. The result was a spread of constitutions that invoked Islam as the sole or primary source of law and the entrenchment of sectarianized systems in which personal status matters like marriage, divorce, and inheritance were adjudicated only through religious courts. Legal systems and states simply did not offer an option for citizens to choose to exist outside of rigid identity boundaries that were usually religiously defined. It's hard to precisely map, even with polling, the different views of secularity, piety, and governance in societies in today's Middle East. In more dynamic political environments, different approaches are tested when accountable, democratic governments implement new approaches as a result of popular demand. Absent such

feedback loops in most of the Arab world, there is little chance to gauge popular attitudes and shifts therein.

Toxic ideas about majoritarianism and essentialism undergirded the deepening sectarianization of life through administrative and judicial means. Majoritarianism holds that the majority has absolute power to impose its will on an entire population. It is often evoked by majorities or pluralities that see any consensus- or rights-based system as a threat not only to their dominance and privilege, but to their very identity and survival. Majoritarianism is often invoked to justify the second-class status of minority religious or ethnic groups in the Middle East, and elsewhere has been cited to justify white supremacy or exclusion and abuse of immigrants and other noncitizens. Essentialism, simply put, holds that people should be understood as a function of their identity—that identity can be labeled and can explain behavior. Its most obviously poisonous form is racism. But there are equally pernicious forms of essentialism that reduce behavior to identity under the banner of religious freedom, or empowerment of the majority.[3] Scholars and other advocates for this approach sometimes claim to be in favor of a form of democracy, or pretend they are merely pointing out liberal hypocrisy, even when what they are really doing is baldly apologizing for religious authoritarianism, or engaging in rampant whataboutism—deflecting criticism by pointing at the often unrelated inconsistencies of their critics.[4] These politicians, thinkers, and activists have claimed that, in Muslim-majority countries, only a certain kind of Islamic-inflected legal system, government, and set of social practices—normally defined by a narrow subset of one sect—describe the entire spectrum of permissible governance and behavior. Some have (perhaps unwittingly) echoed the racist tropes of one-time colonizers, parroting the line that Muslim societies cannot be liberal democracies. Another version of Middle Eastern essentialism points to the consultative tradition of the shura, and Islamic concepts of dialogue and jurisprudence, as sufficient basis for inclusive political systems.

To be sure, secularists and non-Muslim minorities have done plenty to tarnish their own standing in political discourse, repeatedly pursuing naked self-interest over national well-being. Since World War II, there has been a shameful parade of secular elitists who pretended to believe in liberal democracy, but once in power quickly embraced military dictatorship and illiberal authoritarianism to oppress challengers and stifle religious freedom. Eventually, they lost out to a new generation of leaders, among whom religious and identity-based politics have been ascendant since at least the 1980s. Today's generation of Arab despots, be they royals, generals, or dynastic warlords, has heavily leaned on the justifications of religious essentialists. Mid-nineteenth-century Arab secularism is just one of many answers to the narrower question of what form the relationship between state and religion should take. The brand of Islamism that gained traction in the Sunni Arab world after 1970 posits just one of many paths to integrate piety into politics. These two historical contingencies describe a tiny sliver of the spectrum of political possibilities and should no longer serve as the anchor points in the debate over rights, representation, and governance.

Beyond False Binaries

Political experience over the last half century has broken certain taboos and put to rest some false binaries. Most good-faith observers of political life—in the Arab world and anywhere else—could today agree that secularism and faith can coexist, and that individuals (like political movements) have multiple, simultaneous identities. Identity and ideas are not incompatible polar opposites; they come into play together, in life and in politics.

This development in collective wisdom can help us figure out what is not true. We can move past simplistic debates about whether everything can be boiled down to some fixed notion of sectarianism or extremism. Essentialism, helpfully, is out. So far, so good. But where do we turn instead? What are the causes of political pathologies, which sometimes stubbornly persist in all their dastardly specificity? In the Middle East, rights of all sorts remain in short supply. Universal rights, theoretically ascribed to via instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW),

and various national constitutions, are in practice anything but. The very notion of universalism is hotly contested, most often by identity groups: religious fundamentalists, irredentist ethno-nationalists, authoritarian military dictators. Today's Middle East plays host to a particularly yawning gap between popular aspirations and systems of government. The revolts that rocked the Arab world in 2010 and 2011 demanded universal rights that addressed both political and social needs: "bread, freedom, and social justice." Today, almost every country that witnessed protests, with the exception of Tunisia, has backslid on every measure of rights and governance, including the most minimal measures of economic performance and service provision. However, the energies that prompted the uprisings have continued even on the margins of power. They have been a major concern in the shaping of *Citizenship and Its Discontents*.

Military dictatorships have failed to deliver services or political representation; so has political Islam. Also discredited are parochial or tribal identity politics, like the chauvinist Christianist movements that catalyzed Lebanon's 1975—91 civil war, from which it has yet to recover. Resolving the region's impasse requires more than technocratic fixes. At the root of the region's gaping political failures are unresolved questions about the role of religion, identity, and community in government. Too many of the region's attempts at transition and reform have elided these core questions, which are delicate and, in some contexts, explosive. Without answers, however, no government stands a chance at performing its most basic obligations to provide services to citizens who have rights.

Universalism in the Middle East

By now it is painfully clear that the Middle East is experiencing a deep, epochal failure of governance. Most of the states in the region are weak. Those that are not tend to use their strength malignly. The systems in place cannot deliver basic services, and the basis of their legitimacy is in tatters. The current crisis, however, brings with it a silver lining: it helpfully transcends the paralyzing false binary that framed the Middle East's choices as being between secularism and religion. The question is how citizens in the Middle East can secure better governance and more rights. Failed and failing governments in some cases retain the power to force themselves on their subjects, but their standing in the legitimacy debate has slipped. Diversity is not, as it is sometimes posited, a problem to be managed. It is a bedrock condition of society. Just as in any other region, in today's Middle East, governments and, to varying extents, their subjects and citizens are deciding how to apportion rights, police themselves, administer society, and draft laws. But the systems of governance and control in the Middle East are exceptionally brittle and unaccountable, and increasingly unrepresentative of the diversity of views within the societies atop which they stand.

More than at any point since the reversal of European colonialism, this aftermath of the popular revolts of 2010–11, including the rise of illiberal authoritarianism and essentialist identity politics across the Arab world, demands attention to the question of rights—and, more specifically, universal rights. There are alternatives to religion (and other essential or communal identities) on the basis of which societies can assign rights. In theory, many Middle Eastern countries accept the idea of universalism. They have signed international instruments like the UDHR, the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, and CEDAW.[5] In practice, like other countries around the world—including, notably, the United States—they have refused to accede to aspects of universalism or international law they find inconvenient, and have refused to enforce agreed-upon norms that conflict with local practice.

Messy reality does not preclude an open and robust discussion of the need for universal rights, and, failing that, for more inclusive ways to share the benefits of just governance across identity groups. It is also long overdue for the Middle Eastern political debate to allow traditionally disenfranchised groups to lay claim to shared political and civic rights neither on the basis of sectarianism or tribalism, nor by forsaking and erasing their identities.[6]

When the United Nations was founded in 1948, a worldwide consensus quickly took shape about universal rights and international law: they should apply everywhere, at least as ideals, if not immediately achievable realities. Later

challengers took issue with a Eurocentric concept of human rights that functioned as a tool for Western dominance.[7] This critique had validity, but in turn was abused, as some took it as an invitation for essentialist and relativist blowback. That blowback was subsequently used to justify majoritarianism, sectarianism, and other approaches that boosted fragmentation and identity-driven politics, always at the expense of rights, pluralism, and inclusion.

One contribution of *Citizenship and Its Discontents* is to show the folly of rejecting the pursuit of universal rights. The struggle for rights need not and should not be connected to any one hegemonic power. That is the beauty of universalism and rights: there are different paths to extend rights and belonging, while allowing room for different, complex, multilayered identities.[8]

Belonging, in Theory, History, and Practice

We have grouped the reports and interviews in this project into three categories: theory, history, and practice.

The first section, on theories of belonging, explores the animating ideas and principles that shape the way we talk about rights and citizenship. Melani Cammett explores what political science says about managing diverse societies, and then tests the different theoretical approaches against new detailed ethnographic research that measures the different governance outcomes for different sectarian identity groups in Lebanon. Fanar Haddad dissects the evolution of politics in contemporary Iraq, arguing that identity and ideology are in an evolving flux that can create possibilities for unification and coexistence just as readily as it can drive fragmentation and violence. Karl Sharro traces the history of the idea of universalism and argues that sectarian identity and identity politics have reinforced each other in a vicious cycle that connects intellectual trends in North America, Europe, and the Middle East. Ghiwa Sayegh, in an interview, describes her efforts as an intersectional feminist to support queer and women's rights without ignoring the struggles of other segments of society.

Mona Fawaz draws on her own work as an academic and activist founder of the Beirut Madinati movement to argue that cities offer an alternative identity and polity within which citizens (or as she puts it, "city-zens") can fight for new rights in sclerotic political systems. Rohan Advani traces some of the region's most troubling ways of creating a second-tier population without rights through the sprawling system of noncitizen labor, which implicates the citizens who benefit from cheap, easily controlled workers, and end up buying into a system of arbitrary state power and eroded rights. Yassin al-Haj Saleh reflects on his lifelong commitment to a democratic, rights-based Syria and makes a passionate case for universal political rights, rather than protections for minorities, which he argues have undergirded too many would-be reform movements but have ultimately fed a destructive view of political problems as a zero-sum balancing act between minorities and the majority. Elizabeth Monier, in an interview, draws on her extensive study of Christian and other minorities to argue that efforts to protect minorities from the serious threats they face in the region are doomed to fail unless they are part of a quest for rights that will apply equally to all.

The second section of our research, on historical roots, connects today's debates and power struggles to their origins, or, at least, to their earlier incarnations. Elizabeth F. Thompson revives the overlooked history of the Syrian politicians in the 1920s who managed to resolve the supposedly irreconcilable difference between Islamists and democrats—a potentially historic accord that was undone by European intervention, not domestic discord. Lama Abu-Odeh, in an interview, argues sharply that essentialist arguments for an Islamic exception are disingenuous and destructive—and that secularists and other unapologetic proponents of universal rights can build new constituencies rather than be daunted by their current political marginality. Mustafa Akyol asserts the possibility of making a case for democracy that is friendly to piety, learning from the aspirations and failures of the Kemalist experiment with secularism in Turkey. Mark Farha traces the intellectual roots of ideas of the secular and civic state and explores how these and other liberal concepts ended up tarred as godless foreign imports and banished from acceptable political and ideological debate.

The third and final section of our research, on experiments in practice, digs deeply into contemporary case studies. Here, the working group members try to connect ongoing practical policy experiments with the underlying question of how to expand the realms of rights, inclusion, and citizenship. Zaid Al-Ali draws on his firsthand experience negotiating and drafting contemporary Arab constitutions to argue that what's most pressingly absent from today's legal frameworks in the region is any regard for tangibly improving the lives of citizens and requiring policymakers to design pathways to implement change. Cale Salih and Maria Fantappie cite the history of Iraqi Kurdish leaders to argue that the same nationalism that gave rise to a de facto autonomous state has failed to adapt to modern times and create a sense of belonging for contemporary Kurds, or a viable system of government. I document the checkered record of unity building in the Sunni-majority Iraqi city of Samarra, which is controlled by a Shia militia ,to ask how far nationalist rhetoric and cross-sectarian patronage networks can go toward building a new, shared polity. In an interview, Ahmed El Hady says his work as an LGBTQ activist in Egypt revealed disturbing blind spots and parochialism among self-described liberals who sought to avoid or entirely shut down demands for LGBTQ rights because they feared the social backlash would hinder their own more limited quests for rights. Lina Attalah describes the transnational collaboration and learning that has taken place among online media outlets across the Arab region to argue that a new type of journalism and politics is taking shape. Joseph Daher takes a hard, critical look at the Syrian uprising that he supported, and argues that it failed to make room for the full spectrum of Syrian identities. Rabab El Mahdi, in an interview, argues that the rare political experiment she helped pioneer in Egypt, which brought together pious former Muslim Brothers with secular leftists, still provides a blueprint for political progress in the region. Michael Wahid Hanna cites the long history of excluding Copts from Egypt's security service to argue that second-class citizenship is a reality for many of the region's religious minorities.

Our contributors engage each other and their audience through reports, written interviews, podcasts and videos. These case studies, essays, and histories are intended as a jumping-off point for an urgent and long-overdue discussion of rights and governance. A dazzling array of individuals claim a stake in the matter of how the Middle East's states should be governed. Any serious proposal to finally tackle the generational governance failure in the Middle East must take into account the rich and complex identities at play, and the very potent threats at times arrayed against some of them. Just as surely, real reform and stability in the Middle East must begin with an embrace of shared universal rights and equality.[9]

Reports, Interviews, and Podcasts

Here's what you can look forward to in *Citizenship and Its Discontents* on The Century Foundation's website.

Theories of Belonging

April 10

Thanassis Cambanis, "Reviving the Quest for Universal Rights"

Fanar Haddad, "The Waning Relevance of the Sunni–Shia Divide"

Karl Sharro, "The Retreat from Universalism in the Middle East and the World"

Melani Cammett, "Lebanon, the Sectarian Identity Test Lab"

Podcast, "Universal and Minority Rights in the Middle East"

Ghiwa Sayegh, interview, "Moving Feminism Out of Its Silo"

April 16

Mona Fawaz, "Beirut Madinati and the Prospects of Urban Citizenship"

Rohan Advani, "Noncitizen Workers and Exclusive Citizenship in the Gulf"

April 18

Yassin al-Haj Saleh, "The Dark Path of Minority Politics"

Elizabeth Monier, interview, "Christians and Other Religious Minorities in the Middle East"

Arabic podcast, "Universal and Minority Rights in the Middle East"

Historical Roots

April 23
Elizabeth Thompson, "The Arab World's Liberal–Islamist Schism Turns 100"
Lama Abu-Odeh, interview, "Creating a Constituency for Secularism"

April 25
Mustafa Akyol, "Turkey's Troubled Experiment with Secularism"
Mark Farha, "Arab Secularism's Assisted Suicide"

Experiments in Practice

April 30
Zaid Al-Ali, "The Social Justice Blind Spots in the New Arab Constitutions"
Cale Salih and Maria Fantappie, "Kurdish Nationalism at an Impasse"
Podcast, "Kurdish Nationalism at an Impasse"

May 2
Thanassi Cambanis, "An Iraqi Shia Militia Experiments with Nationalism in a Sunni City"
Ahmed El Hady, interview, "The Crisis of LGBTQ Communities in Egypt"
Arabic podcast, "LGBTQ Rights in Egypt"

May 7
Lina Attalah, "Innovative Arab Media and the New Outlines of Citizenship"
Joseph Daher, "Pluralism Lost in Syria's Uprising"

May 9
Michael Wahid Hanna, "The Exclusion of Copts from the Egyptian Security State"
Rabab El Mahdi, interview, "Secular–Islamist Teamwork"
Podcast, "Contesting Sectarian Identity in Iraq"

Author

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Notes

1 Steven Pinker, The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined, (New York: Viking, 2011); Francis Fukuyama, "The End of history?," National Interest 16 (1989): 3–18.
2 Frederick Cooper, Citizenship, Inequality, and Difference: Historical Perspectives (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 5–6.
3 See Lama Abu-Odeh, "Secularism's Fault," Feminist Dissent (Summer 2017): 8, https://scholarship.law.georgetown.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2975&context=facpub.
4 See Saba Mahmood, Religious Difference in a Secular Age: A Minority Report (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2015); Shadi Hamid, Islamic Exceptionalism: How the Struggle over Islam Is Reshaping the World (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2016).
5 Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Turkey voted in favor of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. See "8. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, New York, 18 December, 1979," United Nations, December 18, 1979 (with subsequent updates), https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/MTDSG/Volume%20I/Chapter%20IV/IV-8.en.pdf; and "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights," United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, accessed March 29, 2019, https://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Pages/UDHRIndex.aspx.
6 Michael Gasper, "Sectarianism, Minorities, and the Secular State in the Middle East," International Journal of Middle East Studies 48, no. 4 (2016): 767–78.
7 Samuel Moyn, Human Rights and the Uses of History (London: Verso Books, 2014).
8 Benedict Anderson, Imagined communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London: Verso Books, 2006).
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