

# Democracy

islamist, salafi & progressive approaches

# overview

- theories of democracy
- *shūra*
- salafi, progressive & islamist approaches

# democracy

**“Democracy is a stable system of governance, which seeks to guarantee the widest possible degree of political participation on equal terms and on the basis of a normatively defensible compromise acceptable to the major players in the political community, a compromise which is underpinned by a number of enforceable guarantees limiting the powers of government and the shifts which the system may undergo within a predictable range.”**

El-Affendi, 'Democracy and its (Muslim) Critics.' Khan (ed.) *Islamic Democratic Discourse*. Lexington Books (2006) p. 250 (see further readings)

# theories of democracy:

## i. majoritarianism

- the will of half of the polity determines democratic option (single electoral event: dictatorship)
- can exclude other members, & deprive minorities of their rights

## ii. proceduralism

- right to vote: elections are repetitive (rights of polity to revise decisions)
- institutions that aim to 'preserve' the rights of future polities (right to political expression)

## iii. liberalism

- individuals are autonomous: free to form, pursue & revise their ideas
- individuals: equal as self-ruling persons
- rights of minorities (individuals) protected against majorities
- rights beyond control of present polities: freedom of conscience, freedom of non-political expression, right to privacy, right to fair trial (liberal rights limit procedural rights)

# *shūra* (consultation / counsel)

**...keep up the prayer; conduct their affairs by mutual consultation...**

(Q. 42. 38) trans. Abdel Haleem

**Consult with them about matters, then, when you have decided on a course of action, put your trust in God**

(Q. 3. 159) tans. Abdel Haleem

**She said, ‘Counsellors, give me your counsel in the matter I now face: I only ever decide on matters in your presence.’ (33) They replied, ‘We possess great force and power in war, but you are in command, so consider what orders to give us.’**

(Q. 27. 32-33) trans. Abdel Haleem

# islamic approaches

- rejectionist (salafi)
- affirmative (progressive / liberal)
- accommodationist (islamist)

# ibn Bāz



**What is the ruling on democracy and taking a leadership role in parliament or other levels of the democratical government? What is the ruling regarding voting for someone in democracy? How was the Islamic state organized, and governed in the classical times?**

**Democracy is a man-made system, meaning rule by the people for the people. Thus it is contrary to Islam, because rule is for Allaah, the Most High, the Almighty, and it is not permissible to give legislative rights to any human being, no matter who he is.**

... Undoubtedly the democratic system is **one of the modern forms of shirk**, in terms of obedience and following, or legislation, as it denies the sovereignty of the Creator and His absolute right to issue laws, and ascribes that right to human beings. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“You do not worship besides Him but only names which you have named (forged) — you and your fathers — for which Allaah has sent down no authority. The command (or the judgement) is for none but Allaah. He has commanded that you worship none but Him (i.e. His Monotheism); that is the (true) straight religion, but most men know not” [Q. 12:40]

“The decision is only for Allaah” [Q. 6:57]

...The one who understands the **true nature** of the democratic system and the ruling thereon, then he nominates himself or someone else (for election) is approving of this system, and is working with it, is in grave danger, because **the democratic system is contrary to Islam and approving of it and participating in it are actions that imply apostasy and being beyond the pale of Islam.**

**But as for the one who nominates himself or nominates others in this system in order to join the parliament and enjoin good and forbid evil, and establish proof against them, and reduce its evil and corruption as much as he can, so that people of corruption and disbelievers in Allaah will not have free rein to spread mischief in the land and spoil people's worldly interests and religious commitment, this is a matter that is subject to ijtihaad, according to the interests that it is hoped will be served by that.**

# abou el Fadl

abou el Fadl, *Islam and the Challenge of Democracy*. Cohen & Chasman (ed.s). Princeton University Press (2004)  
([https://librarysearch.uwtsd.ac.uk/permalink/44WHELF\\_UWTSD/1ir6fgh/cdi\\_askewsholts\\_vlebooks\\_9781400873203](https://librarysearch.uwtsd.ac.uk/permalink/44WHELF_UWTSD/1ir6fgh/cdi_askewsholts_vlebooks_9781400873203))



- “...the premise that democracy and Islam are defined in the first instance by their **underlying moral values.**” p. 4
- “my central argument ...is that democracy—by assigning equal rights of speech, association, and suffrage to all— **offers the greatest potential for promoting justice and protecting human dignity**... In particular, human beings are responsible, as God’s vicegerents, for making the world more just.” pp. 5-6
- “democracy...**does establish a basis for pursuing justice** and thus for fulfilling a fundamental responsibility assigned by God to each of us.” p. 6

- **“...claims about God’s sovereignty assume that the divine legislative will seeks to regulate all human interactions, that Shari‘ah is a complete moral code that prescribes for every eventuality. But perhaps God does not seek to regulate all human affairs, and instead leaves human beings considerable latitude in regulating their own affairs as long as they observe certain minimal standards of moral conduct, including the preservation and promotion of human dignity and well-being.”** p. 9

- justice: “At the theological and philosophical level the constituents of justice have not been subject to close examination in Islamic doctrine. And part of the explanation for that limitation lies in a basic tension in understanding the nature of justice. Does the divine law define justice or does justice define the divine law? If it is the former then whatever one concludes is the divine law therein is justice. If it is the latter, then whatever justice demands is, in fact, the demand of the divine.” pp. 20-21

# islamists & individualism

- humans are god's vice-regents: responsible for applying 'shari'a'
- individuals are **not** sovereign
- cannot act against the 'shari'a' (transgression)
- **contrasted with liberal legislative context:**
  - liberal view of tyranny: go against sovereignty of individuals
  - islamist view of tyranny: go against sovereignty of god

# al-Qaraḍāwī (d.2022)

- why was al-Qaraḍāwī influential?
- advocates '*waṣaṭīyah*' (middle way - 'centrist')
- impact on current affairs: 'arab-spring' ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=1&v=Haxwcqa2btA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=Haxwcqa2btA))
- which theory of democracy does he advocate?



**“The best of your rulers are those whom you love and who love you, who invoke God's blessings upon you and you invoke His blessings upon them. And the worst of your rulers are those whom you hate and who hate you, and whom you curse and who curse you.”** al-Qaradawi, p. 232

**“The best of your rulers are those whom you love and who love you, who invoke God’s blessings upon you and you invoke His blessings upon them. And the worst of your rulers are those whom you hate and who hate you, and whom you curse and who curse you. It was asked: Should we not overthrow them with the sword? He said: No, as long as they establish prayer among you [that is to say, as long as they do not violate elementary divine requirements]. If you then find anything detestable in them, you should hate their administration, but do not withdraw yourselves from their obedience.”**

hadith quoted in full by Benhenda, p. 107 (Sahih Muslim: <https://sunnah.com/muslim/33/101>)

**"It has been narrated through a different chain of transmitters, on the authority of Hudhaifa b. al-Yaman who said: Messenger of Allah, no doubt, we had an evil time (i. e. the days of Jahiliyya or ignorance) and God brought us a good time (i. e. Islamic period) through which we are now living Will there be a bad time after this good time? He (the Holy Prophet) said: Yes. I said: Will there be a good time after this bad time? He said: Yes. I said: Will there be a bad time after good time? He said: Yes. I said: How? Whereupon he said: There will be leaders who will not be led by my guidance and who will not adopt my ways? There will be among them men who will have the hearts of devils in the bodies of human beings. I said: What should I do. Messenger of Allah, if I (happen) to live in that time? He replied:**

**You will listen to the Amir and carry out his orders; even if your back is flogged and your wealth is snatched, you should listen and obey."**