**Democracy in the Middle East**

**Where is democracy in the Middle East?**

Review the recent evidence of democracy in the Middle East below:

• May 1997 – Mohammed Khatami wins presidential election in **Iran** beating conservative ruling elite

• January 2004 - **Afghanistan** ratifies constitution that affirms adherence to Islam, but provides

for national elections (held in October 2004) and sets up a two-chamber parliament in which

women would have a significant role.

• February 2004 – **Iran’s** parliamentary elections result in victory for conservatives; reform candidates disqualified by Council of Guardians before polls

• October 9, 2004 – **Afghanistan** holds first presidential election since the Taliban was removed

from power

• January 9, 2005 - **Palestinian** citizens elect Mahmoud Abbas as their president.

• January 30, 2005 - the people of **Iraq** hold their country’s first open, direct, multiparty

legislative elections in more than 50 years.

• February 2005 - **Egyptian** President Hosni Mubarak announces competitive, multi-party elections

for president in September.

• February 2005 - Inspired by earlier events in the Georgian Republic and Iraq and angered by the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, **Lebanese** citizens take to the streets in

protest of Syrian military occupation accelerating the withdrawal of Syrian troops.

• April 2005 - **Saudis** vote in their first ever municipal elections, seen as a bid to answer calls for greater democracy. Though the elected officials will have little influence over national policy, they

will have some in local affairs.

• May 29, 2005 – **Lebanese** general election is first in 30 years without Syrian military interference

• September 18, 2005 – **Afghanistan** holds parliamentary elections for first time since Taliban were removed from power

• June 2005 – **Iran’s** presidential election results in victory for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

• January 5, 2006 – **Palestinians** hold legislative elections and Hamas wins a plurality (more votes

than any other party, but not a majority of total votes)

• June 2009 – Mahmoud Ahmadenijad re-elected as **Iran’s** president; includes women in his cabinet for first time since founding of the Islamic Republic in 1979

• June 7, 2009 – **Lebanese** holds general elections (though its approximately 400,000 Palestinian residents can not vote)

• March 7, 2010 – **Iraq** holds parliamentary elections

• September 18, 2010 – **Afghanistan** holds parliamentary elections

• November 28, 2011 - **Egyptians** vote in their first parliamentary elections since Hosni Mubarak

was ousted; May 23-24, 2012 – presidential vote took place

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Describe the **action of democracy** you see in each example.

2. Identify the **political right** exercised in each of the countries (refer to the U.S. Bill of Rights

or the Universal Declaration of Rights)

3. Explain why these events are indications that political freedom exists in these countries.

4. Can these countries be declared democracies or, if not, what other evidence would be needed?

**Research Tasks:**

**1.** With your group members go to the CIA World Factbook at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html> and look up the following information on your assigned country.

o Government Type

o Constitution (does it have one? Describe the relationship between the people and the government)

o Legal system

o Suffrage (voting rights age and gender?)

o Powers of executive, legislative, and judicial branches and how they are put in power

o Political Parties (does it have any? Level of participation in the government?)

Write the information you gather on the left hand side of the **Democracy Assessment chart**.

Use extra paper if necessary.

**Additional Links for research:**

Egypt: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2011/11/20111121104852168402.html>

Lebanon: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8079481.stm>

* <http://www.aljazeera.com/focus/lebanon2009/2009/06/200962114819360431.html>

Iran: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14541327>

Afghanistan: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12011352>

Saudi Arabia: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14702705>

Iraq: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14542954>

**2.** Once you complete your research, as a group, use the following “**Pillars of Democracy**” from the U.S. State Department to determine the level of democracy you believe the country has. Rate the country as **very democratic**, **somewhat democratic**, **only slightly democratic** or **not democratic**. Place your ratings on the right hand column on the Democracy Assessment chart.

**THE PILLARS OF DEMOCRACY**

√ Sovereignty of the people (gov’t is created by and subject to the will of the people)

√ Government based on consent of the governed

√ Majority rule

√ Minority Rights

√ Guarantee of basic human rights

√ Free and fair elections

√ Equality before the law

√ Due process of law

√ Constitutional limits on government

√ Social, economic, and political pluralism (respect for diversity)

√ Values of tolerance, pragmatism, cooperation, and compromise.

**3.** When your group has completed the left hand side of the chart, make a sign for your country

on a piece of paper that shows the country’s name and its flag. Now have one member from

your group stand on the continuum line, as instructed by your teacher, hold the country sign and provide the following information on your country:

• Country name

• Government type

• Status of constitution

• Extent of suffrage

• Structure of government (describe the powers of executive, legislative and judicial and

who controls these).

• Status of political parties

• Rate the country’s level of democracy and provide an explanation. (very democratic,

somewhat democratic, only slightly democratic or not democratic)

**4.** Debriefing questions for entire class:

a. What aspects of the countries presented surprised you?

b. What aspects did you expect to see?

c. Which countries’ leaders have made progress in democratizing their nation? Which have not?

d. Which countries seem to need the most attention for the United States to fulfill the goals of growing democratic movements and institutions outlined in President Bush’s inaugural speech?

e. What might be some of the difficulties the United States would face if it pursued an aggressive policy of encouraging democracy in these countries?

**Student Handout: Democracy Assessment Chart**

Country name\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Descriptions** | **Facts** |  | **Pillars of Democracy** | **Level of Democracy** |
| **Government Type** |  |  | **Sovereignty of the people** |  |
| **Constitution** |  |  | **Government based on consent of the people** |  |
| **Legal System** |  |  | **Majority Rule** |  |
| **Suffrage** |  |  | **Minority Rights** |  |
| **Powers of Branches** |  |  | **Guarantee of basic human rights** |  |
| * **Executive** |  |  | **Free and Fair Elections** |  |
| * **Legislative** |  |  | **Due Process of Law** |  |
| * **Judicial** |  |  | **Constitutional limits on government** |  |
| **Political Parties** |  |  | **Social, economic, and political pluralism** |  |
|  |  |  | **Values of tolerance, pragmatism, cooperation and compromise** |  |
| **Summarize level of democracy** |  |  |  |  |

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