**“Illiberal Democracy” in the post-Arab Spring World: Classroom Discussion Questions**

*This educational resource is based on [Shadi Hamid’s](https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/people/data/shadi_hamid.html) April 8, 2014 conversation at Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs, in which he discussed illiberal democracies in a post-Arab Spring world. For a full transcript, audio, and video, please click* [*here*](https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/studio/multimedia/20140408b/index.html)*. For Hamid’s book,* Temptations of Power: Islamists and Illiberal Democracy in a New Middle East, *please click* [*here*](https://www.amazon.com/Temptations-Power-Islamists-Illiberal-Democracy/dp/0199314055/163-9559395-6297712?ie=UTF8&tag=viglink23682-20)*.*

**ILLIBERAL DEMOCRACY** is a government system that supports the fair election of representative leaders but also is willing to contradict democratic principles (by suspending civil liberties, for example) if that is what is in the ideological interest of the majority of voters.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS** (adapted from transcript)**:**

**1A. “Democracy, at its essence, is about the right to make the wrong choice.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Please explain why.**

**1B. If you agree with the statement above, how far can wrong choices go before you no longer have a democracy?**

**2.** “There was a Pew Global Attitudes survey poll from 2011, right after the Arab uprisings. Eighty percent of Egyptian respondents said they believed that adulterers should be stoned, 70 percent said they believed that the hands of thieves should be cut off, and 88 percent said they supported the death penalty for apostasy—i.e., leaving Islam.”

**What happens if the attitudes of the majority are not compatible with Western values? Should Western governments still support the democratic process taking place?**

**3.** “It [can be] difficult from an American perspective to really grasp [the concept of an illiberal democracy]. Liberalism and democracy went hand in hand in our own history. We started with at least some degree of constitutional liberalism [protection of the individual from the state, church, etc.]…and then we saw a real move towards democracy later on in terms of universal suffrage, equality of all citizens, participation in the democratic process, and so on. If you look at other Western democracies, you see a similar sequencing.

The problem with actually adopting that in Middle Eastern countries is that it's very difficult to tell an Egyptian or a Jordanian or a Tunisian voter, "Listen…before you're ready for democracy, you have to do all this other stuff first—constitutional liberalism [protect the individual and their rights]." Democracy has become such a normative good [basic need], not just in the West, but across the world, that people want democracy right away, and rightfully so. They want to be able to make their own decisions, to vote for their own representatives.”

**Do you need a liberal society to have a democracy? Or can you have a democracy in a conservative society that does not place as high of a value on the individual and may vote for laws that restrict the rights of women, minorities, etc. ? If one argues that a liberal society must exist for democracy to exist, how does it come in to existence in the first place?**