Perceptions of
Civil Society in the Arab World

A Literature Review

and

Annotated Bibliography

Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship
The Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship aims to be a regional hub of a dynamic community of academics, practitioners, policymakers, and members of the general public interested in exploring traditional and innovative forms of associational life and in advancing realistic solutions to the obstacles to effective civil society and citizenship in the Arab world. In doing so, the Institute encourages and provides evidence-based research, policy/practice recommendations, education and training for active citizenship and an empowered civil society, and promotes awareness of civil society and civic engagement in the region, stimulating fruitful dialogue among the region’s varied publics.

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The Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship
Bridging Academia and Activism
Perceptions of Civil Society in the Arab World

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Introduction

One of the first activities of The Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship was to research the concepts and understandings of ‘civil society’ prevalent in the Arab world. The purpose was both to promote further knowledge building about this topic and to assist the Institute in adopting projects and programs based on this learned knowledge. This study reviews the main literature produced in Arabic about civil society and notes the most prominent discussions that the writers addressed. The goal of this review is not to analyze the results of every research that dealt with the topic, but rather to shed light on the prevalent debates and the most important concepts that emerged surrounding civil society in the Arab world.

The study begins with a brief historical account of the development of literature and writing that address the issue of civil society, noting the relationship between this development and political and social changes in the region and in the world. It then summarizes the various concepts, definitions and approaches addressed by the writers, and concludes by touching on some of the salient problems, issues and debates in the Arab world addressed by the literature.

Growing interest in civil society in the Arab world

The early nineties witnessed a growing interest in writings and publications that addressed the issue of “civil society,” and they became increasingly numerous by the year 2000. This comes as no surprise as it falls within the context of global and regional transformations characterized by the trend towards neo-liberalism that became dominant at the end of the cold war: liberalization of market forces on the regional and global levels, the trend towards privatization and the gradual decline in the state’s support for educational, health and social services. These developments contributed to the introduction of a favorable environment for “civil society”, promoting its role in what was called “the democratic transition,” (Kandil, 2011, 42). During this period, it is argued that political and social movements were shifting towards an institutionalization of their work and issue specialization, and the dependence on foreign funding increased. Some authors described this shift as a transition towards “non-governmental organization” work (Jad, 2004; Mitri, 2015) that led to the emergence of differentiated types of civil society organizations in the Arab world such as human rights organizations, women’s rights organizations, development organizations and those affiliated with specific special interest groups.

According to Sharari (2015), there are several prominent factors that led to the emergence of NGOs in the Arab world. One factor is the economic policies adopted in most Arab countries since the mid-eighties, which, as mentioned previously, revolved around economic liberalization and the state’s abandonment of much of the pivotal role it had played on the economic and social levels. Another is the demographic and social transformation in these countries, such as the increase in

1 The Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship would like to thank our colleagues, Sharif Al-Husseini and Farah Kobaissy for their efforts in preparing this review.
population and the consequent emergent needs, in addition to urban expansion that was not accompanied by economic development. A third and critical factor is the role played by international financial institutions that manifested itself both in exercising pressure on governments to implement liberal economic programs and structural adjustments, and also in seeking new non-governmental actors to address gaps left by the state.

During the past twenty years, there has been an increase of publications concerning civil society. New concepts emerged that attracted the attention of scholars such as “partnership,” “good governance,” “capacity building,” “accountability,” “transparency” and others (Kandil, 2011). In the nineties, Arab studies began to take more interest in civil society issues where this term started to occupy a larger space in the Arab political intellel (Bshara, 2008). An increasing number of scholars focused their attention on researching this topic and adopted various perspectives surrounding the concept of civil society.

**Various approaches to and concepts of civil society**

**Civil society from the perspective of volunteering:** It can be inferred from many academic and field studies that volunteer initiatives, outside the family and state, constitute an essential criterion for defining civil society. According to Shaaban (2012), voluntary association is considered one of the most important manifestations of civil society. Others even considered volunteerism to be the spinal column of civil society (Friedrich Ebert, 2004). In other words, civil society is the collectivity of voluntary organizations that are born of free will to associate and manifest themselves in actions that populate the public sphere (Kandil 2011), whose goal is the public good (Rishmawi and Morris, 2007), or who are commissioned to defend and protect the interests of their members (Hassani, 2000). Based on this, primordial communities, such as the family, tribe or sect, are excluded from the concept of civil society, as are governmental institutions. This leaves non-governmental organizations and institutions that base their activities on voluntary work. All reviewed literature agreed upon five criteria that define civil society: 1) volunteerism; 2) its non-profit status; 3) independence from government; 4) serving the public good; and 5) not seeking authority or power. Accordingly, the literature tends to exclude political parties since they do seek power (Kandil, 2011). While the exclusion of families, tribes and parties is correlated to the concept of voluntary “domestic society” (Mujatamaa Ahll), the exemption of political movements from the definition of civil society remains a controversial topic that has not yet been settled on academically.

**Civil society as compared to domestic society:** Some literature distinguished between domestic society and civil society. Gregoire Haddad, for example, considers domestic society to be improvisational, natural and spontaneous, as it includes families and tribes. On the other hand, civil society is voluntary and by free will, and includes voluntary institutions that are the expression of the will and interests of people (Friedrich Ebert Foundation, 2004). However, Suleiman (2007) views this distinction as incorrect in the Arab situation in general, and in Jordan in particular, because civil and domestic societies intertwine and family relations and associations indeed constitute an integral part of “civil society.” Atef Atieh (2000) considers domestic society a stumbling block facing the establishment of a civil state in the Arab world in general, and specifically in Lebanon.

**The concept’s association with the West.** A number of texts and studies focused on the suitability of Western concepts, which emerged from particular economic, social and cultural contexts over two centuries in Europe, to Arab societies given their own cultural context. According to Abu Halawa (1998), who addressed the historical roots of the concept of “civil society” starting from Greek philosophy up to the twentieth century, there is no distinction between state and civil society in Greek thought, because the state is, in fact, civil society that forms a political collective in which members recognize and respect the laws of the state. The concept evolved thereafter in the
eighteenth century as the relationships of capitalist production were developed. It was at that point that the distinction between the state and civil society emerged, and the issues of the concentration of political power and the need to face political despotism were raised. At the end of the eighteenth century, an urgent need emerged in Western political thought to reduce the dominance of the state in favor of civil society. In the nineteenth century, the second transformation of the concept took place where civil society, according to Karl Marx, became an arena for the struggle between classes. After that we reach the twentieth century, where Gramsci considered civil society an arena for ideological competition based on the distinction between political control and ideological domination.

This Western inception of the concept was indeed approached from a cultural perspective in a number of Arab writings on civil society (e.g. Mufti, 2015). In this regard, Kandil’s statement stands out: “It is legitimate to ask the following questions: Are these (Western) concepts and theories, which evolved over time related to an economic (capitalist and liberal), political (democratic), cultural, and social (values of civic culture) context? Did they succeed in dealing with the Arab situation?” (Kandil, 2011,4). Sharif Mardin’s argument also stands out here, as he argues that civil society is a Western dream and a historical ambition that cannot be translated into Islamic terms, and emphasizes that the “Islamic dream” continues to be different from the “Western dream” (Sajo, 2002). Wahid Abdul Majid (in Matrook, 2002) states that the concept of civil society is incompatible with the cultural specificities and social structures of the Arab world. In contrast, Al-Ghanoushi (1999) argues that human rights and other values that “the West” calls for are in fact at the heart of Islam. Yet it is necessary to recognize that civil society is not a homogenous entity and did not come from outer space. In fact, its components interact with each other and with political culture, legacies and the political and social environment. It is also not separate from the rest of the world, as it is affected by it and interacts with it (Kandil and others, 2008).

**Issues and problems faced by civil society**

**Independence from the State:** The relationship between state authority and civil society in the Arab world constituted the focus of attention in a number of studies, including Amani Kandil’s research (1994) where Arab political regimes and their effects on civil society were analyzed along with the relationship between democratic transition and civil society. Some literature focused on the independence of civil society from authority, such as Aziz Ismail’s who noted (in Sajo, 2002) that civil society is the assemblage of people that constitute a public sphere that is distinct from the private sphere and different from the state. According to Hassani (2000), regulating the relationship between the state and civil society in a manner that ensures the latter’s independence is inevitable. Azza Khalil (2006) emphasized democratic freedoms within civil society, representing the desire to separate society from the state in order to limit its totalitarianism, and others considered that the stronger civil institutions become, the less able the state is to practice authoritarianism against its citizens (Al-Nosour, 2011).

It is worth noting that most literature addressed the concept of authority from a security, economic and legal standpoint. They defended the independence of civil society from government with regard to funding, and called for the freeing of civil activities from legal and security monitoring. Few writings addressed a broader conception of authority or highlighted the ideological aspects of the authorities’ policies. The persistent issue remains the extent to which civil society is capable of forming an ideology and political practice to challenge the ideology of authority in the Arab world. In this regard, Kandil (2011) sheds light on the weak practice of democracy in civil society in the Arab world, and even the reproduction of authority within its organizations and institutions. The dominant characteristics in most civil organizations in the Arab world are: marginalization of national assemblies; concentration of decisions in the hands of the board of directors and especially
its president; poor rotation of power; lack of membership in human rights organizations; and finally the marginalization of youth, particularly in leadership positions. Therefore, there is a need to consider civil society and its organizations from an interactive perspective, as it constitutes an integral part of the socio-political culture, values and environment which are generally understood to be authoritarian (Kandil, 2008).

**Laws and legislation:** According to the literature, the majority of Arab countries have confronted the development of civil society by enacting laws and taking specific administrative measures that hinder the expansion of this phenomenon (Shaaban, 2012). Legislation that governs the formation and work of civil society organizations has had a negative impact on their effectiveness. A bundle of legal and security instruments, according to some literature, strangles these organizations (Kandil, 2005; Rishmawi and Moris, 2007; Shobadi, 2014), and a number of studies mentioned numerous forms of prior censorship by the government of their work. As Khalil stated: “The relationship between civil society and the state in most Arab countries is characterized by lack of trust and suspicion, where the executive authority in many Arab countries has the right to dissolve civil society organizations (Abdullah Khalil, 2007). In Jordan, legal obstacles prevent democratic transition in the country, especially the Assemblies Act in 2001, political parties and trade unions. Many researchers see the need to rethink the prevailing laws.

**Independence of funding:** The issue of funding and the fact that most civil society organizations are connected to foreign funding has been a source of argument in a large portion of the literature, especially with regards to the (possible) threat that results from this funding and which affects the political independence of these organizations. In their book *A Comprehensive Overview of Civil Society in the Arab World*, Morris and Rishmawi emphasized how U.S. funding sources stipulated that Palestinian organizations must adopt their “anti-terrorism” agenda in exchange for providing funding. In order to narrow the margin of opposition, governments have, in different contexts, closed down several civil society organizations on the pretext of unauthorized foreign funding. Therefore, the issue of funding can be seen as a double edge sword: on the one hand, governments put pressure on civil and human rights organizations in their quest to receive international grants, and on the other, there is a potential for foreign funding to affect the political independence of these organizations in favor of the donors’ agendas (Al-Ja'bari, 2010). Moreover, Kandil adds that vast sectors of Arab public opinion consider that civil society organizations derive their legitimacy exclusively from abroad and that society’s elite who are responsible for them have not been able to reach a popular base (Kandil, 2006).

**The prevalence of a charitable orientation:** Some literature addressed a significant problem: the prevalence in the Arab world of civil society organizations that incline towards charity, and the religious convictions adopted by a large number of them. These organizations constitute approximately 30% of the total number of civil society organizations in the Arab world, and more than 90% in the Gulf region (Kandil, 2011). In this regard, Kandil addressed a problematic relationship where the charitable and religious character of most organizations prevails over democracy and development. She considers this pattern to be an obstacle to activating the democratic process and development because of a disconnect between these organizations and the concept of social justice. They do not use rights as a starting point, but rather work from a concept of good deeds and moral imperatives since they are charity and welfare organizations. The goal of enabling marginalized groups is excluded from their programs. Moreover, these organizations work to fill in gaps left by governments’ withdrawal from their social role, and they do not demand the restoration of this role. Finally, religious and charitable organizations adopt, according to Kandil, the state's discourse and guidelines, which human rights organizations do not. Several studies have shown that many charitable organizations are closely linked to officials in the state and to government agencies (Shaaban, 2012; Al-Monaisi, 2009).
Civil society and development: A number of studies focused on civil society in the Arab world and the challenges of development. They gave special attention to the issues of fighting poverty, promoting the role of women, unemployment, the environment and marginalized groups. Yet, institutions dealing with development are somewhat limited (Shaaban, 2012). Moreover, the recent global social, economic, and cultural changes have led to the proliferation of a call to help civil organizations become more effective and to reinforce their role in development. They are considered a mechanism for citizens’ participation and a framework for organizing their initiatives and raising their awareness of their economic, social, political and civil rights. These calls were also reflected in the Arab world (The Economic and Social Committee for West Asia, 1998).

Women in civil society: Some literature addressed the space women occupy on the agendas of civil society organizations and the effectiveness of women’s role in occupying leading positions in it. The results showed a notable strengthening of women’s rights issues on the agendas of human rights organizations that work within the framework of advocacy (Kandil, 2009). However, the results also showed that leading positions occupied by women were still limited. In the first decade of the third millennium, the fundamental issue of violence against women emerged. Many studies addressed its dimensions after numerous women’s rights organizations undertook this issue, in Morocco, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and Sudan (Arab NGO Network, 2005; Nutrition and Rural Development Center (NARD), 2006).

Conclusion

This review did not go into the minutest details covered by civil society literature in the Arab world. Its goal was to present a broad framework of the most prominent concepts and problems addressed by academics and researchers in this domain. It should be noted that a significant amount of research has accumulated from the early nineties to date in the field of civil society. Successive studies have ranged from the exploratory character of the concept to the analytical ones that deal with the troubled relationship between civil society and authority, and civil society’s relationship with reform and social, political and economic changes. During the course of this review, the diversity in research topics, and the diversity of tools and approaches became apparent. Nevertheless, there are still research gaps in Arab studies surrounding civil society. The Asfari Institute is working on contributing to fill those gaps, including, for example, civil society’s role in social justice, its relationship with social and political movements that has gradually increased since 2011, and its role in the democratization of society.
Annotated Bibliography

This book discusses the reasons for the propagation of the concept of civil society in cultural and political discourse through a historical and dialectic approach, shedding light on this concept. The author takes the reader back to Europe’s history in the sixteenth century while presenting both the political and economic development of this region and discussing the texts of Hegel, Marx and Gramsci surrounding this concept.

In this research, the author emphasizes the role of the Arab civil societies in local development in light of the recent global social, economic, political, and cultural changes. These changes have led to a proliferation of the call to activate civil organizations and reinforce their role in development as a mechanism for citizens’ participation and as a framework for organizing citizens’ initiatives and raising awareness of economic, social, political and civil rights. She demonstrates the manifold aspects and requirements of development in Arab societies, presenting the problems of and prospects for civil organizations as a mechanism for democracy in political and economic society and in comprehensive development. In the Arab region, there then arose an increase in awareness that the implementation of comprehensive development is not strictly the responsibility of governments, but is also a democratic process which depends on regular interaction between society and the state.

Al-Jabiri, Muhammed Abed – Criticism of the Need for Reform, Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2005.
The author addresses the problematic of civil society in the Arab world and identifies tribalism and sectarianism in particular, which he considers outdated and pre-modernist forces, as the obstacles. The development on solid foundations of civil society in the Arab world, however, may differ in extent from one society to another.

The book examines the historical background of civil society, shedding light on the rift between the historical background of the Islamic nation (Umma) and the historical background of Western societies in medieval times. The author argues that the civil society that thrived after the State’s abandonment of its development responsibilities was based on liberalism and democracy, which are incompatible with divine laws. He distinguishes between the concept of “citizenship” from a secular point of view and “subsidiarity” in Islamic ideology and between the concepts of “pluralism” and “jurisprudential differences” in Islam. Then he proceeds to argue that despite the significant consistency between the concept of human rights and Islamic provisions, the former is deeply rooted in Europe’s historical background, which is different from the history of the Islamic nation and its culture. He focuses on two Islamic concepts relevant to civil society: agglomeration and welfare. Islam legislates for agglomeration and working within groups and therefore, civil society has but a minor role within a framework of raising awareness and politics, i.e. in theory, whereas in practice does not play any significant role in welfare. Welfare in Islam is vested solely in the state.

According to this book, civil society can be defined as that which is independent of the State's direct authority and which includes only institutions and nongovernmental organizations engaged in voluntary work. During the past two decades, the region, as with the world as a whole, witnessed a series of political, economic and social transformations that created a favorable environment for the expansion of civil society and its organizations. Of those, the most important are: the economic policies adopted by the majority of Arab countries since the mid-eighties, manifested in economic liberalization and state's failure to shoulder major aspects of its economic and social responsibilities; the demographic and social transformations that these countries witnessed such as the increase in population and the new needs that followed; the urban expansion that was not accompanied by economic development; and the role played by international financial institutions that was no longer restricted to exercising pressure on states to implement liberal economic agendas and structural adjustments by means of dealing with new non-governmental players, but rather intended to deal directly with NGOs to address gaps not handled by the states.


This book seeks to explain the historical reasons and the objective, subjective, internal and external circumstances that paved the way for the 'Arab Spring’ uprisings. The book reviews the protests that countries had witnessed for decades and claims to present a detailed explanation for their underlying causes and implications on numerous levels: the economic, social and political levels; their class or sectarian polarizations; organizational structures and framework; manifestations, methodologies and tools; growth and development, transformation of goals; differences in impact from one country to another; and the changes in goals from one stage to another. The writer evaluates the accomplishments and failures of these movements, explores their prospects and anticipates their effects on societies as they have constituted, or may one day constitute, a milestone in the history of the Arab world.


The book claims to closely track civil society in the Arab world since its inception and during all stages of its development. It addresses the problems of Arab civil society from the perspective of the relationship between civil society and the state. It defines the challenges posed by the New World Order, including political, economic and technical challenges that carry numerous risks and stand in the way of the Arab civil society. The book also attempts to paint an aspiring image of the future of Arab civil society, a future that requires improving its relationship with authorities and implementing changes in legal, economic and political frameworks.


The book addresses the political reform movement in Bahrain. Until the turn of the new millennium, Bahrain had witnessed reform movements that paved the way for a wave of political reform, which allowed civil society organizations to work in the political arena to varying degrees. Since 2002, according to the writer, political and social activities have significantly grown with the formation of tens of associations working in political and social issues, women's rights, youth, human rights as well as trade and labor unions.
Al-Aiashi, Onsor – “What is Civil Society? Algeria as Model,” paper presented to the National Project and Civil Society seminar, organized by the Department of Philosophy and Social Studies, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, Damascus University, Syria, 2000.

The writer addresses the topic of democracy and civil society in the Arab world, especially in Algeria. He questions the extent of civil society’s independence and the strength of its impact on society, given its reliance on foreign funding which imposes restrictions on its credibility internally and allows its adversaries to underestimate, restrict and monitor it. In addition, the book tackles the topic of the state in the Arab world and considers it not to be the product of local social changes, but rather that of foreign interventions. The state chose the path of modernity, especially when it started to build its various institutions and organizations in order to impose its legitimacy and dominance since it’s merely an entity foreign to traditional Arab society in its social, economic and political dimensions. During the era of occupation and custody, the function of these institutions and apparatuses was limited to exercising control over society and subjugating it to the authority of a neo-patrimonial state, where family, military and bureaucratic minorities took over the reins of authority. They were a far cry from local, independent and representative councils and institutions and quite close to a central bureaucratic apparatus of the state.


This book includes a collection of articles that look into secularism and civil society from an Islamic perspective. It highlights on the principal role of civil society in limiting the state’s power and repelling its efforts to dominate society. The book considers that the concept of civil society is not foreign to Arab and Islamic culture but that it is based in Islam’s religious conscience. The author notes the success of Islamic civil society in resisting a Western colonialism that placed secularism at the heart of civil society and considers that the Islamic reform movement plays a significant role in responding to the winds of modernity and in supporting civil society’s efforts to resist the intellectual and material invasion facing it.


Although this book addresses the concept of civil society, it does not seek to articulate a specific definition, since it considers that this concept has become a theoretical toss-up leading to numerous fields of knowledge. The book delves into the historical and theoretical backgrounds that paved the way to this concept starting with the Renaissance. It also attempts to pull together current ideas regarding civil society in the philosophical and social domains in various intellectual fields related to this topic.


The study addresses the relationship between ‘the ruralisation’ of Arab cities, democracy, civil society and public freedoms. It is primarily based on the assumption that the concept of civil society in the Arab region is not only an odd concept but, in many cases, also contradictory to the urban-rural frameworks and their national systems and organizations. While the West witnessed a movement to urbanize the countryside, a movement in the Arab world emerged which sidelined the role of civil society; a ‘ruralisation’ of the city — a counter-movement apparent in cities of the Arabian Gulf, Saudi Arabia, Arab Maghreb, and the Nile valley (Egypt and Sudan) in particular.

The book seeks to explain the phenomenon of popular movements in the Arab street and analyze the reasons and circumstances for their growth while getting to know their most prominent activists. The researcher focuses his study on Kefaya (Egyptian Movement for Change), which raised its voice against the principle of inheritance of rule in 2004. To understand this phenomenon, the book examines several factors such as constitutional reform and 'street movement,' considering both of which pillars of democracy. The book also addresses the need for various political forces and currents to come to agreement, which, he argues, will necessarily lead to a peaceful change that aims at establishing a democratic national rule. The research only covers civil society movements in Egypt up to 2011 — i.e. during the phase prior to the events that led to the ousting of Hosni Mubarak and the ruling National Party.


In his study, Al-Monaisi goes into the “political openness” witnessed by the Gulf Cooperation Council countries since the beginning of the nineties, during which consultative councils were established and permanent constitutions became more widespread in Bahrain, Oman, and Qatar. The study revolves around the limits of political openness and its patterns in the three countries by answering a number of questions, most notably: What factors led to this political openness during this period? What are the limits of such openness? What directions were taken after the emergence of the reform movement that has been calling for democratic transformation in the three countries? According to the author, whenever civil society is strengthened, the opportunities for democratic transformation increase because the acceptance of the right to be different is at the heart of civil society. He attributes the weakness of civil society in Gulf States to several factors such as petroleum wealth and the (alleged) lack of need for unions, parties and social institutions because the state assumes total responsibility of social welfare. Moreover, the weakness of civil society institutions and their incompleteness in GCC countries may be attributed to the prevailing notion in most Arab countries that the establishment of independent social institutions would undermine social cohesion and weaken national unity.


The study aims to examine the important role that civil society institutions play in local development in Jordan. The study emphasizes the need to encourage civil society institutions and organizations to undertake their role in development by focusing on both the social and economic levels, the two most important aspects of development to be reinforced.


The researcher addresses the main obstacles that stand in the way of civil society and the available means to overcome them. The study defines the concepts of civil society organizations and democratic transition. It then sheds light on how civil society organizations, political parties and trade unions have coped with this transition. It concludes by examining the main obstacles that hinder this transition. The study concludes that there are many restrictions imposed by constitutional and legal texts on the path towards democratic transformation, especially the Jordanian provisional election law N° 15 of 1993, which led to the disintegration of the parties'
participation in elections, the publications law of 1997 that restricted freedom of press and the public assembly law in 2001. It also pointed to the weakness of political parties and trade unions, which limited the participation of civil society organizations in the democratic transition, as they are distant from the Jordanian people and their national demands.

**Barakat, Halim – Contemporary Arab Society, A Study in Changing Conditions and Relationships, Center for Arab Unity Studies – 2008.**
This book discusses the crisis that Arab civil society is facing in the context of policies that lead to the political marginalization of citizens. The Arab world also faces the challenge of globalization, which casts on its shoulder the need to keep pace with progress and to face the problems of sustainable development through searching for innovative solutions for stimulating civil society by liberating it from authoritarian power and promoting respect for human rights.

This book addresses the concept of civil society and the historical background that led to its inception from a theoretical standpoint. It presents a review of the history of Western political intellect in light of social developments that accompanied it. The author emphasizes the role of civil society in paving the way towards democracy, especially that it’s closely connected to politics and economy, it is also connected to the rise of the idea of society and the state against “outsider groups” on one hand and, on the other, against mechanisms of coercion practiced by the state to impose its power. The book concludes that this civil society, with its intellect and history, is on its way towards citizenship and democracy.

**Hijazi, Ahmed Ali – Civil Society Organizations and Development, Arab Egypt for Publishing and Distribution, 2013.**
The study addresses the role of civil society organizations in the development field in Egyptian society, shedding light on the main obstacles and development strategies that aim to build up the capacity of relevant organizations, especially in regards to popular participation, education, health and sources of funding.

**Haddad, Gregoire – Arab Civil Society and the Democratic Challenge, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Lebanese Female Research Collective, April, 2004.**
Haddad distinguishes between the term civil society and the term domestic (Ahli) society. He considers that domestic society (which is spontaneous, natural and automatic) is the outcome of family, clans and tribes relying on certain conventions to manage their life affairs. It emerged from religious doctrines and the traditions of each sect while trying to make the requirements of the prevailing religion in each society compatible with requirements of modernity. Therefore, it was subject to the existing power whose legitimacy was never discredited, questioned or held accountable. Civil society (which is voluntary and by free will) includes voluntary organizations that reflect the will and interests of the people; the most prominent of which are: labor unions, independent professional bodies, parties, political currents, educational institutions from kindergarten to university, developmental associations, human rights associations, intellectual and artistic currents and town councils. According to Haddad, in the past twenty years, Arab countries have witnessed a new phenomenon - born in Western countries - that led to the emergence of the term civil society. It’s worth mentioning that the civil society phenomenon indeed was present in the Arab world in varying degrees, but was constrained by the prevailing political and economic situation. Yet it is merely the offspring of domestic Ahli society.
This study is concerned with the relationship between society and authority in Algeria, especially on the legal and legislative levels. Laws and legislations have imposed restrictions on Algerian civil society and, consequently, its relationship with the state must be reviewed to ensure its independence and participation in the decision-making processes. The importance of drafting laws and enacting legislation were highlighted in the study, aiming to support civil society in its various components.

Hariq addresses the paradox of civil society and political parties, criticizing all those who consider that political parties don’t belong to civil society simply because they seek power. He states that civil society aims to support the legitimacy of conflicting interests between different society groups and to address it in a peaceful political manner. One cannot talk about a ‘problem’ here unless power is seized by force. Hariq also mentions the duality of authoritarian regimes and civil society, stating that the ruling class in authoritarian regimes may occasionally accept the establishment of a civil society because it contributes to bearing part of the responsibilities that rest on the state such as welfare and social responsibilities and because it won’t form any threat to their authority as long as it steers clear of political issues and works to strengthen stability while focusing on charity and volunteer work.

The researcher addresses the role of civil society in light of developments in the situation of women in the Arab world, especially that, during the past three decades, civil society has played a definitive role in promoting the status and rights of Arab women.

Sajo’s book was released after the September events of 2001 and as a result of the discussion that followed regarding civil society on the global level and specifically on the Arab and Islamic levels. The writer sheds light on culture in Islam, stating that civil society consolidates core Islamic values and contributes, to some extent, in directing Islamic society towards values of citizenship and democracy.

The report addresses the status of civil society in each Arab country and highlights the main obstacles that stand in its way. It sheds light on its dialectical relationship with the political authority in the Arab world that seeks to dominate and restrict it in order to limit its effectiveness. In Libya, for example, civil society continues to be subject to the executive authority in its association and labor union frameworks. In Lebanon, according to the report, despite the constitution's emphasis on the right to establish associations, the sectarian structure of society hinders the establishment of a civil society.

The study addresses the rise and development of civil society in Yemen, especially in Taiz, while giving special emphasis on gender. The study examines the factors that assist or impede women's participation in civil society organizations.


This study addresses the obstacles that stand in the way of establishing the state in Lebanon, i.e. the authority of institutions, in particular. It examines the methods for transition from the domestic (Ahli) society to civil society, presenting a clear definition of the two terms and emphasizing their basic elements, characteristics and the close link between the domestic society and what Atieh calls the “deferred state”. He considers that ‘domestic affiliations’ are a stumbling block to establishing civil society institutions because they maintain the deferral of the state.


This study addresses the Arab experience in integration based on a premise that the states that were able to achieve integration had met the basic conditions that reinforce the values and functions of civil society. This produced democratic countries that were internally, economically, politically and socially integrated. The study concludes that the Arab world today is facing a crisis situation with regards to the relationship between countries and in internal politics in each country. State institutions must be reinforced and an agreement surrounding the form of aspired national identity must be reached in order to treat the colossal failure that hit the region. An Arab integration, somewhat similar to the European model, must also be established. The Arab world needs to build a civil society that is institutionalized, educated and viable, not just a civil authority. The stronger civil institutions become, the less capable the state is to practice authoritarianism against its citizens.


The writer addresses civil society in a chapter entitled: “About the Predominance of Domestic Society over Civil Society in the Arab World.” According to the writer, states suffer from cracks and the dominance of certain social groups over others, which has rendered civil institutions fragile in face secular and tribal affiliation. Thus, these “domestic” structures have tightened control of political parties, unions and associations of civil society, which in turn exposed how narrow the margin of democracy is in the Arab world. Efforts of existing authorities to limit the independence of the civil society, intervene in its work and annex its institutions become entirely apparent. The writer concludes that the state, democracy and civil society constitute three closely correlated elements. Hostility towards the state hinders the achievement of democracy and the building of society on sound foundations, and any disorder in the state will lead to the establishment of domestic authorities and militia. Therefore, an effective and independent civil society is of the utmost importance.


Mitri studies the factors that prevent the women's movement from mobilizing nowadays. She specifically discusses the impact of professionalization (or the transformation into NGOs), which is
carried out by relying on competent professionals who have degrees and specializations, on the women’s movement and its discourse, as well as on its structure and ability to take action on public policies and mobilize all social strata.

Rishmawi, Mirvat; Moris, Taim – A Comprehensive Overview of Civil Society in the Arab World, Practical Application Series No. 20, INTRAC, October 2001.
This study looks into the economic, social and political context that constitutes the framework for civil society in the Arab world, as well as the relevant historical background. It describes the work of civil society organizations in each Arab country, defining the challenges they face and shedding light on the most prominent common issues raised by civil society organizations in the region. Although the propagation and impact of civil society organizations have increased, they remain under the restrictions imposed on their freedom and funding that limit their competency, such as restrictions on freedom to establish associations and to assemble, as well as the freedom to establish unions and the right to strike.

This article takes an analytical look at the civil society movement in Syria following the death of Hafez Al-Assad and his son’s ascendancy to the presidency in early 2000. This first movement of civil society was known as the “Damascus Spring,” and it called for democratic reforms such as lifting the state of emergency and political freedoms. Many social and political forums were formed, but the authorities quickly started to impose restrictions on political activities and later arrested activists in this civil movement, thus bringing to an end to “the spring.”

Shaaban studies the use of the term civil society on the global and Arab levels. He discusses its paradoxes, problems, strategies and the challenges it faces, including the establishment of civil society organizations as branches of prevalent political, religious and ideological parties. The Arab world suffers from a lack of awareness of human rights on the part of the people, including civil society actors and organizations. Society also suffers from the scarcity of intellectual and scientific initiatives, the non-inclusion of economic and social rights in the programs and agendas of civil society organizations, the weakness of the organizations’ structures and the inadequacy of information and communication systems and technological methodologies.

Kawakbi, Salam – Syrian Voices from Pre-Revolution Syria: Civil Society Against All Odds, Hivos Special Bulletin 2, and Bait Al-Mowaten for Publishing and Distributions, April 2013.
This book includes a group of studies carried out by civil society activists, where they discuss their experiences and the prospects, dilemmas and accomplishments of their fieldwork. It criticizes the totalitarianism of the Soviet bloc in the early eighties and the dictators of southern countries. In light of the disadvantages of globalization and governments’ inability to face the pressure applied by financial institutions, civil society has stepped to the forefront. Many institutions and organizations claimed that they are civil society. However, they soon started to trade accusations of taking advantage of this banner. They include: political authorities, governmental organizations, Islamist movements, women’s rights groups, professional organizations, environmental organizations, human rights organizations and political parties. Charities are considered one of the oldest civil society formations in the country, since they have numerous social activities and economic projects. There are many NGOs that are, in fact, extensively governmental, such as the ones that are a result of an initiative on part of the ‘First Lady.’ The book also addresses the new generation of civil society organizations that were established in the mid-2000s and were concerned with important issues such as honor crimes, annulment of the amendment of the
Personal Status Law and granting women the right to pass citizenship to their children. The book concludes that the relationship between civil society and political society in Syria is very vague and ambiguous. So, despite the increase in the number of associations in Syria, this increase remains to be one of quantity, as they continue to be weak, fragile and subject to restrictions.

Kandil, Amani – Developing Civil Society Institutions, Arab Network for Civil Organizations, Cairo, 2004.
The book addresses the concept of “good governance”, focusing on its pillars and the methodology followed by civil society to translate it into practice. It also discusses the concept of transparency and the practical approaches that seek to implement it on the ground on the financial administration level. The book constitutes a guide to civil society activists, as it sheds light on the fields that enhance the performance of Arab civil society institutions and stresses the value of collective work and the importance of networking to increase interaction and exchange of expertise between its various institutions.

Kandil, Amani – Civil Society and the State in Egypt; Al-Mahrousah Center for Publishing, Cairo, 2005.
The book addresses the historical evolution of the relationship between civil society and the state, starting at Egypt’s modern history, i.e. when Muhammed Ali established the modern state and up to the third millennium. 2002 was a pivotal year because it saw the first comprehensive legislative reform for civil society, which allowed it to participate openly in the political arena. Kandil considers elitism an obstacle facing civil society organizations, especially those that are attempting to establish effective institutions and advocating human rights and citizenship. She adds that the state undermined the trust it had with the civil society by adopting a set of measures to impose legislative and security restrictions.

This study takes a critical look at the literature of civil society in the Arab world, starting from the early nineties and up to the third millennium. Arab academic groups and Arab civil society organizations have been interacting and cooperating since the early nineties. Kandil mentions many studies concerned with civil society in order to shed light on the development of this concept since the nineties, especially studies carried out before 1990, between 1990 and 2000, and after 2000. Finally, the author questions the potential of developing relevant research and studies in the Arab world.

Mahmoud, Qarziz; Yahyawi, Mariam – The Role of Civil Society in Achieving Comprehensive Development in Algeria: Between Persistence and Change, Baskara University, 2008.
Qarziz and Yahyawi both address the concept of civil society. According to this study, civil society is the agglomeration of political, economic, social and cultural institutions - each of which functions according to its specialization to fulfill the urgent needs of local societies. Civil society is also an entity that enjoys some form of independence from the state and the capitalism of influential private companies. It contributes to necessary decision-making processes but from outside the political framework. Civil society is an entity with specific syndicate-like purposes defending economic interests, promoting professions, expressing the demands of the people and cultural purposes such as those reflected in writers‘ and intellectuals‘ unions, cultural associations and social clubs. The study stresses the fact that civil society is based on volunteering, independence and individualism in a culture of citizenship and human rights. Both the civil society and the state have to build a relationship based on integration and solidarity. The study addresses the challenges
facing the aforementioned organizations, such as the lack of a favorable political and legal atmosphere, poor participation of women, weakness of rehabilitation and ascendency of financiers.

This study addresses two concepts of the civil society and the civil state based on the idea that they are not just linguistic concepts that we use as we please with regards to culture and history, but rather cultural concepts that carry intellectual and ideological substance. Adopting and using any of the two concepts means accepting the intellectual framework that it falls within or else it becomes a hollow concept with no meaning and no value. The study is divided into two chapters: the first addresses the civil society and its inception and foundations, and the second examines the civil state and its inception and intellectual foundations.

The book revolves around the evolution of volunteer work in the Lebanese political arena. The writer believes that volunteering has acquired a developmental role in light of market economy policies and the increasing importance that the private sector has gained, which in turn limited the social role of the state and increased the impact of social rifts. The study presents numerous good examples about attracting volunteers and articulating development strategies. It also addresses the impact of the digital revolution on volunteering and the importance of social media, which played an important role in the Arab movements, especially in supporting the efforts of the civil society and voluntary bodies and reinforcing their capacities.

The writer presents an overview of civil society and goes back to Hegel, Rousseau and Kant ,who considered it to be the political not the primitive society, and to Gramsci, who focused on the importance of civil society within the framework of the superstructure, as it is the civil society and not the state which advances the wheels of historic development. The writer considers civil society to be a prerequisite for establishing a sustainable democratic and political system. On the Palestinian level, the writer considers that civil society was effective since 1967, and it includes unions, clubs, charity and religious associations and other associations that interact in a free, civil and tolerant atmosphere, the pillar of the Palestinian state and the bulwark in face of occupation. However, employing the concept of civil society has become a complex issue in the Palestinian case due to the absence of a national state.