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Political Science in the Arab World**

العلوم السياسية عربيًا

Abstract: This study emphasizes the importance of assessing the state of political science within Arab academic institutions. It posits that the humanities and social sciences, particularly political science, play a pivotal role in the advancement of any society. Pedagogical experience at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, as well as the studies and seminars organized by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, have demonstrated that there is a gap in our knowledge on this subject – as well as a need to evaluate the output of Arab universities and the extent to which they are equipping students to engage with the political sciences to a world standard. Drawing on observations from both the Arab region and beyond, the study examines the multifaceted crisis affecting education and research in this field. This crisis stems from the relatively recent introduction of political science in the Arab World, a failure to keep up with international developments in the field, and the political, economic, social, and structural obstacles that have prevented it from achieving its broader objectives. The study argues that the primary obstacle to the success of political science in the region is the absence of an Arab academic community.

Keywords: Political Science; Arab World; Academic Community; Doha Institute for Graduate Studies; Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies.

الملخص: تستكشف هذه الورقة أهمية تقصّي حالة العلوم السياسية في المؤسسات الأكاديمية العربية، انطلاقًا من أهمية دور الإنسانيات والعلوم الاجتماعية عمومًا، والعلوم السياسية خصوصًا، في نهضة أيّ مجتمع. وقد أثبتت التجربة التربوية في معهد الدوحة للدراسات العليا، وكذلك الدراسات والندوات التي نظّمها المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات، وجود فجوة في المعرفة بشأن هذا الموضوع، فضلًا عن الحاجة إلى تقييم مخرجات الجامعات العربية ومدى قدرتها على تأهيل الطلاب للتعامل مع العلوم السياسية وفقًا للمعايير العالمية. واستنادًا إلى ملاحظات من داخل الوطن العربي وخارجه، تبحث الورقة في الأزمة المركبة في مجالات التدريس، بدءًا من تأخّر دخول التخصص إلى الساحة العربية، وعدم مواكبة التطورات الدولية في الحقل، ووجود معوقات سياسية واقتصادية واجتماعية وهيكلية تعترض وصول الأداء في الحقل إلى غاياته الأوسع. وتخلص الورقة إلى أنّ المعوّق الأكبر لانطلاقة التخصص يتمثل في غياب جماعة علمية عربية في المنطقة.

كلمات مفتاحية: العلوم السياسية؛ العالم العربي؛ الجماعة العلمية؛ معهد الدوحة للدراسات العليا؛ المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات.

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In their introduction to a book published in 2009, Tickner and Wæver claim that they devoted significant time and effort to find studies on the state of the international relations discipline in the Arab World – more than they spent on all the other chapters combined. Ultimately, they were unable to find any relevant research, and were obliged to reprint an old article by an Arab writer and accept a brief, "disappointing" chapter from another.[1] They attribute this difficulty in finding materials to a dearth of writing on the subject, not only by Arabs but by other academics as well.

Writing elsewhere, I have described what I call the "Binder challenge", referring to the observation made by Leonard Binder, an American scholar of Middle Eastern Studies in the 1980s. He noted that the Middle East and its academic life seemed to be "immune" to any sort of "scientific revolution".[2] Binder compared the region to Latin America, which has contributed extensively to the reinvigoration of the liberal theory of development, producing such key ideas as dependency theory and "bureaucratic despotism". In contrast, the Middle East has made no comparable contribution, and has, in fact, failed to make use of those ideas, never mind developing them. Binder attributes this disparity to the influence of Marxism on Latin American thinkers, as well as the region's proximity to the West, as opposed to the assumed cultural insularity of the Arab World. Whatever other disagreements we may have with him,[3] Binder's point on the limited contributions of Arab thinkers – and even foreign academics working on the region – to political thought in general cannot be dismissed. This point is further supported by the work of Abdelkarim Amengay and Alan Aloskan, which underscores the near-total absence of quantitative methods in Arab political science even today.[4] This is indicative of the deep crisis within the discipline, itself the product of an educational, social, and institutional failure. Understanding the causes of this failure requires serious consideration of the state of the field.

The Need to Assess the State of Political Science in the Arab World

Several considerations at work compel us, at this particular moment, to profoundly examine the state of political science in the Arab World from different angles. First, the study will address a series of questions: Where does the field stand today? What are its origins in each country? And how has it evolved and developed? It is necessary to assess its state intellectually and academically, particularly as political science remains absent in many Arab universities, with the discipline often unrecognized. Even in countries where political science courses are taught, the field's presence is, in many cases, little more than nominal. Second, the study will turn to the development of the field in Arab academia to explore whether it has evolved into a fully-fledged discipline that meets contemporary global research trends and addresses pressing theoretical and practical issues. It will inspect the availability of qualified teaching staff and access to sources and resources in Arabic.

Third, the study will evaluate the practical presence of political science in society, beyond lecture halls and seminar rooms, as well as its efficacy and impact. Are political science researchers engaging with issues that matter to society? Are these studies being read and used by researchers to advance knowledge? Do they exert influence beyond academia and the narrow circles of the academic elite? This raises important questions regarding the state of the field worldwide, including the originality of contributions and the

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[1] Arlene B. Tickner & Ole Wæver (eds.), *International Relations Scholarship around the World* (London/New York: Routledge, 2009).

[2] Abdelwahab El-Affendi & Khalil Al Anani, *After the Arab Revolutions: Decentring Democratic Transition Theory* (UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), pp. 5-6; L. Binder, *Islamic Liberalism: A Critique of Development Ideologies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 76-78.

[3] Binder dedicates a whole chapter to a critique of Edward Said's arguments on orientalism, arguments rooted in critical contributions by the Arab thinkers of the 1960s which eventually gave rise to a whole new discipline: postcolonial studies. This somewhat undermines his central thesis that there have been few original Arab contributions to the development of knowledge.

[4] Abdelkarim Amengay & Alan Aloskan, "Hāmishiyyat al-Manhaj al-Kammī fī al-ʿUlūm al-Siyāsiyya al-ʿArabiyya: al-Iḥṣāʾ al-Istidlālī Namūdhajan," *Siyasat Arabiya*, vol. 11, no. 60 (January 2023), pp. 111-126.

effective interaction with the broader environment. The Arab Spring put these questions at the top of the agenda for the political science community, both locally and globally, by exposing the significant gap between this "science" and the world that it purports to describe. This brings us back to Binder's observations – and he is not alone in this critique – on the paucity of Arab contributions to the field compared to those from the West and other regions, such as Latin America and the Indian subcontinent. That is: how great a presence does Arab scholarship have in political science globally?

In this connection, the relationship between contemporary political science and the Arab-Islamic tradition of the premodern era may also be considered. To what extent does contemporary political science in the Arab World draw upon pre-existing foundations? Finally, what is the relationship between the enduring absence of democratic systems in the region and the underdevelopment of political science, particularly since many scholars emphasize the centrality of this connection? Could the failure of democracy be the root cause of the crisis in political science or vice versa?

These questions arise from my teaching experience at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies (DI), which has served as a venue for experimenting with the teaching of political science in Arabic while remaining closely connected to global developments within the field. The DI's political science programme seeks to bolster the Arab contribution to the discipline, featuring a course, originally titled "Arab Contributions to Political Thought" (now renamed "Political Science and the Arabs"). The course is designed to familiarize students with significant Arab contributions, both historical and contemporary, to political thought and political science, inspiring and equipping them to tackle the challenge of making their own contributions. At the same time, the DI, in collaboration with its sister organization, the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies (ACRPS), has taken on this challenge by coordinating the efforts of Arab scholars in the humanities and the social sciences, including political science and international relations. Together, they are broadening and deepening links with pioneering academic institutions and publishing houses within and beyond the Arab world.

The Arab revolutions also raised critical questions. From East to West, they revealed gaps in understanding Arab realities and questioned the effectiveness of political science theories and analytical tools more broadly. In-depth studies produced by the ACRPS on the Arab revolutions have cast light on some of these theoretical problems, as have many of the conferences organized by the ACRPS and DI. Numerous studies, too, have worked to find solutions to these challenges.[5]

From a practical perspective, my teaching experience at the DI has highlighted several gaps in Arab political science, reflected in the overall knowledge of incoming students. While most are academically gifted, their previous curricula have not provided them with a comprehensive education of contemporary contributions to the field, particularly when it comes to theory. Many are familiar only with theories that were already outdated in the 1960s and 1970s. Bringing them up to date with the latest theoretical and methodological developments and bolstering their research, analytical, and critical skills, has required considerable effort. Fortunately, we have made significant progress in this respect. However, encountering this problem has prompted us to think more deeply about the state of political science in the Arab World. Doing so would be crucial to joint Arab efforts to overcome the obstacles to scientific progress in the region.

For these reasons, among others, I came to realise the importance of studying how political science has been taught at Arab universities and asking questions about its development, the schools of thought it has subscribed to, the resources utilized in instruction, and the key studies it has produced. It interrogates the impact of political unrest in the region on teaching, learning, and research within the field, as well as

[5] See, for example: Azmi Bishara, *Egypt: Revolution, Failed Transition and Counter-Revolution* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2022).

the extent of political interventions in the academic process. It is a well-known fact that the discipline has only recently emerged in universities in many Arab countries, and has historically been taught under the auspices of other disciplines, such as law or economics. Furthermore, universities face many pressures that restrict freedom of research and expression, pressures that have unfortunately intensified over time, complicating both teaching and intellectual production.

Over the last few decades, the quality of Arab universities has experienced an alarming decline, due to political and economic deteriorationin Arab states, and unrest and instability. The Universities of Cairo, Baghdad, Khartoum, Damascus, Rabat, and Tunis – to name but a few – once showed great promise, not only regionally but also globally.[6] However, most of these universities now face a complex array of challenges, including inadequate funding, insufficient teaching resources, brain drain, and a partial or total lack of government support for students who face constant pressures during their education journey.

For all these reasons, exploring the state of affairs of political science teaching and research in the Arab World not only represents a significant scientific and academic contribution that chronicles the historical development of the field, but also contributes to identifying ways to further develop and modernize it. This can lead to a broader renaissance of political science in the region, enhancing its role in advancing our understanding of the world and promoting political modernization. The development of a country is closely linked to the depth and richness of political thought in it. The Hellenic and Islamic golden ages, the French Revolution, and the Industrial Revolution in the UK and then the USA were interconnected with the increasing sophistication of political thought and praxis. The debates among philosophers, jurists, men of letters, as well as thinkers on matters of justice and the virtues of different political systems, produced competing ideas on these subjects and led to insights on the best forms of governance. Indeed, many of the political leaders of the great civilizations have themselves been leading thinkers.

Political Science in the Arab World: Emergence and Crisis

In 2010, the Faculty of Economics at Cairo University celebrated its 50th anniversary. Established in 1960, it represented a major shift in the development of political science as a discipline, although political science had been taught at the university for over 25 years before its official founding. It is perhaps not insignificant that only a year earlier, in 2009, the University of Baghdad had marked fifty years of political science teaching. The first classes at the University of Baghdad were launched in 1959, followed by the establishment of a faculty of economics and political science in 1963. These anniversaries were an opportune moment to reflect on the achievements and development of the discipline in both countries.

The discussion inevitably touched upon the broader state of the discipline across the Arab World, beginning with its relatively late arrival in the region, which coincided with the end of colonial rule and the return of politics to the forefront of national life. It also coincided with the end of what Albert Hourani termed the "liberal age" of Arab politics and the relative efflorescence of thought and culture. During this time, "aggressive" regimes began to assert control over society in general and academia in particular, attempting to impose political and ideological hegemony, especially with the humanities and social sciences. Political science thus began to develop in the Arab World at precisely the same moment that freedom of thought was starting to recede from Arab academia, particularly in government-related areas. Ironically, the rector of the Cairo Faculty of Economics during its Golden Jubilee, celebrated on the eve of the 2011

[6] For example, Talal Asad, one of the world's most prominent anthropologists, was full of praise for the University of Khartoum (where he was a professor in the 1960s while preparing his PhD thesis on the Sudanese Kababish tribe). He even compared it favourably to the University of Oxford. See: D. Scott & C. Hirschkind, *Powers of the Secular Modern: Talal Asad and His Interlocutors* (California: Stanford University Press, 2006), pp. 248-250.

Egyptian Revolution, was Ali El-Din Hilal, a leading member of the ruling National Party, underscoring the enduring and far-reaching interventions of the state in Egyptian academic life.

Political science as an independent discipline remained absent from many Arab universities for much longer. In some cases, such as in Morocco, it has recently been removed from the curriculum, most likely for political reasons. However, even as overall conditions have become much less welcoming now, political science is experiencing a paradoxical renaissance, even when compared to the recent past. For example, an academic article published in 1995 on the state of political science in the United Arab Emirates discusses the emergence of the field within the Faculty of Administrative and Political Sciences in 1977, noting its delayed establishment as an independent discipline and the changing view of the state on what its role should be.[7] Such an article could not be written today given the political climate. The situation in many Arab countries in the present is well-known, particularly in Egypt, which once led the way in political science education. Studying and teaching political science has become perilous, to the point that one political scientist in Egypt has been sentenced to death in absentia on charges related to his academic work, while many others have been thrown in prison or forced into exile.

This situation raises important questions – not only about whether political science can flourish and remain relevant in the Arab context, but also whether the minimum viable conditions for its continued existence are even present. The discipline first emerged in close association with the awareness of the political as an independent sphere, governed by its own rules and distinguishing features, setting it apart from other spheres, such as law, philosophy, and history, with those studying this sphere recognizing its distinctiveness. This requires a degree of freedom of movement, both within the political sphere and the academic spaces that study it. When politics is as constrained as it currently is and universities resemble oversized prisons, where would this freedom of movement be found? Where might the "political" it is supposed to study be found?

Political science is a relatively new discipline, even in the West. Its emergence is often traced to the founding of the American Political Science Association (APSA) in 1903, followed by the evolution of international relations as a subdiscipline. Even in the American context, political science was very slow to acquire full institutional and disciplinary independence. Perhaps the first institution to formally offer classes in modern political science in the Arab World was the American University in Beirut (AUB), which some scholars consider the first modern Arab university.[8] AUB's records show that in 1896 when it was still known as the Syrian Protestant College, it began teaching classes on political economy. The 1926-1927 annual report indicates that in 1927, a class on "political science" was introduced.[9] The first reference to a political science department, as opposed to the discipline itself, appears in 1941, while the 1950-1951 annual report mentions the "Department of Political Science and Law". In 1957, the Department of Political Science and Public Administration was founded, and it continues to operate today.

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[7] Abdulkhaliq Abdullah, "Burūz wa-Taṭawwur ʿIlm al-Siyāsa fī al-Imārāt al-ʿArabiyya al-Muttaḥida: Ḥalat ʿIlm Qayd al-Taʾsīs," *Dirāsāt al-Khalīj wa-l-Jazīra al-ʿArabiyya*, vol. 19, no. 76 (1995), pp. 97-127.

[8] AUB was founded in 1866 as the Syrian Protestant College and adopted its current name in 1920. Raymond Habiby, "Teaching Political Science in the Arab World," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southwestern Social Science Association 66th, Houston, TX, 22-26 March 1988, accessed on 21/1/2023, at: https://bit.ly/3BZFQPd. Although the University of Algiers had been founded earlier (in 1833 in its earliest form, with the medical and pharmacological schools established in 1859 and the schools of law and sciences and literature in 1879, and the title of university granted in 1909), the situation in Algeria was complicated, first because the university was not initially open to Algerians, and they remained a small proportion of its students even once that policy was changed, and second because education was fiercely contested between those attempting to impose a hegemonic French culture and those attempting to resist this hegemony. A. A. Heggoy, "Education in French Algeria: An Essay on Cultural Conflict," *Comparative Education Review*, vol. 17, no. 2 (1973), pp. 180-197. Ultimately, the Algerian cultural and academic sphere produced or employed many great French thinkers and sociologists, such as Albert Camus, Pierre Bourdieu, Jean-Francois Leotard, Jacques Derrida, and even Montesquieu and Jean-Paul Sartre. Nonetheless, AUB is usually counted as the first Arab university.

[9] American University of Beirut, *The President's Annual Report to the Board of Trustees, 1926 -1927*, p. 20.

In Egypt, too, the Egyptian University was first established as a private institution in 1908,[10] building on previous institutions including the Muhandiskhana (an engineering college established by Muhammad Ali in 1816), the Medical School (1827), and the Law School (1886). It officially transitioned to a state university in 1925.[11] There is some evidence that certain classes relating to political science were taught in the Higher School of Commerce, beginning in 1911.

The foundation of these universities was a political act, even an activist one, which resulted in a general upswing in politicization and political activity – evident in the campaigns that led to the creation of the Egyptian University. Similarly, the AUB had another sort of influence. Beyond its pioneering role in teaching political science, AUB fostered a vibrant political atmosphere, becoming the largest open space for debate between Arab students. For example, the student newspaper *al-ʿUrwa al-Wuthqā* (a name inspired by the first modernist-activist Arab newspaper founded by Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and his pupil Muhammad Abduh in Paris in 1883), consistently voiced Arab ambitions of unity and cultural revival.[12]

With the exception of AUB, Egypt was probably the first Arab country to incorporate political science as a discipline in its universities – a case can also be made for Algeria, although it is not well-documented. A political science department was established in 1935 in the Faculty of Commerce at the Egyptian University (later named Fuad I University from 1942 and Cairo University from 1953), followed about a decade later by another department at the Faculty of Commerce at Faruq University (now the University of Alexandria). A distinct Department of Postgraduate Studies in Political Science was established in Cairo in 1942, first offering master's degrees and later introducing doctoral programmes in 1950. Officially, political science was first introduced at the University of Algiers in 1949. In Iraq, Sudan, and Tunisia, the first departments were set up between 1959 and 1960. It is worth noting, however, that many scholars characterize the foundation of law colleges in many of these countries (in the 19th century in Egypt and Algeria, in 1909 in Iraq, and in 1935 in Sudan) as laying the foundations for the later adoption of political science, because they taught international law.[13]

The teaching methods, resources, and approaches within the discipline have developed over time, confronting various challenges. Raymond Habiby notes that AUB (followed by the Egyptian University in Cairo in 1920) adopted an American teaching model, while Université Saint-Joseph, a French-language university set up by Jesuits in Lebanon the year after AUB as part of the interdenominational competition for converts, followed a French model. The Egyptian University, meanwhile, which began as an extension of the University of London, adopted a British model,[14] as did the University of Khartoum, which was founded in 1902 as the Gordon Memorial College and incorporated into the University of London as a college in the early 1950s (Talal Asad also notes the influence of Oxford professors on the university's development in the 1940s).[15] Habiby also emphasizes the influence of Cairo University and other Egyptian institutions on higher education throughout the Arab World. Not only did they establish direct branches in other countries, such as in Khartoum in 1955, but Egyptian professors also staffed many university departments across the region.[16]

In subsequent years, universities began to take on new identities, influenced by the conditions under which they emerged and the social and political environment. For example, the Egyptian University

[10] Hamdy A. Hassan, "The Development of Political Science in the Arab World: A Narrative," *SSRN*, 25/7/2009, p. 2.

[11] See: "Waqāʾiʿ wa-Ḥaqāʾiq", *University of Cairo*, accessed on 21/1/2023, at: https://bit.ly/3INkOam

[12] Betty S. Anderson, *The American University of Beirut: Arab Nationalism and Liberal Education* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), pp. 2-3.

[13] Qahtan Ahmad Sulayman & Salah Abdelhadi, "al-ʿUlūm al-Siyāsiyya fī al-ʿIrāq: Bidāyātuhā, Nashʾatuhā, Taṭawwuruhā wa-Mufradātuhā al-Tadrīsiyya," *al-ʿUlūm al-Siyāsiyya*, no. 37 (2008), pp. 193-209.

[14] Habiby, pp. 5-6.

[15] Hirschkind & Scott, pp. 248-250.

[16] Habiby, pp. 6-7.

established its postgraduate political science departments under the umbrella of the Faculty of Law, while undergraduate classes were taught as part of economics. Economics was taught according to British curricula, whereas law followed a French approach, and as a result postgraduate students were obliged to familiarize themselves with the French method.[17]

Marwa Fikri argues that this dual influence remains evident in political science in Egypt.[18] The teaching of political science in the Faculty of Economics and Political Science was influenced by its emergence from the Faculty of Law and Commerce, focusing primarily on economic and legal matters. In this, the French tradition and its great emphasis on constitutional law continues to play a major role. Additionally, teaching has been influenced by the development of the discipline in the West, particularly the rise of positivism in the United States. As a result, the majority of Egyptian political scientists today can still be described as positivists.

Equally significant are the impacts of political developments: the discipline first began to consolidate its independent identity in the early 1960s, coinciding with the rising influence of Nasserism and the state's increasing dominance over the cultural sphere. Fikri finds that the prevailing conception among Egyptian academics is that the role of the political scientist is to move within the dominant political and academic elites, serving the state and decision-makers. Therefore, the identity of the discipline has evolved under the influence of this mixture of positivism and alignment with the government.

Achievements of the Discipline

It is important to note that political science in the region has made great progress over the last few decades. From very modest beginnings – virtually from non-existence –it has established a solid presence in multiple universities in most Arab countries. Today, Arab universities graduate hundreds of political scientists every year. In Algeria, for example, the discipline has expanded from a single centre at the University of Algiers (the Institute of Political Science and International Relations) in 1991 to some 29 departments across the country today.[19]

This growth reflects a broader expansion of higher education across the region. In Algeria, the number of higher education institutions, including universities, institutes, and teaching centres, leapt from no more than 20 in the 1970s to 107 in 2021. The number of students has increased around 850 times over, from around 2000 to some 1.7 million. In Egypt, over two million students are enrolled in 20 state universities, along with 60,000 students scattered across 23 private institutions. Lebanon today boasts around 41 universities, while Sudan has multiplied its number of institutions over the last 40 years, with more than a hundred operating today. The same trend applies to most countries.

We might evoke here the concept of the "academic production cycle", used by Sidahmed Goudjili. in his account of the development of international relations. This cycle comprises three generations: the first generation, which entered the field between the early 1930s and the 1960s and paved the way for the second generation, the "delegation" generation sent abroad on scholarships and earned their PhDs between 1970 and 1985, and finally the millennial generation, who qualified between 2000 and 2015.

Notwithstanding Goudjili's criticisms of the contributions of these various generations and the difficulty of communication between them, his study shows that every group made significant contributions, some

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[17] Ibid., pp. 5-6.

[18] Marwa Fikri, "Ḥāl al-ʿUlūm al-Siyāsiyya fī Miṣr: Tajribat Qism al-ʿUlūm al-Siyāsiyya fī Kulliyyat al-Iqtiṣād bi-Jāmiʿat al-Qāhira," *Siyasat Arabiya*, vol. 11, no. 60 (January 2023), pp. 21-49.

[19] Abdelkader Abdelali, Lubna Jassas & Qassem Hajjaj, "Azmat Takhaṣṣuṣ al-ʿUlūm al-Siyāsiyya fī al-Jāmiʿa al-Jazāʾiriyya: Mufāraqāt Ṭafrat Sittat ʿUqūd min al-Istiqlāl al-Waṭanī," *Siyasat Arabiya*, vol. 11, no. 60 (January 2023).

resulting in major advancements. The "founding generation" (the second generation) planted the first seeds of the discipline in the Arab World, while the millennial generation brought Arab scholarly output to a global standard.[20] This trajectory illustrates a steady improvement in qualifications and abilities from generation to generation, despite the limited academic resources. Moreover, we might also include the hundreds of scholars trained in major Arab universities, which have graduated large numbers of students who may have not pursued doctorates but went on to disseminate the discipline's insights throughout society, whether via the media, the schools, or the bureaucracy.

Bassel Salloukh and May Darwich likewise emphasize this positive trend, noting some important contributions made in recent years through critical interrogations of the prevailing concepts and theories used in teaching worldwide.[21] Such contributions allow the teaching space itself to become a space for theoretical development. The assessment of this "productive" phase between reception and research is important. The usual process is a cycle between research and publication; works that set out new theories or test existing theories against reality are put in dialogue with existing publications, including critical approaches to theories and new proposals for their development. Typically, teaching spaces are some of the most important sites in which students are exposed to these ideas and debates, preparing them for a later stage in which they will synthesize them into new publications, after which the cycle begins anew. But Salloukh and Darwich make this intermediate stage a very productive source of alternative knowledge.

The starting point for Salloukh and Darwich is the challenges faced by major IR theories, often of foreign origins, when they encounter realities outside the West, particularly in the Arab region. Here, some professors encourage students to critically engage with these theories by drawing on readings that interrogate their assumptions and premises and proceed from the Arab World. This might include postcolonial readings or radical critiques focusing on the security interests of great powers or rejecting stereotypes. Some, likewise, rely on theories developed locally, or on analytical eclecticism, bringing together multiple theoretical frameworks.

The goal is to develop a framework that more effectively captures the reality being studied. These efforts complement attempts to draw on classical works and values. Salloukh and Darwich see these efforts as serious attempts to escape the noose of Western intellectual and academic hegemony, potentially leading to new theories and approaches that will enrich the discipline. Nonetheless, there is still a missing link: how do these classroom debates transit from the mere exchange of ideas behind closed doors in the universities of the periphery to the formulation of coherent propositions capable of challenging established theories?

A Crisis of Accumulation and an Accumulation of Crises

Despite these positive indicators, the prevailing assessment among those working in the field is that political science in the Arab World is experiencing a major and multifaceted crisis. According to Fikri's data, most political scientists in Egypt share this view, attributing it to the overall "political climate", the lack of funding, the "gap between theory and practice", and the difficulty of accessing data.[22] By "political culture", respondents presumably mean the undemocratic political system. However, it is worth noting that Chaker Houki describes another political dimension to the problem in Tunisia, that of the ideological polarization

[20] Sid Ahmed Goudjili, "Ḥaql al-ʿAlāqāt al-Duwaliyya fī al-ʿĀlam al-ʿArabī: Baḥth fī al-Tārīkh al-Ijtimāʿī li-Nashʾatihi wa-Taṭawwurihi wa-Ḥālatihi al-Rāhina," *Siyasat Arabiya*, vol. 11, no. 60 (January 2023), pp. 63-81.

[21] Bassel Salloukh & May Darwich, "Tadrīs al-ʿAlāqāt al-Duwaliyya fī'l-ʿĀlam al-ʿArabī: al-Ishkālāt al-Maʿrifiyya wa-l-Naẓariyya," *Siyasat Arabiya*, vol. 11, no. 61 (March 2023), pp. 78-93.

[22] Fikri.

of academic debate (a reference to the Islamic-secularist conflict) and what he calls "political confusion".[23] Houki also cites political science's loss of an independent disciplinary identity, which he attributes to the enduring link in Tunisian practice between political science and constitutional law. The discipline was first taught in the Faculty of Law and Political Science, where the pedagogical approach was dominated by public and private law, and administrative positions were primarily held by legal specialists. This characterization resonates with the situation in Algeria and applies more broadly to the Maghreb as a whole.

Houki also alludes to other important problems, including the issue of language. He emphasizes the importance of Arabization to domesticating and establishing the independence of the discipline, and the simultaneous danger that Arabization might obscure valuable sources available in foreign languages. Additionally, he points to the shortage of qualified teaching staff and the limitations of the local publishing industry. Equally important is the absence of active academic associations.

In Algeria, the crisis unfolds in the retrenchment of the field after a period of rapid expansion beginning in the early 1990s. Since 2014, many political science departments have been closed because of the lack of student interest. This can be attributed to policy decisions that have significantly limited the opportunities available to political science graduates, as a result of (or under the pretext of) the oil crisis that began at that juncture.

Respondents to the survey conducted by Jassas, Abdelali, and Hajjaj criticized what they described as the "arbitrary" expansion of political science programs and "random" closures.[24] But this was only one aspect of what respondents perceived as a potential larger crisis: the disappearance of the discipline's distinct identity and independent character – independence from both other disciplines and state power – its failure to meet global academic standards, and its inability to adequately prepare graduates for specific professional roles. The same can be said of the imposition of a "socialist agenda" on the discipline prior to the 1990s, which contributed to the turn toward ideology at the expense of professionalism (although some respondents felt it was natural for the discipline to be influenced by the prevailing political climate). Jassas, Abdelali, and Hajjaj paint a relatively positive picture of political science in Algeria compared to other Arab countries, thanks to its long pedigree and the diverse foreign and Arab influences that have enriched it and enabled the incorporation of new methodologies, including quantitative approaches.

In Sudan, Hassan El Hajj Ali and Yasir Awad Abdalla likewise attribute the crisis in political science to government intervention in academia, particularly under undemocratic regimes.[25] They note that Khartoum University in its earliest form as the Gordon Memorial College was intended primarily to train administrators and later teachers and lawyers for junior positions within the new political system. In 1951, the College was amalgamated with several other higher schools to form University College Khartoum, which at the time was part of the University of London. Indeed, in its early years, Sudanese graduates received University of London degrees. This relationship continued until the Sudanese independence and the creation of an independent University of Khartoum, with the University of London overseeing examinations. Even after this direct oversight was terminated, British external examiners continued to be used by the university until the late 1970s, and English remained the language of instruction until the mid-1980s. The first political science classes were introduced by the Faculty of Literature in 1952, and in 1960, a Department of Political Science was established under the Faculty of Economic and Social Studies.

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[23] Chaker Houki, "Taḥarrukāt al-ʿUlūm al-Siyāsiyya fī al-Jāmiʿa al-Tūnisiyya: Mufāraqat al-Masārāt wa-Azmat al-Mawḍūʿ, Kulliyyat al-Ḥuqūq wa-l-ʿUlūm al-Siyāsiyya Namūdhajan," *Siyasat Arabiya*, vol. 11, no. 60 (January 2023), pp. 82-109.

[24] Abdelali, Jassas & Hajjaj.

[25] Hassan El Hajj Ali & Yasir Awad Abdalla , "Tadrīs al-ʿUlūm al-Siyāsiyya fī al-Jāmiʿāt al-Sūdāniyya: al-Nashʾa wa-l-Taṭawwur," *Siyasat Arabiya*, vol. 11, no. 60 (January 2023), pp. 50-61.

The University of Khartoum enjoyed far-reaching independence, and many foreign professors (mostly from Britain) continued to teach there until the 1980s. During its more left-wing period, the Gaafar Nimeiri government attempted to bring the University to heel by dissolving the student union and dismissing several faculty members. However, the fierce resistance mounted by students almost toppled the regime in 1973 and forced it to backpedal. The University retained its academic freedom, and students continued to enjoy political and cultural freedoms within its confines. This dynamic shifted dramatically, however, after Omar al-Bashir's coup in 1989. al-Bashir also attempted to tighten state control over universities by dismissing professors and replacing them with loyal appointees, enforcing total Arabization in teaching, and opening a number of new institutions.

These developments in Sudan serve as a compelling case study of the far-reaching and tangible negative impact of the deteriorating political situation, including dictatorship and a series of civil wars, on higher education. The University of Khartoum, once an institution renowned for upholding the highest international standards, found itself fighting to survive. Economic decline, beginning with the oil boom in the 1970s, dramatically exacerbated the crisis, leading to the migration of academic cadres to the Gulf and other African countries, such as Nigeria. With the outbreak of civil war once again in the 1980s, coupled with the imposition of arbitrary military rule in the 1990s, brain drain became almost collective – albeit now to the West, particularly to the UK and the US.

Nonetheless, Sudanese universities continued to enjoy relative independence compared to other Arab universities, particularly after the emergence of private universities. El Hajj Ali and Abdalla mention 90 such institutions in Khartoum alone, including eight state universities, 17 locally- or foreign-owned private universities, and 65 private colleges. They report that some 575,719 students are enrolled in university education in the country despite private universities only teaching political science to meet job market demands, such as diplomatic studies and strategic studies. Studies on Egypt, Tunisia, and Algeria, on the other hand, show governments in those countries are the ultimate direct decision-makers in universities, from the establishment and modification of disciplines and subject areas to the curricula themselves. This is a problematic situation, particularly when regimes have an agenda that does not sit easily with free research and expression and independent analysis of the political situation.

Studies in some countries have noted the importance of democracy to the development of political science. This reminds us of Samuel Huntington's famous assertion from his 1987 presidential address to APSA: "It is impossible to have political scientists in the absence of political participation […] in a society in which there is no participation – no competition for power – political scientists would have nothing to do".[26] Evidence seems to support this claim. China and Russia, for example, have had relatively little impact on political science, despite producing many influential thinkers in other academic fields. Conversely, there are other counterexamples, such as Pinochet's Chile in the 1980s and 1990s, where political science flourished and ultimately contributed to the transition to democracy.

This, however, appears to be the exception that proves the rule: the boom in Chilean political science must be attributed to the many Chilean thinkers who fled the country in the 1970s to escape persecution, and they were subsequently absorbed into major universities in Europe and the US, where many enjoyed stellar careers. When the government permitted many of them to return in the mid-1980s, they took positions in various independent research centres, since they were still banned from teaching at universities, often with Western support. Ironically, this ban on teaching allowed them to focus instead on research, in which many excelled.[27]

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[26] S. P. Huntington, "One Soul at a Time: Political Science and Political Reform," *American Political Science Review*, vol. 82, no. 1 (1988), pp. 3-10.

[27] J. Heine, "Democracy, Dictatorship, and the Making of Modern Political Science: Huntington's Thesis and Pinochet's Chile," *Political Science & Politics*, vol. 39, no. 2 (2006), pp. 273-280.

The Chilean case thus confirms that democracy is a necessary condition for the flourishing of political science. Furthermore, the impressive development of the discipline in other Latin American countries and among migrants and exiles from those countries in the US during that period also helped support its growth in Chile.

Crisis of a Discipline, a Region, or Politics?

Mekia Nedjar underscores the importance of freedom of thought and expression to the development of the social sciences, arguing that academic production cannot flourish under regimes that forbid criticism and undermine freedoms.[28] Although she focuses on international relations, her questions apply equally to all the social sciences, particularly political science. She links the state of international relations, which emerged relatively late in the region, to various global problems, intellectual, political, and moral.

Nedjar notes that while the Arab countries may have won nominal membership in the global community, this "recognition" has led to their absorption into the prevailing theoretical and ethical framework, which is of Western origin. At the same time, Arab states remain unable to meet the conditions of true statehood: their sovereignty is frequently breached, their regimes are unable to address domestic or foreign challenges, and their global presence very limited. In other words, the Arab system is trapped within an indirect colonial hegemony, a situation further compounded by an epistemological hegemony that is no less dangerous. This hegemony controls the narrative and understanding of history, serving as the source of all forms of knowledge currently available.

In Nedjar's view, the root of the crisis lies in an international political-economic-epistemological system that perpetuates hegemony and marginalization, and in local regimes that not only fail to produce knowledge but actively impede it with remarkable energy. Society does not only import knowledge from foreign sources but laps it up, including the "epistemological racism" inherent in the prevailing narrative, often to the extent of collusion and submission to hegemony.

There is a pessimistic impulse in Nedjar's analysis of the crisis. She compares third-world countries (including Arab countries) to Foucault's prisoner, who surrenders to the disciplinary regime under coercion but also voluntarily. The third-world state's presence on the global stage is marked by a complex form of impotence, rendering the Westphalian nation-state a prison confined by a single, reductive way of understanding it within a modern system built on "surveillance" akin to the modern state. In response, Nedjar advocates for a confrontation grounded in what she calls "reflexivity" (drawing on Pierre Bourdieu and Inanna Hamati-Ataya, among others), as a "continuing process of sociological assessment of the tools of knowledge and the process by which it is produced". For her, reflexivity serves not only as a "philosophy" and a "practical-social style of research" but also as a "tool for epistemological awareness" which empowers researchers to "understand the self and translate it into an axiological machine for the practice of knowledge". Moreover, it enables them to "reconcile the claims of knowledge with the conditions of the possible as they face it and its social, as well as its political, responsibility".

It is not difficult to spot an internal contradiction in this proposition and in postcolonial discourse more broadly. On the one hand, it attributes the epistemological crisis in the periphery to the multifaceted political, economic, and epistemological hegemony of the international system. On the other hand, it attributes that same crisis to the dictatorial regimes that suppress and undermine freedoms. Do Arab regimes possess agency independent of the hegemonic system, or do they bear no responsibility for the crisis? From another perspective: Are the radical regimes that present themselves as the enemies of colonialism – those that are

[28] Mekia Nedjar, "Limādhā Lā Tūwjad Naẓariyya ʻʿArabiyyaʼ fī al-ʿAlāqāt al-Duwaliyya? Asbāb Quṣūr al-Musāhama al-ʿArabiyya fī Naẓariyyāt al-ʿAlāqāt al-Duwaliyya," *Siyasat Arabiya*, vol. 11, no. 61 (March 2023), pp. 54-77.

often the most brutal in suppressing free thought in the Arab World – the product of "absorption" into a system of liberal Western values, for example?

How little attention we have given to the internal contradictions within Arab thought itself! Left-wing Arab intellectuals, some of whom have supported dictatorial regimes, have made important contributions to political thought both within the Arab World and globally. For instance, the first critiques of orientalism appeared in the mid-1960s at the height of Nasserism in the theoretical works of leftist thinkers such as Anouar Abdel-Malek (although he was writing in France), and of certain Islamists. Much of the work of Malek Bennabi, too, appeared in radical Algeria. Conversely, regimes loyal to the West have sometimes afforded greater freedom, despite their repressive impulses. Notable figures like Abdallah Laroui and Mohammed Abed al-Jabri, for example, wrote in Morocco. However, the more recent Arab rapprochement, wherein some countries loyal to the West have become more repressive, has created a new reality that requires a great deal of thought, particularly given that some regimes are colluding in the return of classical colonialism by inviting foreign interventions, including Israeli, in the region.

At the same time, important contributions to Western political thought have been made by leftist thinkers, who, at times, expressed favourable views toward repressive, dictatorial regimes in Eastern Europe and Maoist China (Michel Foucault or Jean-Paul Sartre, for example). The political movement known as European Marxism, or Western Marxism, enriched global political thought, notably through the Frankfurt School and thinkers such as Louis Althusser, Herbert Marcuse, Nicos Poulantzas, Ralph Miliband, and Benedict and Perry Anderson. But we must also recognize that while some of these thinkers attached to Marxist regimes – sometimes with a critical perspective – they all lived and wrote in liberal Western countries, and worked in universities or research centres situated in those countries.

There is no doubt that freedom and personal safety are important to any intellectual or theoretical endeavour. Thought cannot flourish in a country where academics lack safety assurance, freedom, and income. However, freedom alone is not sufficient. Resources are also needed, as well as an environment conducive to intellectual production. The crisis facing the humanities and social sciences in the Arab World is not merely a crisis of freedoms, but also a crisis of resources and the overall academic environment.

It is worth remembering here that Arab universities, including private universities like the American Universities of Beirut and Cairo, began as elite institutions that provided students and academics with the supportive environment necessary for teaching, learning, and research. These universities produced many great thinkers, some of whom went to work in the West and contributed to the growth of their discipline there. But the deterioration of the economic situation, coupled with an increasing demand for university education, has forced many universities into a struggle simply to stay afloat in an atmosphere of severely restricted freedoms. Indeed, even in countries where resources are more plentiful, freedom remains elusive.

Returning to those thinkers who draw inspiration from classical Arab and Islamic sources, such as Bennabi, Jabiri, and Araoui, for example, or Khaldoun Alnaqeeb on tribalism, these efforts have yet to coalesce into a school of thought capable of producing strong theoretical contributions. Fikri notes the attempts of Hamid Rabie to establish a school of thought that approached international relations from an Islamic perspective.[29] Additionally, there are the works of Riad El-Rayyes and Islamist critiques of orientalism, as well as the "Islamization of knowledge" school led by Ismail Raji al-Faruqi from the US and supported by a series of Saudi scholars, most notably the late Abdul Hamid AbulSulayman, which was supported generously by particular quarters in the Gulf. This group established the International Institute of Islamic Thought in Washington, DC, and supported the Islamic University in Malaysia and other institutions in Sudan, Turkey, and elsewhere. It also supported Arab and American periodicals.

[29] Fikri.

However, the theoretical fruit of these efforts remains limited relative to the time and money invested in them. This is particularly concerning given the importance of integrating the Arab-Islamic tradition into contemporary political thought through an approach simultaneously critical of modern and classical Islamic approaches. Discussing political science in Tunisia, Houki alludes to the legacy of Ibn Khaldun (who is not an exclusive property of Tunisia), but does not give any examples of modern Tunisian writings building on his ideas.[30]

None of this suggests that we cannot work toward finding solutions to these complex problems, such as establishing centres of excellence in states with limited resources, with sufficient budgets to attract talented and capable staff. This was the idea behind the establishment of political science faculties in Egypt and Iraq. However, as I explained above, these centres have not achieved the desired outcomes due to political interventions, declining freedoms, and a lack of political will. Ironically, political science in countries like Tunisia and Algeria (and we might add Iraq and Sudan too) has regressed during a period of relative democratization. Nevertheless, creative engagement with the Islamic tradition is still on the table.

The Absence of an Academic Community and Research Problematics

No less important than teaching institutions is the presence of an academic community represented by specialist associations, research platforms, conferences, seminars, and publishing infrastructure. The history of the development of science in the West, including applied sciences, is closely tied to scientific associations – far more so than to universities. There have been great universities throughout Europe since the beginning of the second millennium, but they did not begin to produce meaningful scientific output until the emergence of associations like the Royal Society in the UK in the mid-17th century and similar entities in other European countries. In political science, there is a near-consensus pinning the date of its emergence to the founding of APSA in 1903. APSA continues to play a leading role in supporting and advancing scholarship by maintaining some of the most important journals in the discipline, organizing conferences that facilitate the exchange of ideas and knowledge, and offering training in different fields.

In the Arab World, however, such associations are few, whether at the pan-Arab level or in individual countries. The establishment of new associations is hindered in many countries because of the lack of freedom and fear from security agencies, particularly concerning associations focused on political science or international relations. The problem of resources also dogs many associations across the Arab World. For instance, the Arab Association for Political Science has faced major obstacles in this regards. While it publishes a biannual journal through the Centre for Arab Unity Studies, it lacks a permanent headquarters. Due to the turbulent environment in Arab countries, it was forced to hold its 1983 founding conference in Cyprus. It continues to grapple with funding issues and pressure from states that attempt to exercise influence at least through their members.

However, there are bigger problems that all associations and universities face: political polarization. Historically, this was a matter of left and right, as in other countries, but the polarization in Arab countries was particularly sharper, influenced by the region's political regimes. Today, the most significant source of polarization stems from the hostility between Islamists and liberals or leftists.

This polarization could have been harnessed, as in the West, by establishing competing research centres that embrace competing political approaches while striving to produce outstanding research and academic publications. Indeed, attempts in this direction were made in the last decades of the 20th century. But the

[30] Houki.

colleges and centres established in Arab universities in the 1960s have never operated in a climate suitable to the flourishing of scholarship. Their proximity to regimes, involvement with state bureaucracies, and adherence to government agendas, as well as a prevailing elitist perspective that saw political science as a tool to support the state and political regimes, have significantly hindered their development.

The founding of al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies in 1968 under the auspices of the newspaper *al-Ahrām* – then headed by Mohamed Hassanein Heikal, a close associate of the Nasser regime – is a perfect example. Originally tasked with studying Israeli affairs and the Palestinian question, the Centre's remit expanded to broader political and strategic issues, including international and regional affairs.[31] Its establishment outside existing academic institutions and within a media organization deemed politically reliable is indicative of the crisis of research within the university framework and the restrictions imposed on it. In subsequent years, likely inspired by the Egyptian example, most Arab regimes established their own research centres within their intelligence agencies or at least with intelligence support and funding, to study and discuss sensitive matters that universities were not permitted to debate explicitly.

Another political science institution, the Centre for Arab Unity Studies, was established in Beirut in 1975. It, too, has faced political pressures. It was followed by other centres, within and beyond universities, including local branches of foreign institutions such as the Carnegie Middle East Center in Lebanon and Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in Amman. A recent study lists some 224 Arab research centres active in politics and public policy. Most of these centres, however, are almost unknown, even within their own countries.[32]

The issue of political science research is complex and multifaceted, yet it is a crucial part of the broader crisis of political science as a whole. Academic research is the ultimate aim of all study; teaching is only the first step toward qualifying students to carry out research, to discover, to develop, and research work is the material on which teaching depends. As such, a discipline can never fully mature within a specific cultural and national context unless it is able to produce knowledge that is relevant to the society and up to its needs.

Conclusion

The discipline of political science has made great strides in the Arab World, but its progress has been uneven, marked by many setbacks in recent years for various political, economic, and institutional reasons. Today, it faces a major crisis that takes various forms: decades-long stagnation in intellectual thought, a failure to keep up with global developments in the field, a near-total absence of the use of quantitative methods, the lack of an academic community, limited accumulation of expertise and knowledge, and the overall deterioration of the standard of universities – even when compared to their historical achievements – due to limited resources, brain drain, constraints on their activity, regime interventions in teaching and organizing, and the dearth of publishing infrastructure.

There are, however, causes for optimism, including the survival of certain reputable universities, the opening of new research centres and institutes, and the emergence of new generations of professors and researchers, many of whom benefitted from a foreign education. Notably, new, critical groups and schools of thought have formed, such as the Beirut Group for Critical Security Studies (2016). Additionally, the Arab Council for the Social Sciences, founded in 2010 in Beirut, is one such advanced initiative supporting the humanities and the social sciences in the region. The centre receives support from the UN as well as Western and Arab bodies.

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[31] Hassan, p. 4.

[32] Mabruk Sahili, "Dawr Marākiz al-Abḥāth fī Rasm al-Siyāsāt al-ʿĀmma (Dirāsat Ḥālat al-ʿĀlam al-ʿArabī)," *al-Buḥūth wa-l-Dirāsāt*, vol. 14, no. 23 (Winter 2017), pp. 256-261.

New initiatives are also emerging abroad, such as the Project on Middle East Political Science, launched in 2010 by Marc Lynch, a professor of political science at George Washington University. Although the headquarters of the project sits within the Centre for Middle Eastern Studies at the university, and was originally designed to support Middle Eastern studies in the US, it has since cultivated a broad network that includes many Arab researchers and provides backing to early-career Arab scholars. It seeks to diversify the research approaches in the region – particularly in light of the Arab Spring, among other developments – and has cooperated with the ACRPS across different fields. Similarly, the Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut organizes activities and publishes studies on political affairs in the region.

To confront the fundamental crisis in political science in the region, it is urgent to create an Arab political community that can support the discipline. This initiative might build on the existing achievements of the ACRPS and the DI, which have already laid the foundations for political science research and teaching to meet global standards. Their accomplishments include establishing peer-reviewed journals dedicated to advancing the discipline within the Arab World and organizing regular events open to Arab scholars of politics to present peer-reviewed papers and publish them in books or journals. The ACRPS and the DI have also facilitated collaborative activities with leading academics from beyond the region through a series of conferences and events that bring together specialists from Western, Arab, and world universities, including those in China, Russia, and Africa. The next step could involve launching initiatives to support Arab political science associations and building partnerships with academic institutions in the region to build networks that will support the discipline, injecting a new vibrancy into intellectual and academic production in the political field.

Such vibrancy is not only indicative of a healthy society but is also an indispensable precondition of social, economic, and political prosperity. Rational intellectual debate, robust to the convulsions of arbitrary whims, interests, and power, is simultaneously the space in which identity is expressed, formed, and built. Within this debate, society determines the values that govern it, assesses them critically, evaluates how closely they are followed, compares itself with other societies, explores new horizons for development, and allows its members to share their views within a competitive framework that identifies the most promising paths forward. Without such debate, there is no difference between a living and a dead society.

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