



"Dancing Around Democracy: Conduct and Counter-conduct in EU-Tunisia Politics of Democracy Assistance"

Visiting Scholar lecture by Professor Andrea Teti,
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Time: 4 November 2026, 13:15-15:00

Venue: Nobelauditorium 1483-105



Some scholarship on democratization and on 'democracy assistance' policies suggests the EU may have – or at least aims for – a democratising effect on Middle Eastern counterparts.

Other research shows MENA governments resist democratization by appropriating the EU's normative language to subvert democratic reform, reinforcing autocracy. Poststructuralist scholarship helps understand this ebb and flow of 'norm diffusion' as a contest of conduct/counter-conduct between governments. Productive though this perspective is, it remains limited.

Once the populations are introduced, the picture changes substantively.

Mapping actors' discursive construction of democracy in the case of Tunisia shows governmental actors' conceptions are much closer than appears from government-to-government analysis, both focusing on 'thin' understandings of democracy which conflate selected civil-political rights with human rights tout court while eliding socio-economic rights and deferring social justice over an indefinite future time horizon. By contrast, the Tunisian population has a holistic and substantive understanding of democracy.

This suggests the need to generalise current analyses of EU/MENA norm diffusion by reversing it and viewing it not as a bilateral dynamic but as a three-way conductive/counter-conductive contest wherein government-level actors attempt to counter-conduct citizens, undermining EU 'normative power' and delegitimising democracy itself in the process.

Professor Teti is an expert on EU-Middle East politics, and he has published widely on democratization, Egyptian politics, and Continental political theory. His publications include *Democratization vs Democracy* (2020), *The Arab Uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt and Jordan* (2018), and *Informal Power in the Greater Middle East* (2014).

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