

***Is Non-Western Democracy Possible?
A Russian Perspective***

Edited by Alexei D. Voskressenski.
(New Jersey: World Scientific, 2017)
ISBN: 9789813147379

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In today's international political climate many approach Russian perspectives with measured caution. Yet, missing this handbook on how we might deal with the non-western world would be a mistake for both policymakers and for academia. In reviving the utility of traditional area studies and comparative politics for security studies practitioners, Voskressenski compiles a groundbreaking volume on democratisation processes across Asia, Africa and the Middle East. This unique text presents Russian scholarship on the intricacies of non-western political processes, covering a commendable array of historical and cultural drivers of non-western political development.

Central to the book is the concept of non-western democracy. Is it possible? Can western democracy as we know it flourish in the non-western world? How do the existing political cultures in Asia, Africa and the Middle East shape the prospects for western democracy? With evident historical failures to establish western democracy (read liberal democratic ideals) in a range of states across Asia, Africa and the Middle East, this text sheds light on how the unique political-cultural characteristics of the non-western world are overall non-conducive to the western democratic model. Instead, this volume illustrates that across various regions there is a different democratic model emerging through a process of modernisation, which is distinctively different to the western model. In this text, Russian scholars ingeniously map an emerging system of non-western democracy.

Voskressenski tackles a subject traditionally infused with ideology and yet presents a nuanced assessment of why and how processes of modernisation don't always lead to westernisation. The Russian perspective on this, as presented by this volume, is simply that the non-western world is not geared towards western democracy due to cultural divergences. What follows in the text are evidenced and well-argued case studies spanning Asia, Africa and the Middle East which ultimately have the reader questioning existing beliefs and assumptions of democracy. The volume begins with, amusingly for Australians, a foreword by former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd. Rudd commends Voskressenski's ability to frame democracy

as not solely a western concept, noting that successful democracies indeed exist on every continent.

This volume establishes the parameters of the eastern and western political worlds more broadly—noting the world's largest democracy (India) is considered a non-western nation. Voskressenski highlights the importance of comparative political science—an area of study in decline to the detriment of security scholars. There is an assessment of the correlation between economic development (processes of modernisation included) and the impact on political culture and therefore democracy in the non-western world. Strezhneva and Yefimova delve into political culture more broadly to determine the divergences between east and west to map how democracy forms and functions in different ways in the non-western world.

Yemelyanov's chapter focuses on the political systems and political culture of states within Africa. In assessing processes of European colonialism and the ensuing historical evolution of African political regimes, Yemelyanov illustrates how this part of the non-western world has developed a political culture distinctly wedded to history and a system of cultural identity with some elements of western democracy. Epstein delves into the features of the political system and political culture unique to the state of Israel—the sole democratic nation in the near east. A chapter by Kudryashova offers a comparative analysis of the development of political systems in Turkey, Egypt, Iran and Iraq. Looking at how these states organise authority and determine their political identity is an important undertaking in order to determine democratic development potential. For Kudryashova, modernisation is neither a linear nor a determining process and her chapter illustrates how the Islamic world continues to rely on historical-cultural drivers to structure their political systems. Further, Sapronova's chapter deals with the political systems of Arab states and the factors influencing the formation and functioning of these systems. Laletin focuses on the Afghani state development and the role of tribes in political systems. This chapter provides a unique assessment of Afghanistan's state development processes over the past almost two and a half centuries.

Lunev looks to the political processes and system developments in Central Asia following the break-up of the USSR. Most of these states proclaim themselves to be sovereign, democratic, secular and law-respecting republics. Lunev delves into the Central Asian variant of democracy—indeed unlike the western variant. In dealing with Eastern Asia, Lunev partners with Alayev to unpack the political culture of India. Koldunova and Yefimova then present an assessment of the political systems of South East Asia. Of interest is their study of Singapore, which they argue uses the western democratic model as a façade to hide authoritarian traditions “characteristic of the political culture of Confucian civilization”. For Koldunova and Yefimova, South East Asia represents hybrid political cultures which only very generally ever adhere to western democratic

models, as they are forever constrained by nationally specific political cultures.

We are reminded of the Mongol Empire by Luzyanin who looks to the evolution of political systems and political culture in Mongolia. The 1990 democratic revolution has endured and, as Luzyanin illustrates, Mongolia's variant of democracy embodies a synthesis of traditional Mongol as well as modern western values and has managed to mould them into a non-western democratic model. The Korean Peninsula's unique political systems are examined by Denisov in his fascinating chapter which delves into the past fifty years of divergent political system development in the case of the ROK and DPRK. Voskressenski rounds out the volume with a study on the evolution of political institutions in China, which is of great interest to security scholars pondering the future of the so-called liberal democratic rules-based order.

Voskressenski leaves us to question the value of typologising political systems and of holding western democracy as the gold standard. This volume challenges policymakers and interdisciplinary academics to really delve into the idea that there is potentially more than *one* democratic political form. In doing so, this engaging (perhaps contentious) book illustrates how the concept of democracy has been exploited for ideological gain (the West versus 'other') when it should instead be unpacked to recognise the sheer diversity of global democratic political models. This volume serves as a blueprint for understanding non-western states and for navigating the ever-evolving international political arena.

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