

Mistakes of democracy

By [Amy Frykholm](#)

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One of the most interesting posts on Middle East expert Juan Cole's extensive blog is his [advice](#) to fledgling Arab democracies on how to build a democracy. He bases his advice on ten mistakes that he thinks Americans have made in the formation and perpetuation of our democracy.

For example, at this formative moment, Arab nations can avoid television advertisements for and against candidates; they can set a day for free elections that is fair to working people (Tuesdays were enacted in the United States, Cole argues, to *discourage* people from voting); they can enact a bill of rights that has updated understandings of technology and the kinds of interferences that governments can make in the lives of citizens.

Cole's litany of what has gone wrong with American democracy--our enormous prison population and our capitulation to the economic interests of the wealthy top among them--is depressing, but it behooves us to listen. "You are young," Cole says to the Arab world, "and you still weep at the thought of freedom, and of those who died for it." If the Arab world is able to create strong and free democracies, we will have much to learn from them.