**Panel 13**

**Public Policing the Middle East: Exploring the Micro-Foundations of Regime Persistence in the Arab World**

*Directors*

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During the last three years, political landscapes of the Middle East have undergone sweeping changes, the outcomes of which remain uncertain. The popular uprisings of 2010-2011 ignited a series of political changes, modifying political scenes, regimes, and their opponents. While the dynamics and effects of mass politics have received significant attention from researchers and the media, far less attention has been devoted to how Arab regimes have responded when confronted with the resurgence of politics from below. In order to assess regime dynamics, this panel will welcome theoretically-informed, first-hand inductive research into regime adaptations and modes of resilience in the Arab world, including transformations of regime practices linked to their efforts to repress and contain the effects of mass politics.

The panel will address two core questions. One concerns empirical evidence: the amplitude and profoundness of the “earthquake” needs assessment. In other words, researchers on the region have to investigate how regimes coped with the uprisings, how they can assess the impact of reform trends on their ability to face the “wave” or reuse it to reform in order to sustain themselves, and how incumbents have set in motion policies in order to deal with the post-December 2010 Middle East. The second concerns theoretical coherence. Regime responses to the resurgence of mass politics poses new questions about both the applicability of transitology and its limits, and about how the theoretical trajectory of the “post-transitology” turn should unfold. As autocracies have persisted across the region, despite the uprisings, regime adaptations to pressures for political and economic reform come to be seen not as indicators of potential openings, but as markers of authoritarianism transformed: practices of authoritarian governance that appropriated the forms of liberalization as elements of regime renewal.

*The Limits of Transitology and the Post-Transitology Turn*

For much of the 1990s, the assumptions underlying transitology shaped research programs on prospects for political change in the Arab world, despite a growing unease among scholars of the region about the appropriateness of the fit between Arab cases and the models generated to account for transitions to democracy in other world regions.

Despite the prominence of transitology-inflected analysis, numerous studies describing different aspects of authoritarian reconfiguration appeared in the 2000s. From Morocco to Egypt and the Gulf, regimes were found to be undergoing profound reforms as a precondition for their own persistence. The strategic use of elections, democracy, human rights, and IMF economic recipes, to say nothing of the global war on terror, have been turned from constraints into resources by ruling elites determined to stay in power. The way regimes coped with their opposition – a mix of repression, divide and rule strategies, cooptation, tolerance, and arbitrary clamp downs, and, significantly, the “promotion” of civil societies that have increasingly become appendages of the state – all came to be seen as elements of authoritarian renewal. Throughout the region, emergent patterns of popular mobilization were effectively integrated into the new disciplines of regimes, blunting their potential to challenge the architecture and authoritarian weft of regimes. Despite the Washington-based expectations of democratic transformations led by reinvigorated Arab private sectors, the link between business and democracy is proving no less tenuous than that between civil society and democracy.

*The Challenges of Post-Transitology*

The possibilities for fruitful investigation expand dramatically once we stop perceiving authoritarian persistence through the lens of a democratizing world, nevertheless the development of post-transitology research programs must still wrestle with meaningful analytic and conceptual challenges. The question we confront is not one of missing variables, or of too few cases and too many variables (Bellin, 2004), since authoritarian reforms have proven to be sufficiently widespread and sufficiently varied to permit robust comparative analysis. Nor is it a matter, as Anderson (2006) suggests, of “inversion:” simply taking the variables that we used to explain failures of democracy, turning them upside down, and applying them to explain authoritarian persistence. Rather, the analytic center of gravity of a focus on persistence and reform of authoritarianism draws our attention toward theoretically informed, inductive modes of analysis – research anchored in a keen interest in what is happening on the ground; an appreciation for the complexity evident in new practices of authoritarian governance; but also an awareness of the extent to which such practices can be framed in terms of emergent models, with elements that express degrees of similarity with authoritarian trajectories visible in a wide range of regimes. The issue is how we can investigate different processes of authoritarian reform and how this generates comparative analytic resources.

*The Social Sciences and MENA: Toward Two-way Interactions*

Much of the work devoted to the region uses case studies to validate existing theories (when “theory” or broader social sciences are discussed) and parts of it lack first-hand empirical content. The idea of the panel proposed here would be to define how the MENA can be useful to social sciences at large, as a site for research that does not only “test” paradigms, but also enriches them on various topics, including the formation of expertise, policy transfer, mobilization of international resources, governance and its links with authoritarianism, to say nothing of privatization and modes of economic governance.

The idea that MENA's social processes, formations, forms, etc. can be approached using analytic frameworks that have been developed by counterparts to explore related phenomena in other settings (but via case-studies rather than via cross-case or cross-regional comparisons) has some value, but is often limited. We define this as a one-way flow, in which scholars appropriate conceptual or analytic frameworks developed in a discipline and explore their application to MENA cases.

Another strategy, one we feel has particular promise when applied to questions of authoritarian restructuring, would consist of a critical discussion between social scientists of MENA and the disciplines. In such an exchange, MENA scholars would focus precisely on those aspects of their cases that confound the general categories or conceptual frameworks developed on the basis of non-MENA experiences, and make an effort to explore the critical implications of their findings for these general categories or frameworks. They would map the gaps in theory and where it is irrelevant for their fieldwork. At the same time, they would make critical use of theory to highlight new enigmas and provide new problems and questions for the rest of the discipline. In that way, research on MENA is not just consuming the frameworks developed elsewhere in an un-reflexive fashion, but making sure that MENA experiences inform the general understandings that shape how research programs in the discipline develop more broadly.

*Investigating Authoritarian Reform*

Early conceptualizations of authoritarian regimes (e.g. Linz, 1975) were more eager to classify regimes or situate authoritarian rules in a continuum between totalitarian and democratic regimes than to examine the means of domination in these political situations, if we set apart various uses of violence as way to limit pluralism and contain mobilization. Because it is such a “real fact,” domination in authoritarian situations deserves the attention of social sciences. By-and-large, our knowledge of the various recipes of authoritarian reform or stabilization has progressed (Schlumberger, 2007) during the past few years, yet the uprisings call for renewed investigations about their backstage elaboration, implementation, and systemic implications. In other words, the question remains opened about the practices that constitute domination and how they work in these situations.

If we aim at understanding how regimes maintain a starting point could be to understand them as “a set of sectors which sustain relations and transactions with each other, hierarchically organized and for this reason form a system” (Camau, Geisser, 2003). The question of policy making in the MENA – the way public policies are designed and implemented, the actors involved in this activity, their resources and careers, the tools they use for this purpose – will enlighten the relation of these policies with questions of resource allocation, domination, and regime maintenance, and at the same will reveal global trends.

One area where integration between MENA cases and social sciences could have payoffs, concerns the literature on modes of capitalism, or more recently on capitalist diversity and the "recombinant" properties of modes of capitalism (see Crouch, 2005). A second concerns the production of social policy and social provision, a field which is very poorly developed in MENA. A third would be literatures on the practices of authoritarian governance that have emerged in relation to cases in other world regions, where we see attention to, for instance, the role of courts and law in authoritarian governance. A fourth would be on practices of authoritarian learning and the global diffusion of authoritarian practices (e.g. repression and the policing of protest). A fifth related area for engagement could be the role of international variables in the production and reproduction of authoritarian governance. Exploring how MENA regimes take advantage of their international environment situates the analysis at the crossroad of capitalist transformations and emergent approaches to economic development. The support or the “promotion” of authoritarianism does not rely only on bringing out material resources be they financial, military, or subsidized food, however. These are well-known ingredients of the recipe of regime maintenance and ruling coalition building or strengthening. The international environment provides also cognitive resources – models of governance, modes of action, political mantras – which are less imposed than hybridized and accommodated in the different political settings of the region. If the relation between the Arab world and globalization is no more something new (Springborg, Moore 2001), there are some intellectual payoffs to be add in exploring how global prescriptions and modes of action are transformed into power technologies and their effects for domination: in other words how discourses, policy instruments, and specific political groups are linked together in frameworks of domination in specific sectors of activity (Kohstall, 2006). Given their obvious and massive effects on economic and social policies, economic privatizations have deserved much of scholars’ attention while other reforms (education, health, housing, human rights, and justice) could be revealing.

A second point of entry that offers potential for analytic gains begins with the extraordinary proliferation of theories of authoritarian persistence in MENA that have emerged in the last decade, and how researchers might systematically test their competing claims. The expanding number of competing arguments about persistence of autocracy is an issue both of real interest but also, for the organizers of the panel, of real concern. Unlike our counterparts who studied bureaucratic authoritarianism in Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s, where a committed group of scholars interacted over the course of 10-15 years, developing and testing theories and working collectively to explain an important phenomenon through a coherent focus and a clearly-elaborated research program, what we have seen among scholars of authoritarianism in the Arab world is quite different. The study of Arab authoritarianism –and we are referring to the post-transitology turn in this field – has been marked by fragmentation, a lack of engagement among scholars with similar interests, the proliferation of competing theories, and no effort to test theories against one another or against careful assessment of empirical data. As a result, research on persistence shows much activity, but relatively little accumulation of knowledge (Mahoney and Reuschemeyer 2003).

*Objectives of the Panel: Toward Micro-Foundations*

The intent of the panel is to strengthen linkages between research that focuses on local processes of authoritarian restructuring and comparative research on contemporary transformations of economic and political governance. Contributors should make explicit the implications of their findings for theoretical debates in the disciplines, including – but not limited to – debates about: hybrid regimes, hyphenated forms of authoritarianism, state-society relations under autocracy, post-welfare social policies, comparative capitalisms, labor market and social policy reform, institutions and governance, corruption, state violence and human security, and others that hold promise in generating comparative, theoretically-engaged research on the micro-foundations of authoritarian persistence.

*Publication Plan*

January 2015 SeSaMO Conference : discussion of the book proposal, design of the book architecture, discussion of potential participants

January-May 2015 : book proposal redrafting, contact to participants

May-September 2015: first draft of the introduction, writing of substantial chapters summaries (3-4 pages).

September 2015-October 2015: compilation of summaries and redirection of chapters (when necessary), second draft of the introduction.

November 2015: book proposal submission (ECPR Press, ECPR/OUP Comparative Politics Series, Stanford University Press, Cambridge Comparative Series in Political Science, UCLA Press).