**Panel 7**

**Electoral frameworks and party systems in the Persian Gulf after the Arab Spring**

*Chairs:*

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*Objectives and rationale of the proposed panel*

The panel aims to examine the effects of popular mobilisations around the MENA region on Gulf countries (including the GCC, Yemen, Iran and Iraq), and in particular how protests and mobilisations impacted the electoral systems, the elections outcomes, and the party systems in the Gulf area. This is relevant as the Arab Uprisings and all the different dynamics they originated (from armed conflicts in Libya and Syria to sustained mobilisation in Turkey) had a strong impact on the countries around the Gulf. This is not only valid for countries which had actual mobilisations such as for instance Bahrain, but also for countries such as Iran, where a broad and nation-wide mobilisation took place in 2009, well-before the protests erupted in Tunisia. No matter how strong and diffuse the mobilisation was, in Gulf countries elections became a mechanism to face (and manage) discontent or the fear of discontent. Ornamental reformism and constitutionalism, partial openings of the electoral process and political inclusion through elections seemed to be the strategies preferred by the rulers around the Gulf.

Following on from these initial reflections, the panel aims to answer the following questions: how to describe the reaction that single rulers in the Gulf had when facing the fear of popular mobilisation? Are there similar patterns? Is Iran standing as an exception here? What is the significance of Rouhani’s election, in the context of the post-Uprisings MENA region? What was the reaction of political factions or parties to the Uprisings? Is there any evidence of linkage between intra-elite conflicts and electoral engineering? How to describe the reaction of local and political constituencies to electoral politics? Were the GCC and Yemen’s electoral processes significant enough in order to prove the rulers’ desires for reform? And ultimately, how to examine the linkage between electoral politics and authoritarian stability?

*Research dissemination*

We plan to turn the panel into a journal special issue. The special issue will be proposed to a highly-ranked ISI journal. We envision submitting a special issue proposal to ‘Democratization’ as soon as we will be satisfied by the single papers’ quality.

*Anticipated papers*

We are looking for theoretically strong and empirically grounded papers. Ideally, we would like to receive comparative papers, but also single country examinations fitting our broader research questions are welcome. Papers comparing same type of elections (local or legislative) across different countries are welcome. Of special interest will be papers based on empirical observations.