Dynamics of Change in the Gulf and Maghreb

States in both the Gulf and the Maghreb have confronted considerable uncertainty in the 2010s. States have faced political upheaval, economic uncertainty, social and demographic pressures, and complex security environment with both state and non-state threats. This panel examines how states in both regions have grappled with these challenges as well as how citizens have responded to state actions. A diverse set of panelists engage with issues of political economy and reform, innovation, security, popular movements, and political change from disciplinary perspectives that include security studies, political economy, and history.

Contributions from Samuel Greene and Sobhon Khairy and Dania Thafer both consider the challenges of economic reform in the Gulf in the context of political and societal challenges. Greene and Khairy examine factors from domestic politics and societies as well as regional geopolitics that have undermined attempted economic reform initiatives. The paper argues that without sustained political commitment to difficult changes, these conditions will continue to stymie reform. Thafer’s paper considers the implications of close relations between the state and business sector for economic policy. She explores how sociopolitical factors have shaped economic development in the region and the implications of this context on the youth bulge in Gulf states.

Nathan Toronto and A.J. Nolte’s contributions both draw on the security situation in the region to expand on broader lessons. Toronto explores the links between military innovation and human capital via a case study of the United Arab Emirates. Drawing from his book manuscript in innovation, his work considers the implications of a model that relies on importing human capital for innovation. Nolte’s paper studies Qatar as a case from which to explore the concept of ideational security. He considers how an ideas-based model can explain Qatar’s attempt to triangulate between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

In the Maghreb, Elizabeth Perego’s contribution considers how references and codes used in the current protest movement in Algeria fit in the country’s complex historical and social context. This contribution both considers the relevance of past history as well as unique aspects of the current movement. Greene and Perego’s paper compares the current transition in Algeria with the Arab Spring events in Tunisia and Egypt as well other key examples from the literature on political transitions. They use both transition type as well as case specific details including study of military ownership of property and autonomy as well as the ideology and quality of political actors to predict the likely trajectories of the Algerian case.

Contributors and Provisional Paper Titles:

Samuel Greene (Shepherd University) and Sabhon Khairy (Pilot44 Labs), “The Limits of Economic Diversification in Gulf Cooperation Council States: Geopolitics, Economics, and Security”
Dania Thafer (American University and Gulf International Forum),


Elizabeth Perego (Shepherd University), “Popular Mobilization and History as Code in the Algerian 2019 Hirak Movement”

AJ Nolte (Regent University) “Ideational Security: The Case of Qatar”

Samuel Greene and Elizabeth Perego (Shepherd University), “The Algerian Transition in Comparative Context”

Note: this could be one panel or two depending on available space—the Maghreb papers can be split from the Gulf papers, resulting in one panel with 4 papers from the Gulf and one with two papers on the Maghreb. In this case we could also add a relevant single submission to the Maghreb panel. In the event of a six paper panel, I will serve as chair/coordinator. If we split, I will nominate other members as chairs.