

CALL FOR PAPERS

20-22 October 2016, Tunis



International Conference



Regime Transformation and the Recomposition of Elites in the Arab World After 2010-2011:

A Comparative Approach

The aim of this conference is to analyze the re-composition of “elites”, in the particular context of the Arab world after the 2010-2011 uprisings and in the wake of regime changes, whether they occurred following a popular uprising, a revolution or a coup. The conference will focus on elites in key sectors, in particular in the political arena, amongst members of political parties, but also on elites in other public services such as defense, security, justice, economy, culture, media and within the intellectual sphere. Particular attention will be devoted to the construction of a new political elite. Following a comparative approach, including cases such as Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, etc., the goal of the conference is to contribute to understanding the dynamics between radical political transformation processes and the State’s leading actors, i.e. how do elites affect those processes and how does regime change affect the elites in return.¹

What elites do to regime transformation processes

Elites have played a major role in the process of regime transformation in Arab countries, albeit quite differently. Whereas some have contributed passively, by waiting and refraining from interfering, other politicians from the regime in place took directly part in the political process. Civil society representatives were also involved in shaping the transformation process in several Arab countries after the uprisings, such as Tunisia. Other

¹The seminar is building on the academic work on authoritarianism in Arab societies, which insists on elite configurations and roles : Perthes Volker (ed.), *Arab Elites : Negotiating the Politics of Change*, Boulder CO, Lynne Rienner, 2004 ; Camau Michel, Geisser Vincent, *Le syndrome autoritaire. Politique en Tunisie de Bourguiba à Ben Ali*, Paris, Presses de sciences po, 2003.

examples include the political role of military leaders in Egypt, the commitments of several of Egyptian intellectuals and media elites alongside the social movement or in favor of the army; the resistance and mobilizations of networks of Khadafi supporters during the civil war and the foreign intervention in Libya; or the establishment of a “pact between elites” in Yemen. A research gap also exists in better understanding how (and why) authoritarian leaders have acted during the “revolutionary situation”.

To grasp developments in the Arab world since 2010-2011, it therefore seems necessary to better understand how the emergence of a critical process of political transformation enlists all or parts of the regime’s elite, favors the emergence of new elites involved in the protests, and consolidates or breaks the collusive transactions between various fractions of established elites.

What a “revolution” does to elites

One of the features of a regime change is that it is accompanied by a redefinition of the boundaries of legitimate political and administrative actors: all or parts of the elite of the former regime are disqualified, while new actors emerge. These can include, in varying proportions from one country and from one era to another, politicians from the old regime. Are we witnessing a renewal or a reproduction of former elites in politics, economy, security, culture, media, etc., both quantitatively and qualitatively? Which sectors are the most “renewed” ones? What are the practical modalities of these transformations (such as political decisions, demonstrations, social and media pressure)? What kind and degree of resistance against this restructuring of past elites can be observed in the different sectors concerned?

Emergence of new players and making of a political staff

Five years after the wave of protests in the Arab world, new elites have emerged due to the institutionalization of pluralism, the reconstruction of the positions of power and the electoral process, in particular in countries where democracy has been institutionalized such as in Tunisia. Who are these “new” elites and to which extent are they really “new”? What are the social and political profiles of the post-revolutionary political staff in the relevant transitional institutions such as the High Instance for Political Reform and the Realization of the Goals of the Revolution in Tunisia (2011), but also among deputies, government teams, and political organizations? What are means and ways of access to become part of this new elite? What are the changes in the balance of power between the various elites and within the same category of elite that took place in countries where restorative tendencies are observed?

The collapse of an authoritarian regime, even if partially or symbolically reconstituted in the transformation process, is likely to lead to the emergence of new practices and to the introduction of new standards in the exercise of political representation. How do politicians (but also other elites such as the media) “learn” political competition and electoral competition? How do members of Parliament apprehend their representative role and how do they contribute to the social re-definition of political roles? Do specific groups (such as members of the former opposition, or of the former ruling party, or former marginalized actors such as the Islamists and victim groups) learn and evolve specifically in adapting to the (new) formal and informal rules which regulate the functioning of institutions and of the public arena in general? Which political profiles do emerge from this new state of political configuration, leading to “plutocratic” tendencies or to a “notabilization” of politics, in particular at the local level?

Re-composition and conversions of cadres of the old regime

The “Arab awakening” has shaken, sometimes up to collapse, the authoritarian regimes which for the most part were institutionalized after the independence. Everywhere, these protests, even if they did not result in true regime change, were a test for the elites in place: politicians, senior officials, economic and cultural elites had to adapt to a situation they had not anticipated, and where their power position appeared as more fragile. How did this adaptation take place? How do “old elites” re-position themselves in countries experiencing the progressive institutionalization of democracy, in countries with an authoritarian backlash or in countries that have slid into civil war?

The conference will seek to understand if categories of “established elites” trajectories, depending on their previous position, on the sector of elites they belong to, or on the evolution of the post-authoritarian context, can be defined. What forms of re-composition and re-positioning took place in these periods? Which means were used by the new elites (such as “downgrading” of the old ones, for instance through early retirement in the public sector) or by the old elites themselves (such as “converting” to democracy)? More generally, in what form and by what means do these groups survive to the collapse (or transformation) of the regime? Are there any specific criteria (human rights screening, truth-telling, public apologies...) adopted to allow for this reintegration of former regime representatives, especially in key sectors such as justice and security, and if so, who defines and who negotiates this “vetting” processes? What effect do “political exclusion laws” have had in those various transformation processes?

Redefinition of legitimacy

These questions lead to the problem of legitimacy, and of setting standards of legitimacy in “post-revolutionary” or transformative politics. This problem can be considered at several levels. First, it involves the relationship between the social composition of representative assemblies, representation practices and revolutionary perspectives: are the elites, for example, representative of the territories from where the social protests have emerged, such as in Tunisia? Furthermore, the partial reproduction of the elites of the old regime raises deeper questions of legitimacy, and accountability including through processes of “transitional justice”. Finally, a renewal of the political personnel does not necessarily imply a transformation of the criteria of political legitimacy, as for example the social logic of political recruitment.

Objectives of the conference

The conference aims to map the research on elites/transformation, to cross, and make more accessible the knowledge produced on this topic in various disciplines, such as political science, sociology, anthropology and history. It will bring together individual researchers and research teams working on this issue, in order to confront theoretical perspectives and empirical data, and to promote a methodological discussion on the best manners to analyze elite dynamics in the context of regime transformation. The conference aims at promoting a comparative analysis on who are the elites and what they do in such contexts in order to better understand the political and social transformations that have shaken the Arab world since 2010-2011. By adopting the angle of their composition of elites perspective, the seminar will go beyond the logics of well-established, but often insufficient classifications (such as democracy vs. authoritarianism), and propose instead an analysis from the inside, through the perspective of key actors within the political configurations.

The expected contributions of the conference should focus on the Arab world. Discussants specialized on other cultural areas and historic periods, however, will be invited in order to encourage comparative debates.

Keywords

politicians, senior civil and economic elites, revolution, regime change, democratic transition, retraining, legitimacy, renewal, social reproduction, political crisis, circulation patterns.

Organisation

The conference is jointly organized by the Institut de recherche sur le Maghreb contemporain (IRMC) and the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS). Coordinator: Jérôme Heurtaux, PSL Research University, Paris-Dauphine University, IRISSE-CNRS, Research Institute on Contemporary Maghreb (IRMC), Tunis. Working languages are French and English.

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Calendar

10 June 2016	Launch of the call for papers
16 July 2016	Deadline for proposals
30 July 2016	Communication of the list of selected proposals
1 October 2016	Deadline for sending communications
20-22 October 2016	Conference

To apply

Send an abstract of the paper (500-1500 words) and a CV to jheurtaux@yahoo.fr and clement.perarnaud@irmcmaghreb.org before **16 July 2016**. Please see the IRMC website for an extended version (in French) of the call for papers.

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