

Youth politics in the MENA: Democracy support from the ground up

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What is populism?

- Three features *combined* (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017; Müller 2017):
 - Anti-elitism
 - Anti-pluralism
 - Morally and/or symbolically driven (as opposed to empirically)
 - ‘The people’ vs corrupt elite
- Whether a phenomenon can be defined as populist is also largely context bound.

The political context

- Theoretically, populism is most fundamentally juxtaposed to liberal democracy.
- Populism in illiberal settings
 - Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017): is or aspires to be.
 - Mounck (2018): crisis of liberal democracy and the rise of liberalism: illiberal regimes democratic.
 - Democracy: a set of binding electoral institutions that effectively translates popular views into public policy.
 - Democracy: majority rule.

The political context continued

- The importance of defining regime types
 - Debate in MENA studies: subtype of democracy or authoritarianism?
 1. Apples and oranges
 2. Lending legitimacy to competitive authoritarianism
 3. Context matter for how regimes operate
 - Definition of democracy here: regular RCE w universal suffrage, BCL and PR, EPG of the elected government.

Populism in the MENA: the roots of the problem

- Why the MENA?
 1. Illiberal, competitive authoritarianism, most hostile to democracy: understudied. Misunderstood?
 2. Also: Arab Uprisings: level and intensity; global interest
- Context: global surge of populism plus regional factors, most notably political instability and the 'youth bulge'.

Roots continued

- Young people have lost faith in political parties, in particular. Dissatisfaction and lack of trust.
- Problematic re:Schattschneider (1942: 1).
- MENA population, especially youth, shares the misgivings w democracy voiced by the citizenry elsewhere in countries plagued by populism.
- The role of parties: fueling the fire.
 - Distributors of spoils with a view to minimize dissent.
 - ‘Wasta’ key at election time.

Roots continued

- While in the West this state of affairs, where people are effectively becoming non-sovereign and democracy is gradually becoming stripped of its popular element as Mair (2005: 1) puts it, is relatively new, in the MENA it is simply a reflection of the status quo.
- Hence, the frustration with parties and the functioning of democracy consequently has different roots and targets in the two contexts.

Popular attitudes in the MENA

- WVS, Arab Barometer, Sahwa, P2Y, etc. plus interviews
- Anti-elitism in the MENA
 - Arab Uprisings and anti-elite sentiment
 - Bread, freedom and dignity
 - Not call for democracy
 - No problem with technocrats (WVS2013:V128): different to the West and popular grievances w so-called 'experts' (Mair 2013)
- Not feeling represented, included and heard
 - Interest in politics
 - Langauge of politics
 - How parties view youth
 - MENA parties: elitist and under-developed

Popular attitudes continued

- The crux of the matter: corruption in all spheres of society
 - 1. Elites amassing wealth
 - 2. *Wasta*
- 2nd most important feature of democracy
- Qualified for political leadership
- Most important challenge facing the country
- 2nd most important challenge
- Government effort to eliminate corruption
- Levels of corruption
- Corruption in state institutions and agencies
- Personal experiences: job and *wasta*

Popular attitudes continued

- The Arab Uprisings did not deliver
 - Not belittling astonishing achievements
 - Impact on the daily lives of many people in areas of high importance to them personally: not improved, but worsened.
 - Expectations perhaps unrealistic, but they are real.
 - Tunisia in Jan. 2018 is one example.
 - Protesters taking to the streets, not via parties. Tired of middle men. Gate keepers. This is the window for populists (Müller 2017).
 - Role of social media in populism: Trump and Grillo. Enormous potential in the MENA.

Popular attitudes continued

■ Anti-pluralism

- The picture is much less clear
- Never highly pluralistic nor free:
 - Colonialism
 - Authoritarian legacy
- Tentative openings of the 1990s: very limited
- Rights curtailed: them versus us justification accepted
- Nationalist rhetoric
 - Secular (moving out the Islamists: Egypt and Tunisia)
 - Islamo- (Egypt and Turkey)

Anti-pluralism continued

- Justification for abuses of power: national interest
- Longevity: people do not question it.
- NB! Not because they are keen on the idea of a strong leader or, indeed, military rule,
- ...but rather because they were concerned with issues of order and stability and, by extension, national identity, which remains a so-called boundary problem in many MENA states.