



المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات
Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies

ACRPS Winter School

Third Round: January 3 - 13, 2022

Concept Note



Introduction to the Winter School

Goals

The winter school aims to provide an in-depth and critical look at selected topics in the broader study of the Middle East. For participating early career scholars, it provides an opportunity to network with regional scholars, gain substantive knowledge and insight unavailable in their home institutions and countries, and receive feedback from respected scholars.

Target Audience

The winter school is a 10-day program from 3 - 13 January 2022, open to advanced graduate students and early career researchers in the social sciences and humanities.

General Theme of the Winter School

The theme of the 2022 Winter School is “Variations in Populism.” This theme was selected to reflect emerging research trends in a variety of social science disciplines and will generate a wide range of applicants. This theme will be approached from an interdisciplinary perspective, enriching the winter school and participant perspectives.

After decades of research within South American and European contexts, populism has gained more momentum during the last few years, particularly in the wake of the UK’s vote to withdraw from the EU in 2016 (Brexit), the election of Donald Trump in 2016, and the rise of particular political figures in India, Brazil, Philippines, and elsewhere. Such cases have been widely identified as examples of populism by analysts and the media. The success and failure of populist parties, populist discourse, psychological reasons for populist fervour became a subject of discussion and induced more academic research to study this phenomenon.

For a long time, scholars distinguished between different forms of populism. One distinction is based on geography, such as the Western European and the South American models of populism. There is also a distinction of left-wing versus right-wing forms of populism. Nevertheless, studying populism in the Global South and Arab region, where democracy is not consolidated or in some cases does not exist, poses unique challenges. How do we distinguish between populism and national development agendas of certain regimes in countries which struggle with underdevelopment? Often when populism is discussed – especially in the context of the Global South – there is a conflation between manifestations of far-right groups discourse, and populism. This leads to a question of definitions: is our conceptualization of populism being applied appropriately outside the global north?



The Arab region is no exception when it comes to populism. Emergent cases of populism differ from those experienced by other post-independence states. An example of this is the Tunisian case that fits the textbook definition of populism in well-established populism studies.

Arab scholarship on populism in particular has lagged behind. Aside from a few rare exceptions, populism has not been studied in depth in this region or by regional scholars. There are two possible explanations for this gap. First, populism in the Arab world manifests differently. Where party politics exist and elections hold, the closeness of the political system makes the emergence of any new political forces hardly conceivable. Moreover, the emergence of new political forces does not occur organically at the electoral level without state intervention. As such, populism may appear to be an irrelevant concept that has not piqued the attention of regional scholars.

A second possible explanation is that the way in which we measure this phenomenon in public opinion polling may give us an inaccurate assessment of populist trends in the region. In the Arab context, dissatisfaction with the government and a distrust of elites are not necessarily manifestations of populist sentiment. There is a great deal of dissatisfaction among the public, large divides between elites and wider society, and certain regimes shoulder a degree of illegitimacy. This could be interpreted as widespread populist sentiment using a blunt measure, when in reality the concept, rather than the measure, needs to be reassessed in the Arab context.

The relatively new “cases” raise theoretical and methodological challenges to the study of populism. Several questions need to be addressed. For instance, to what extent are the current definitions of populism adequate for analyzing these cases? Are the empirical tools developed to measure populist attitudes valid and comprehensive?

In order to address these questions, we propose a winter school that focuses on reconceptualizing and comparing populism across regions. Accordingly, we welcome submissions on populism across the globe, in a variety of contexts, from scholars specialized in different social science disciplines. Topics of discussion include, but are not limited to:

- Researching populism (definitions, concepts, models, measurements, discourses)
- Origins of populism in comparative perspective
- Intersections of ideology and populism
- Intersections of nationalism and populism
- Researching populism outside the Global North
- Analysis and comparisons of populist discourses
- Regime types and the emergence of populism
- Impact of populism on domestic and international politics



The winter school will feature regional and international lecturers and discussants to generate these much-needed discussions and provide participants with nuanced feedback and intellectual exchange. We invite early career academics working on this topic to apply, with a special interest to those whose work applies the concept to the Arab region.

Application Process

- Fill out the application form. This should be accompanied by a current CV and an abstract/research outline of the proposed paper you would bring to the winter school. The abstract should be no more than 500 words in length.
- It should also be accompanied by a letter of recommendation, the form for which is available on this website. Please send the recommendation form to your referee and have them send it directly to our academic committee directly.
- The Academic Committee will accept research proposals 30 October 2021. Please send all relevant materials to: winter.school@dohainstitute.org.
- The Academic Committee will notify all applicants about the status of their applications by email.
- Successful applicants should submit complete drafts of papers, between 5,000 and 8,500 words in length, 30 days before the conference begins. Submitted drafts must follow the ACRPS guidelines.
- **Funding is available for travel expenses on a competitive basis, and accommodation is provided for all participants. Given current circumstances this workshop may be moved online. We will keep applicants posted regarding developments.**