

Seminar

Can the Middle East Learn from Southeast Asia? A Comparative Analysis of Political Transitions in Volatile Regions

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Time: **4 pm – 5:30 pm**
Venue: **G4-702, AC1, City University of Hong Kong**

Abstract

Almost daily, headline news are dominated by the Middle East, a region that is embroiled in a very intense cross-border sectarian war. The latest incident involving the execution of Nimr al-Nimr, a notable Shiite cleric in Eastern Saudi Arabia, threatens to further disrupt the very fragile relations between and among countries in the region. In contrast, there are encouraging signs of democratic transitions, as in Myanmar despite indications of their fragility. Thailand's authoritarian resurgence is a worrying sign of the democratic reversals. In the Philippines and Indonesia, countries with relatively open political systems, transitions to democracy have been complete, albeit messy, flawed, and highly contested. What accounts for these differences? This seminar will discuss three salient factors: 1) a civil society infrastructure (or lack thereof); 2) military-civil society-business sector coalitions; and 3) management of inter-ethnic relations. If there are lessons that can be derived from the transitions in Southeast Asia, these are treated with caution and consideration given the differences in historical, social, political and economic contexts of both regions. The collective experience of Asia, however, should boost confidence in the Middle East and North Africa. While it is an experience of volatility in the wake of the Arab revolts, continued vigilance among Arab citizens and the international community could potentially result in the ultimate entrenchment of electoral politics and the long-term flourishing of civil society.

Short bio

Teresita Cruz-del Rosario is Senior Research Fellow at the Asia Research Institute (ARI), National University of Singapore. She has a background in Sociology, Social Anthropology and Public Administration from Boston College, Harvard University and New York University. Apart from peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters, her publications include a book entitled "The State and the Advocate: Development Policy in Asia" (Routledge UK 2014) and a forthcoming book entitled "Lost in Transition: Comparative Political Transitions in Southeast Asia and the Middle East" (Palgrave MacMillan forthcoming 2016). Her current research interests are in the broad field of Arabia-Asia historical and sociological connections, with specific foci on religious pluralism, religious conversion and diaspora, and comparative regional development.

All are welcome. Language: English

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