

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
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Call for Papers for a Special Issue of *The International Journal of Press/Politics*

“Media, Accountability and Dissent in the Middle East and North Africa”

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Manuscript submission deadline: 15 June 2020

This special issue aims to provide new research perspectives on the momentous upheavals that took place in the Middle East and North Africa in the past ten years by shedding light on the interactions between citizens, social movements, and different types of media actors. So far, the extensive scholarly focus on institutional politics and transitions’ paradigms has overshadowed the importance of micro-dynamics in understanding tumultuous political change in the Middle East and North Africa during and after the 2010 uprisings. The recent developments in 2019, with large street protests in Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Iraq, Sudan and Algeria demonstrate that change is mainly taking place outside mainstream politics and is not following traditional paradigms of democratization and resilient authoritarianism. We aim to shift scholarship on these subjects away from the meta-debate between paradigms to shed light on relevant actors involved in the trajectories of these transformation movements.

The media plays a crucial role in framing and communicating transitional politics. The ways in which these movements are framed and communicated have a considerable influence on their development and sometimes their outcomes. In transitional politics, political actors rely heavily on media, new and old, to gain influence. However, scholarly and policy research on the Arab uprisings in North Africa has neglected the institutional media’s role in framing these movements and their impact on shaping the dynamics and sometimes the outcomes of transition processes. This takes place as over-optimism regarding the impact of activism on powering change is being challenged by authoritarian regimes’ attempts to reclaim the digital space.

Beyond dichotomies of old and new, online and offline, liberal and authoritarian, diversity, interdependency and uncertainty define the emergent hybrid media and political systems across the region in this tumultuous phase of their history. While media hybridity is fuelling political hybridity, it is also increasing uncertainty. The relationship between various societal agents is governed by interdependence rather than dependence or independence, as demonstrated by the trajectories of these movements so far. This interconnectedness is an opportunity for creativity, including for dissenting agency, mainly

through its ability to expand pluralism and to challenge restrictive mainstream media and political structures. These dynamics are empowering dissenting agency, not only in digital medias but also in traditional newsrooms where a continuous struggle between journalistic roles and identities is taking place.

The ambivalent role of the media in both supporting and hindering democratic change is a key feature of uncertain and volatile transitions and tends to consolidate structures of violence rather than challenge them. Media antagonism reflects and reinforces political antagonism. The media agency in shaping transitional trajectories remains under-researched. This special issue aims to contribute to filling this gap by, among other things, giving more attention to the agentic power of journalists working in transitional contexts.

Communicating transitional conflicts takes place in a multi-layered complex media ecology where the binaries of old and new media are no longer relevant. In addition to the important processes of framing and agenda setting, the direct and indirect alliances between media and the institutions of power are crucial, as alliances contribute to shaping both media narratives and political processes in complex inter-dependent dynamics. This special issue will shed light on the role of institutional media in its independence with agents and dynamics in the wider political and societal system under uncertainty.

We aim to bring together scholarly expertise from different disciplines and parts of the world to reflect on the main dynamics and limitations of democratic transitions in the region with specific focus on the role of the media in shaping these processes. By so doing, we hope we will give voice to scholars from the region and we are particularly interested in submissions from them.

RESEARCH TOPICS

Possible topics include, but are not limited to, the following:

- The inner dynamics of transitional movements in the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) and their interplay with structures and agents' choices;
- The role of street protests and new forms of political mobilization from below: past, present and future;
- The influence of media practices on power relations in transitional contexts;
- Antagonistic pluralism and its implications for fragile processes of political change;
- Political representation in media: balance, bias and subjectivity;
- Journalistic agency in supporting forces of change or structures of conformity;
- Dilemmas and challenges that impact journalists' practices and the definition of professionalism in uncertain times;
- The complex and hybrid new media ecology and its impact on framing and communicating transitional conflicts;
- Disruptive political performance in the context of democratic transitions in the region and their media representation;
- Media policy and its impact on shaping journalistic practices and identities;

- The challenges of conducting research on these topics in MENA, including access to data and ethical obligations towards research participants and environments.

We welcome a broad range of contributions asking different questions and employing different methods. We particularly welcome contributions from scholars and researchers from the MENA region.

SUBMISSION INFORMATION

Manuscript submissions for this special issue are due on **15 June 2020**. Manuscripts should follow the IJPP submission guidelines (<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/journal/international-journal-presspolitics#submission-guidelines>). Submissions will be subject to a double-blind peer review process and must not have been published, accepted for publication, or under consideration for publication elsewhere.

Please note that, to ensure consistency, submissions will only be considered for peer review after the 15 June 2020 deadline has passed.

Authors interested in submitting their work are encouraged to contact the guest editors, Jonathan Hill (jonathan.n.hill@kcl.ac.uk) and Fatima el Issawi (feliss@essex.ac.uk) with questions.

EXPECTED TIMELINE

- Manuscript submissions: 15 June 2020
- First decision: 15 August 2020
- Manuscript revisions: 15 October 2020
- Final decision: 15 December 2020
- Online publication: January 2021
- Print publication: April 2021