

Letter from the Editor

2021 marks the final year of my tenure as Section Chair and Newsletter Chief Editor. I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to everyone who has contributed to the Section's activities over the last two years.

The Section continues to grow, welcoming new members from around the world and expanding its activities in support of their scholarly aspirations. We have supported two major initiatives to support junior scholars: the Section sponsors the MENA Junior Scholars Research Development Group, held in conjunction with the APSA Annual Meeting, which will be held virtually for its third annual session; and the Section supports the POMEPS Virtual Research Workshop, which has met almost twenty times since its launch last year and workshopped more than 60 papers. The Section has also expanded its annual awards, adding "Best Article in MENA Political Science" to the existing awards "Best Dissertation", "Best Book", and "Best Paper Presented to the APSA Annual Meeting"; the award winners will be profiled in the fall issue of the Newsletter.

This Newsletter is a critical part of the Section's activities. We take great pride in its rapid development into a widely read publication featuring a wide range of short essays and organized symposia of interest across our field. The Newsletter benefits from a very actively engaged, diverse and enthusiastic Editorial Board; new members are elected to join the Board every year, and we welcome self-nominations for consideration. In that context, we are delighted to announce the successful conclusion of a competitive search for a new editorial team to take the reins as of the Spring 2022 issue: Nermin Allam (Rutgers University), Gamze Çavdar (Colorado State University) and Sean Yom (Temple University). (See below for more on the new editorial team). The Newsletter will be in good hands!

This issue of the Newsletter begins with a short profile of the MENA Scholars Barometer, a new biannual survey of scholars of the region launched earlier this year by Shibley Telhami (University of Maryland) and myself, with the cooperation of the Section, the Middle East Studies Association and the Project on Middle East Political Science. My introduction of the project explains the methodology, presents some of the key findings of the first wave, and points out some intriguing differences in the responses from political scientists and other disciplines.

The Newsletter then presents a feature research essay by Shimaa Hatab (Cairo University). Ten years on from the eruption of the Arab Uprisings, Hatab urges adopting a cross-regional and historical perspective to help shed light on the post-uprisings' trajectories in the region's transitions. She uses these broad comparisons to highlight what is unusual and what is rather typical in the region's experience, and develops an alternative approach focused on the agency of actors and strategic interaction within the opposition.

Two rich, exciting symposia round out the Newsletter. The first, edited and introduced by Alexandra Blackman and Lama Mourad, surveys new research and methods in the rich terrain

of spatial studies. Alexei Abrahams (Harvard University) and Diana Greenwald (City College of New York) show how geospatial research can help complement other types of data in the study of Palestine. Christiana Parreira shows how satellite imagery and nighttime light data can be used to explore state capacity and service provision. Emily Scott discusses the use of GIS methods to inform the study and practice of humanitarian aid provision. Ashrakat Elshehawy explores the uses and availability of historical maps for political science research, while Ahmad Gharbieh presents a fascinating discussion of the assumptions behind mapmaking and the results of creative efforts to develop alternative approaches to mapping urban life. Finally, Julia Clark shows how data on changes in municipal boundaries which are not publicly available can be generated and used for political science research.

The second symposium, edited by Nermin Allam, Justin Gengler, Lisel Hintz and Noora Lori explores some critical dimensions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Sultan Alamer, Rana Mamdouh and Nathan Brown dissect the differences in Saudi and Egyptian responses to COVID-19 by examining their past experiences with infectious disease. Başak Yavçan digs deep into the local level to show the micropolitics of Turkey's response, while Aida Essaid shows the problems with assessing the Jordanian state response in refugee communities. Robert Kubinec finally offers thoughts on new methodological approaches which could strengthen the use of the online surveys to which many scholars have turned in the face of the inability to travel for research.

We hope you find this issue of the MENA Politics Newsletter as compelling and interesting as we do, and always welcome your feedback and suggestions for future articles and symposia.

Marc Lynch (Editor)

Prerna BalaEddy and Tessa Talebi (Assistant Editors)