

**Labor Transformation and Regime Transition:
Lessons from the Middle East and North Africa**

The *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* is calling for papers for a virtual workshop and subsequent publication devoted to work and employment relations in the Middle East and North Africa. Conference co-organizers Dina Bishara (Cornell) and Ian Hartshorn (University of Nevada, Reno) will assist the journal's regular editors in developing the Special Section.

Scholars interested in participating should submit an abstract of up to 500 words to the conference organizers by January 22, 2021. Authors whose abstracts are accepted will be invited to present a paper at a virtual workshop co-sponsored by the School of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell University and the Project on Middle East Political Science, to be held on April 29–30, 2021. Papers presented at this workshop should be substantially completed, but invited participants will have the opportunity to receive feedback from scholars of industrial relations and the politics of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) at the workshop. Based on this workshop, a subset of authors will be asked to submit their paper to the *ILR Review* to be considered for part of a special themed section in a future issue of the journal.

Overview

What can the Middle East and North Africa tell us about the new world of workers' movements? Despite its political and strategic importance, the MENA region has been largely absent from cross-regional comparative treatments of industrial relations and unionism. Although the dynamics of union decline and renewal have been at the center of scholarship on industrial relations, this conventional focus obscures important transformations in labor relations in the MENA and beyond. These transformations demonstrate new pathways for worker voice, including those among precarious groups, and new modes of organizing among the unemployed. They also highlight the changing role of unions in democratizing states and the continued struggle for representation in authoritarian regimes.

This Special Section offers the first systematic attempt to bring the study of labor in the MENA into conversation with international and comparative scholarship on industrial and labor relations. It also contributes a much-needed theoretically grounded, empirically rich, interdisciplinary approach to the study of labor in the MENA.

The MENA region provides an ideal opportunity to examine a wide variety of important labor relations and employment issues. First, the region features many types of labor–management–state relationships. Scholars have identified corporatist unions, union pluralism, union repression, and widespread wildcat strikes and independent organizing. Second, the region features a variety of regime types, including a high concentration of non-democratic regimes, making it possible to examine the effects of variation in political constraints on freedom of association and labor market conditions. Third, the MENA features higher youth unemployment rates than any other world region, high levels of internal migration, a comparatively large share

of public-sector employment, and a sizable informal economy. These conditions have important effects on state–labor relations, labor market dynamics, the mobilization of the unemployed, and the precarious nature of work.

The recent experiences of the MENA countries can shed light on several broader trends. Several countries were considered critical successes in structural adjustment programs, the legacies of which continue to affect state–labor relations today. These countries were also ahead of the curve for mitigation efforts, from social development funds to new forms of microlending. Countries in the region were also laboratories for matching flexible labor markets with limited social safety nets, prefacing much of the flexicurity discourse in wealthier countries today. Most pressingly, as more countries face rising anti-systemic parties and democratic backsliding, we see in MENA countries how unions and workers’ movements can be co-opted by authoritarian rule or at the forefront for movements of greater democracy.

We are especially interested in empirical submissions from scholars whose work is grounded in labor relations with diverse disciplinary perspectives from industrial relations, sociology, psychology, economics, or political science. Papers may be supported by a range of methodologies, including survey research, qualitative or quantitative case studies, or statistical analyses of archival data.

Potential topic areas include, but are not limited to:

- Labor unions with/against workers’ movements
- World of work beyond organizing
- Blue collar and white collar on the barricades: Different types of workers in unions, different types of workers’ unions
- Precarious or informal work
- Unemployment: Youth unemployment and the mobilization of the unemployed
- Labor markets or insider/outsider dynamics (political economy perspective)
- Female labor force participation
- Labor markets in the Gulf, with an emphasis on labor market conditions for citizens and migrants
- Employment opportunities and labor market conditions for migrants and refugees

Prospective contributors are urged to consult any of the coordinators regarding preliminary proposals or ideas for papers. To submit your extended abstract for consideration for the conference, please e-mail it to db833@cornell.edu by the January 22, 2021, deadline.