

Introduction

Governance in the Middle East

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This special issue of *The Innovation Journal: The Public Sector Innovation Journal* focuses on innovative measures in the Middle Eastern public sector by examining opportunities available for actors in governance to answer challenges through coordination, networking, and partnership that may facilitate innovation in both visions and practices. In this context, this issue observes public policy and administrative issues in Turkey, Morocco, Egypt, Syria, Israel, Libya, Palestine and Iraq in order to present an argument in favor of innovation in the public sector as key for sound governance in the Middle East.

Some of the articles in this volume were presented during the Inaugural Conference of the Association for Middle Eastern Public Policy and Administration (AMEPPA) held on November 8 and 9, 2012 at Al-Akawayne University in Ifrane, Morocco. As president of AMEPPA and the editor of this special issue, it is an honor and privilege to work and to be associated with such outstanding scholars who, through their expertise, analyses and experiences, shed important light on complex issues related to public service in the Middle East.

In this special issue, Michiel de Vries addresses trade-offs and dilemmas in citizens' responsibility for the development of policies where the basic right of each individual is respected while difficult choices can be made more democratically. His article, "The Challenge of Good Governance," examines governance as a concept that includes phenomena related to the steering of societal developments by societal actors through networks in which hierarchy hardly plays a role. According to de Vries, the term "good governance" is abused by using so many indicators that it becomes nearly impossible to achieve good governance. At the same time, many governments are also locked in conflicts of interests between trying to do the right things and doing the urgently needed things right. It is not self-evident that improving governance will result in a reduction in societal and managerial problems. The innovations may provide short term responses to serious governance deficits, but may not provide long term solutions to them.

Warigia Bowman and L. Jean Camp explore the interaction between Internet communications, activists, and the state in Egypt, Syria, Libya, Uganda and northern Sudan. Their paper, "Protecting the Internet from Dictators: Technical and Policy Solutions to Ensure Online Freedoms," addresses the following problem: Under what conditions are authoritarian regimes able to disrupt Internet traffic in situations of a popular uprising, and what can be done to prevent it? Bowman and Camp illustrate that there are three critical variables in this interaction: redundancy in communications, distribution of power across organizations and individuals and geographic localities, and state regulation. They argue for a more resilient, redundant network and propose policies that can be implemented in more open states with greater influence on the development of the network. Finally, the authors illustrate that the same investments that empower dissidents actually strengthen the Internet for commerce and government, and against unauthorized attacks.

In my article, “The Middle East and Learning from Brazil, Russia, India, and China (BRIC),” I assert that the Arab Spring is a populous movement that is shifting the Middle East toward sound governance. The basic principles of such governance reside in freedom, transparency, accountability, civic engagement, and economic prosperity. The impact of the movement not only is measured on regional levels but also globally, such as in inspiring movements such Occupy Wall Street and Russia’s Democratic movement. While Turkey, Israel, and the United Arab Emirates (TIE) provides successful economic and administrative models for the region, the Middle East can also benefit from other successful developing countries’ models, especially those presented by Brazil, Russia, India, and China. In this paper I explore the opportunities and challenges in applying the BRIC models to the Middle East, overcoming cultural barriers, and bridging successful models in the global efforts to eradicate violence, hunger, dysfunctional administrative practices and in promoting peace and prosperity based on cooperation, networking, dialogue, and sound governance.

Samir Rihani argues in “Middle Eastern Countries in Suspended Animation: Defective Complex Adaptive Systems,” that locally driven long-term evolution is the only sustainable way forward. There are no shortcuts to good performance. Middle Eastern nations will have to work hard to recapture high level performance that they enjoyed in the distant past. He outlines the behavior of complex adaptive systems and conditions needed for such nations to attain a state of evolving self-organization that does not need top-down control. A healthy person is an example of a properly functioning complex adaptive system, and nations are in turn nested complex adaptive systems. He also argues that Middle Eastern countries suffer from deficits that inhibit their ability as complex adaptive systems, to achieve good performance. The deficits concern the ability of citizens to interact freely in all aspects of life and their capability to do so effectively. Fragmentation, low levels of education and health, and gender inequality are key factors in this respect.

Examining these concepts in particular Middle Eastern countries, Jack Kalpakian begins by looking at reforms in governance at the aftermath of the Arab Spring by contrasting between governmental responses in Morocco and Syria. He observes in “Between Reform and Reaction: The Syrian and Moroccan Responses to the Arab Spring,” that the Arab Spring is caused by a diverse set of causes that include government repression, the development of overseas communities and economic hardship. In addition, he identifies the changes in information technologies as a permissive cause of the Arab Spring. Kalpakian explores normative issues related to revolution as well as the broader issues of order and justice in international affairs and uses a comparative case study methodology and offers some policy prescriptions for Syria and Morocco.

Continuing with a Moroccan case study, Aziza Zemrani and Cynthia E. Lynch argue in “Morocco’s Dance with Democracy: An Evolutionary Approach to Democratic Reform,” that Morocco has been in evolutionary change toward structural democratic governance since its independence in 1957, but that the rise of the Arab Spring in 2011 gave it a significant jolt toward implementing the values of a moral democracy. However, the transition is incomplete. For example, it remains the task of the various political parties to pass the laws necessary to implement the changes articulated in the new 2011 constitution. And, it remains the challenge of the King, not to overreach the powers he has retained. The Arab people have emitted cries for justice, liberty, freedom and dignity. They have not and will not be silenced. Morocco has demonstrated that, while it may be slow, the evolutionary way of implementing democratic change is a more peaceful transition.

Moving from Morocco to Turkey, Fahrettin Sumer uses public policy reforms in Turkey as another case study of government response to change in the Middle East at the aftermath of the Arab

Spring. He states in “Turkey’s Changing Foreign Policy and the Arab Spring” that Turkey’s foreign policy towards its neighbors at the aftermath of the Arab Spring has followed an idealistic foreign policy called “zero problems with neighbors.” An outcome of this policy was that Turkey gradually started to promote change in the Middle East by supporting oppositions against the authoritarian regimes of Tunisia and Egypt, and then against Kaddafi and finally against the Syrian regime. The Syrian crisis created a bigger challenge for Turkish foreign policy because relations with Iran and Russia were negatively affected by the crisis.

Moving from Turkey to Israel, Nissim Cohen describes and explains in “Solving Problems Informally: The Influence of Israel's Political Culture on the Public Policy Process” that the informal influence of Israeli political culture on the public policy process is significant. Cohen demonstrates how informal elements are rooted in Israeli society and are an integral part of its public policy and administration. Specifically, he identifies the impact of "alternative politics" in the Israeli literature on public policy and institutional settings. These alternative politics are based on a "do-it-yourself" approach as adopted by citizens to address dissatisfaction with governmental services. When such a mode of political culture is diffused to all sectors and levels of society, all players, including bureaucrats and politicians, are then guided by short-term considerations and apply unilateral strategies that bypass formal rules either through illegal activity or by marginalizing formal rules. Hence, the notion of alternative politics is not confined only to the Israeli experience but emerge as part of the dialogue about political culture in the region.

Observing Palestine and issues of volunteerism as an example, Mohammad Awad observes in “International Funding to Palestinian NGOs and Its Impact on Social Capital in the West Bank” that international funding of projects to Palestinian NGOs and social causes has strengthened the development of social capital in the West Bank. By utilizing two methods in data collection, a survey of 320 self-administrated questionnaires distributed to paid and non-paid volunteers, and a focus group session attended by 21 leaders of NGOs in Palestine, Awad concludes that people of above thirty years of age are more likely to volunteer than those of age less than thirty as well as people with higher levels of education, above high school, are more likely to volunteer. Based on such observation he then draws on the public demand for reforms and government response.

Moving from Palestine to observing the experience of the Egyptian population in the United States after September 11, 2001, Suzi Millar and Shamshad Ahmed argue in “The Process of Fitting In: Generational Differences of Self-Esteem in First, 1.5, and Second-Generation Egyptian/Immigrants Compared to Non-Immigrants” that how the struggles of this population differ from non-immigrants whereby non-immigrants experience greater individualistic attitudes and personal self-esteem and lower collective self-esteem than Egyptian immigrants while greater collectivistic attitudes and identity subscale of collective self-esteem are present in the Egyptian population. These Egyptian immigrants’ ability to acculturate due to feeling that life in the host society is improving at the aftermath of the Arab Spring, which in return is impacting their extended community in Egypt itself.

Finally, shifting from Egypt to a specific case study of the Muslim community in the United States, Kathryn Clauss, Shamshad Ahmed, and Mary Salvaterra explore in “The Rise of Islamic Schools in the United States,” the growth of Islamic schools from the perspective of Muslim administrators, teachers, parents, and graduates in the United States. The authors examine two questions: what is the nature of an Islamic school today, and how do graduates transition to a non-Islamic environment?

Collectively, these articles emphasize the importance of sound governance in responding to citizens' needs and demands for coordination, accountability, transparency, openness, and participation in public affairs. The articles suggest the following themes for issues of governance in the Middle East:

- Departing from the qualitative terminology of “good” governance and instead, focusing on “sound” governance.
- Recognizing specificity and special characteristics in the public services of each country in the Middle East that nonetheless share common trends toward learning and cooperative purposes.
- Changing the institutionalization of corruption, incompetence, and nepotism.
- De-politicizing public service
- Changing public services through participatory dynamics that systemically reform governance case by case through phase shift, accountability, transparency, participation, coordination, and openness.
- Implementing innovation in the delivery of public services, especially in learning from successful models, applying technology and e-services, and the use of complex adaptive systems.
- Emphasizing ethical standards in public service.
- Utilizing education to train a professional cadre of public servants capable of responding to public needs and leading the Middle East toward peace and prosperity through sound governance.

These papers also discuss innovations in efforts to change non-democratic regimes through peaceful demonstrations and the use of electronic communications. Grass-roots mobilization and social networking through the utility of information and communication technology (ICT) remain, by far, the most effective innovative measure in civic discourse. Coupling the use of ICT with demands for change and a vigilant presence on the street is making the Arab spring an ongoing phenomenon that does not settle for half-measured reforms or political opportunism riding on public sentiments but serving political agendas. The road toward democracy and sound governance in the Middle East is going to be long and full of bumps and setbacks. Decades of tyrannical rule created a vacuum in the formation of viable democratic opposition forces. These vacuums have been quickly filled, at least in the immediate aftermath of some regimes' collapse, by non-democratic political forces disguised as political Islam in order to ride public sentiments and abscond with the fruits of their sacrifices. However, because of the public's taste for freedom, willingness to continue their sacrifices for liberty, and interconnectedness with global dynamics through a phenomenon known as “the global participant-observers”, silencing such populations and returning them to the dynamics of the past decade of silent submission is no longer viable. Today's laws of gravity in the Middle East are tilting toward the citizens, not the rulers, and the language of these laws is mobility, adaptability, and dynamic change.

There are, however, reforms and change in some parts of the Middle East that can serve as models of innovative approaches in responding to public demands for sound governance. One example of such reforms is the attention paid by various governments to the education and continuous training of a cadre in public servants on up-to-date and innovative measures in administrative sciences both at home and abroad. Although these efforts remain small in comparison with the size of the populations, and they often are centered in areas with relative resources, they nevertheless are a step in the right direction.

Another innovative measure is the increased call for decentralization and shifting of resources to regional and local governments and for the central government to play the role of coordinating agent. This agent-based model, although new to the Middle East with its long tradition of centralized structures and

decision-making apparatuses, is beginning to yield tangible results, especially when confronted with public satisfaction in handling local issues.

Openness in media coverage of public affairs and the shift from being an organ of propaganda to a public platform for civic discourse is another innovative measure that increasingly holds governance institutions responsible to the public and exposes corruption and abuse. Despite some regimes' continuing manipulation of the media, threats and at times arresting of and killing journalists, today's media in the Middle East is beginning to show tendencies toward freedom of speech and at times is demanding more of it.

Yet, and despite these innovative measures, the Middle East remains plagued by dysfunctional forms of governments in many countries, suffering from lack of citizen participation, accountability, transparency, and effectiveness. It continues to suffer from massive paralyzing bureaucracies, systemic corruption, nepotism, theft, and abuse of power with little or no regard for human rights and basic demands for freedoms and equality.

The encouraging aspect is that people in the Middle East are no longer settling for mediocrity and business as usual. Regimes' past excuses in shifting blame outward is no longer capable of subduing the populations. Educated, interconnected and aware youth constitute the largest segment of the population but they face increased unemployment, lack of jobs and little hope in the face of augmented regime apparatuses. With their willingness to sacrifice, the Middle East will continue to be in a state of chaos, moving through phase shifts and oscillations in order hopefully to arrive at a new order that is a better fit with today's environment.

This special peer-reviewed symposium touches aspects of these challenges and areas for change. They deserve further exploration and analysis in hopes of better understanding the dynamic of change that is taking place. While the symposium may not touch all the complex issues relating to public affairs in the Middle East, it nevertheless opens a window for further dialogue and exploration. I invite more scholars, practitioners, and students to engage with us in pushing this frontier forward and to join our efforts at the Association for Middle Eastern Public Policy and Administration (AMEPPA) to advance peace and prosperity in the Middle East through sound governance.

I would like to thank all the authors who contributed to this special issue and enriched understanding of public service in the Middle East through their work and expertise, including the reviewers of the symposium for their efforts to make the symposium even better. Finally, I offer my appreciation to my doctoral graduate assistant at Marywood University, Bill Miller, for his work in proof-reading some of the articles.

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