



International Society for Third Sector Research (ISTR)

MENA Newsletter | Issue 3, September 2026

Editor's Note:

This issue of the ISTR MENA Newsletter comes, once again, at a time of considerable uncertainty across the region. A particular thread running through this issue is a focus on social movements and collective action across different parts of the region, with contributions and reflections engaging with contexts including Lebanon, Tunisia, Algeria, and Libya. Taken together, they remind us of the diversity of social and political experiences that shape the MENA region, as well as the different social fabrics, histories, and forms of mobilisation that inform civil society across its countries and communities.

This issue also reflects on the importance of creating greater space for scholarship produced from the region, as well as for scholars whose work is grounded in and engages deeply with MENA contexts. Producing and circulating knowledge about the region is not simply a matter of geographical representation. It is also about recognising the value of locally grounded expertise, perspectives, and ways of understanding civil society and social change.

As the ISTR MENA Newsletter continues to grow, we hope it can contribute to strengthening these connections and creating a space for scholars, researchers, practitioners, and activists working across the region to share their work, perspectives, and experiences. In doing so, we hope to continue reflecting the richness and diversity of civil society research and practice across MENA.

- **Sarah Al Bouery, Editor-in-Chief**
Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship, American University of Beirut

Publications:

- 1) **Voluntas: de Graaf, A., Maiello, A., & van Eijk, C. (2026). Encounters of community-based initiatives and the state: A relational perspective. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 37(3), 261–269. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0957876526000367>**

Description: This article examines interactions between **community-based initiatives (CBIs) and the state** from a relational perspective. It focuses on how CBIs contribute to addressing persistent social challenges and how their encounters with state institutions

shape what they can achieve. Rather than treating the state and civil society as separate actors, the article highlights their ongoing interaction and mutual influence.

- 2) **Voluntas: Al Jayousi, R., & Nishide, Y. (2026). Revisiting institutionalization: Informalization in civil society organizations. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 37(3), 270–280.**

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0957876526000392>

Description: The article challenges conventional understandings of institutionalization and NGOization in civil society organisations. Using a case study of Palestinian CSOs operating under occupation and shrinking civic space, it argues that informalization can be a deliberate strategy for maintaining flexibility, community legitimacy, and responsiveness. The study draws on 30 semi-structured interviews, a purposive survey, and document analysis.

- 3) **Book: Sater, J. N. (Ed.). (2026). *Routledge handbook on civil society in the Middle East and North Africa*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/b23025>**

Description: *Routledge Handbook on Civil Society in the Middle East and North Africa* provides a comprehensive and multidimensional exploration of civil society across the MENA region, tracing its historical emergence, diverse expressions, and contemporary transformations.

- 4) **Book: Al Mokdad, M. (Ed.). (2027). *Collective action and social regulation in complex societies*. IGI Global Scientific Publishing.**

<https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3373-9280-6>

Description: This book explores how individuals, groups, and institutions coordinate behavior and regulate social life amid increasing complexity and uncertainty. By examining contemporary theoretical and empirical perspectives on collective action, governance, and regulatory mechanisms, this book advances interdisciplinary dialogue on how order and social change are produced and sustained in complex societies.

- 5) **Book: Ovadia, J. S., Saunders, R. G., & Nem Singh, J. T. (Eds.). (2026). *Handbook of resource nationalism*. Edward Elgar Publishing.**

Description: This handbook provides a broad overview of resource nationalism, examining how resource-producing societies seek to exercise sovereignty over natural resources. Contributions address the theoretical foundations, historical evolution, and practical manifestations of resource nationalism across different countries, commodities, and historical periods. It is useful for understanding the relationship between states, political economy, natural resources, and sovereignty. [Link to publication](#)

- 6) **Book: Sawani, Y. M. (2026). *Libya's struggle and unfinished transformation: Monarchy, dictatorship, the reform dilemma, and the betrayal of R2P*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-22399-9>**

Description: The book provides a historical and political analysis of modern Libya, covering the Sanusi monarchy, Gaddafi's rule, the 2011 uprising, foreign intervention, and the subsequent political fragmentation. Sawani examines how domestic political dynamics interacted with international intervention and external actors. The book also addresses state-building, national identity, political reform, transitional justice, and Libya's continuing search for stability.

- 7) **Journal Article: Landolt, L. K. (2026). Naming and praising states? MENA women's NGO rhetoric at the universal periodic review. *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2026.2693126>.**

Description: The article examines how women's NGOs from the Middle East and North Africa engage with states through the UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process. It focuses on the rhetorical strategies NGOs use when evaluating and addressing states, including when they criticise, name, or praise governments. The study contributes to understanding how civil society organisations navigate international human-rights mechanisms and state–civil society relations.

- 8) **Book: Ennaji, M. (2026). *Social movements and democratization in North Africa, 1912–2024*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-16628-9>**

Description: This book examines the development of social movements in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia from 1912 through the post-Arab Spring period. It covers nationalist, democratic and human-rights, Islamist, women's, Amazigh, and youth movements. The book links social mobilisation to democratization, social change, political participation, identity, social justice, and civil society.

- 9) **Journal Article: Latif, M. A. (2026). The Rise of Ennahda: Social Movements, Post-Islamist Ideology, and Political Party Formation in Tunisia's Democratic Landscape. *Sociology of Islam*, 13(1-4), 1-29. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22131418-bja10003>**

Description: This study uses the analytical frameworks of post-Islamism, ideological development, and political institutionalization to look at how Tunisia's al-Nahda evolved from an Islamist social movement to a political party. Although al-Nahda began as a grassroots organization based on social reform and Islamic activism in the 1970s, its post-2011 trajectory shows a conscious turn toward political pragmatism, democratic engagement, and ideological recalibration.

- 10) **Journal Article: Magued, S. (2026). Social protest movements and civil society in the Arab world: Attitudes towards the civil state. *The Journal of Constitutional Law in the Middle East and North Africa*, (5).**

Description: The article examines the relationship between social protest movements, civil society, and the idea of the civil state in the Arab world. It argues that the Arab Spring uprisings expressed demands associated with political rights, public freedoms, social justice, and accountability. It situates these demands within structural obstacles including

military power, rentier economies, authoritarianism, and entrenched elite structures. [Link to publication](#)

- 11) Journal Article: Loewe, M., & Albrecht, H. (2026). The social contract and collective action: Grievances, cleavages, and protests in the Middle East. *Kyklos*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/kykl.70067>**

Description: The article investigates how grievances related to the social contract can translate into collective action and street protest. Drawing on nationally representative telephone surveys in Tunisia and Lebanon, it examines citizens' expectations regarding social services, protection, and political participation. The findings suggest that socially privileged groups may be particularly likely to mobilise, offering support for arguments about the role of middle classes in protest movements.

- 12) Book: Lynch, M. (Ed.). (2026). *Political movements in North Africa and the Sahel* (POMEPS Studies 59). Project on Middle East Political Science.**

Description: This volume brings together research on changing political, social, religious, and protest movements across North Africa and the Sahel. It emerged from a February 2026 POMEPS workshop and deliberately places the two regions in conversation with one another. Contributions address Islamist movements, feminist mobilisation, environmental movements, youth protests, Amazigh activism, pro-democratic mobilisation, and political change. [Link to publication](#)

- 13) Journal Article: Northey, J. (2026). Social movements post-conflict: Youth activism and the Algerian Hirak. *Middle East Law and Governance*, 18(2), 115–137. <https://doi.org/10.1163/18763375-bja10006>**

Description: The article examines youth activism in post-conflict Algeria, focusing particularly on the Algerian Hirak movement. It considers how youth mobilisation developed within Algeria's political and post-conflict environment and how activists challenged established political structures. The article contributes to broader debates about social movements, youth political participation, and contentious politics in Algeria.

Call for Conferences:

1) Call for Participation I Our History and the Future

The Luxembourg Centre for Contemporary and Digital History (C²DH) and partners are convening “Our History and the Future: Lessons in Public and Participatory History from the SWANA Region.” The one-day workshop brings together scholars, archivists, artists, journalists, and cultural practitioners to discuss how histories are made visible, preserved, and carried forward across the SWANA region and diaspora.

Discussions will focus on public and participatory history, digital media and AI, community archiving, and the challenges and possibilities of co-producing history.

Free, in-person event.

Event details: 21 October 2026 | Qatar National Library, Doha

You can register [here](#)

More event details [here](#)

2) Conference | The Future of Governance and Development Policymaking in the Global South

The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies and the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, in partnership with UN ESCWA, will host a conference on “The Future of Governance and Development Policymaking in the Global South: Perspectives from the Arab Region” in Morocco on 2–3 November 2026.

The conference will bring together researchers to examine emerging challenges and future directions in governance and development policymaking across the Arab region and the Global South. Discussions will address institution-building and administrative reform, social justice and development, state- and peacebuilding, international cooperation and global governance, and digital transformation and AI.

The conference is linked to a special issue of *Hikama*, the journal of public administration and public policy published by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies and the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies.

Conference details: 2–3 November 2026, Morocco

For more details about the conference [here](#)

3) Conference | Social Protection in Times of Crisis: Gender and Persistent Inequalities in the WANA Region

The Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship at the American University of Beirut will convene the regional conference “Social Protection in Times of Crisis: Gender and Persistent Inequalities in the WANA Region” from 13–15 November 2026 in Beirut.

The conference will examine how political instability, armed conflict, displacement, economic breakdown, austerity, and deepening inequalities are pressuring social protection systems across West Asia and North Africa. It will explore who is protected, who is left out, and why, with discussions focusing on differentiated vulnerabilities, fiscal space and alternative financing, state fragility, militarization and welfare investment, and pathways towards transformative, gender-just social protection.

Registration: [Register through this link](#)

Follow the Asfari Institute for program updates, speaker announcements, and further details.

Op-ed:

Why Reimagining Citizenship Matters Now

At a time when conflict, displacement, and economic pressures are affecting communities across the Arab region, a conference on citizenship might appear removed from people's immediate concerns. I see it differently. Questions about who belongs, whose voice is heard, and how institutions respond are not separate from these challenges. They are part of understanding what it means to face them together.

This was the significance of "Re-Imagining Citizenship in the Arab Region," which we organized at the American University of Beirut on September 5–6, 2026. Bringing together scholars, policymakers, educators, civil society practitioners, and students created a space to examine citizenship through different experiences, rather than through a single institutional or disciplinary lens.

For me, creating that space was as important as the program itself. We need opportunities to listen beyond familiar circles, question our assumptions, and connect research with the realities people navigate every day. A university can provide room for disagreement without closing the conversation, and for shared questions without requiring identical answers.

The conference's main themes reflected this purpose: governance and citizen engagement; reform and development; education and active citizenship; and the experiences of refugees, migrants, and displaced communities. Discussed together, these subjects revealed the breadth of the conversation. What does participation mean when someone struggles to access a public service? How does education prepare young people to engage with difference? What can belonging mean for those displaced from their homes?

These questions connect closely with my teaching and research on citizenship, civil society, and public institutions. I am particularly interested in the distance between citizenship as an idea and citizenship as an experience. Bringing academic and practical perspectives together offers a way to examine that distance, while involving students connects the discussion to a generation that will continue asking these questions.

A conference cannot, by itself, rebuild trust or resolve the pressures facing communities. Its contribution begins more modestly, but meaningfully: bringing people into dialogue and opening possibilities for continued work. Its longer-term impact will depend on whether those exchanges inform research, teaching, and collaboration beyond the event.

This is why such gatherings matter today. Alongside responding to immediate crises, we need spaces to reflect on the relationships that hold communities together. Dialogue is not a substitute

for action, but it can help shape what follows. For me, the value of our conference lies in keeping that conversation open- and connecting it to what we do next.

- ***Tania Haddad, Associate Professor of Public Affairs and Non-Profit Management at the American University of Beirut***

ISTR News and Opportunities

Stay updated with the latest announcements, funding calls, publications, and sector news from the International Society for Third Sector Research.

News & Press: [Link](#)

Calendar of Events: [Link](#)