



Arab Reform Initiative

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# Arab Reform Initiative Launches New Environmental Politics Program



March under way..more than 500 strong !!!! Banner reads in Arabic " Enough Cars and Traffic Jams ...We want to walk, or bicycle or use more Public Transport "

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## Arab Reform Initiative

(Paris/Tunis/Beirut, 19 April 2021) – The Arab Reform Initiative (ARI) has today launched a new program on [Environmental Politics in the Middle East and North Africa](#) with the aim of centering the environment as a critical, core element of broader political and economic discussions about the region.

The program covers four main areas and brings together a network of scholars, practitioners, and activists to:

- **create** a community of practice to share new ways of thinking about environmental conditions, challenges, and potentials;
- **foster** trans-regional linkages among activists and movements advocating for environmental justice;
- **showcase** the experiences of local communities contending with environmental injustices; and
- **identify** critical locations and margins of maneuver for environmental change.

“With the launch of this program, we wanted to create a space where researchers from different disciplines and activists in different countries -- many of whom may not necessarily think of themselves as ‘environmentalists’ -- can come together regularly to approach environmentalism not as a ‘technical’ issue, but as part and parcel of the political and economic struggles in our region. We will look at the environment not simply as a set of natural resources, but also a domain of public health, a shared public space, and an arena of political economy,” said Julia Choucair, the Director of the Program and Non-Resident Senior Fellow at ARI.

“In our experience, many scholars and activists who are working on similar issues do not know about each other’s work. We hope to create an interactive, regular platform that takes a broad view of what constitutes ‘environmental work’ to share knowledge and solidarity,” said Nadim Houry, ARI’s Executive Director.

The program covers four main areas:

- Understanding and supporting environmental activism in MENA: From protests over land use in Egypt, to [garbage handling in Lebanon](#), to water mismanagement in Basra, to phosphate pollution and toxic landfills in



Tunisia, we have witnessed the rise of ad-hoc environmental activism campaigns as well as more organized social movements born out of environmental harms. Civil society organizations are more actively campaigning at home and representing the region more regularly and visibly at international meetings on environmental causes. However, environmental activism has yet to be studied in the context of a broader process of social contestation seeking to change the region's political and economic order. ARI works to highlight the various forms, demands, and expressions of environmental activism, understand its modes of organization and current needs, and document state responses.

- Analyzing national-level governance structures and advocating for change: The institutional and political landscape that governs national-level decisions on the environment in MENA is a black box. Budget lines, functions, competencies, and regulatory powers on issues that affect the environment are fuzzy and opaque. ARI is mapping and analyzing governance structures and the politics surrounding them to better elaborate recommendations that would address environmental justice concerns. Our work also critically examines the role of international institutions ([the European Union](#), World Bank, UN agencies, regional development banks) in setting environmental policies in the region, in defining what qualifies as environmental hazard or crisis, and in integrating the ubiquitous discourse on environmental into traditional development and infrastructure projects.
- Highlighting and promoting local initiatives: Critical questions of environmental policy are experienced at the local level. Very often, the local is also the stage for responses and solutions to global environmental issues. From a grassroots angle, we see increasing use of adaptation and mitigation strategies to address the myriad of social, economic, urban, and environmental problems facing local communities. Seen through a municipal politics lens, recent decentralization processes around the world have provided new tools and capabilities for environmental action at the subnational level. Local authorities, especially municipalities – historically an overlooked site of change – are increasingly taking on new regulatory powers, moving into new policy spaces, and transforming into sites for meaningful political engagement and change. The program



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documents case studies of local practices to illustrate the constraints and opportunities, and ultimately determine whether they could be replicated across localities or potentially scaled up.

- Environment in Conflict: The scope of destruction in the post-2011 wars in MENA have profound environmental implications. In Yemen, [Syria](#), or Libya, armed conflict is contributing directly to severe environmental damage, while simultaneously making societies less resilient to environmental disasters such as drought or floods and delaying the adoption of needed change to attenuate the damage of climate change. ARI seeks to analyze the nexus of conflict, climate change, and environmental governance in the region, mapping initiatives that address this nexus and lessons learned for environmental peacebuilding.

More details about the program can be found by clicking [here](#)



## About Arab Reform Initiative

The Arab Reform Initiative is the leading independent Arab think tank working with expert partners in the Middle East and North Africa and beyond to articulate a home-grown agenda for democratic change. It conducts research and policy analysis and provides a platform for inspirational voices based on the principles of diversity, impartiality and social justice.

- We produce original research informed by local experiences and partner with institutions to achieve impact across the Arab world and globally
- We empower individuals and institutions to develop their own concept of policy solutions
- We mobilize stakeholders to build coalitions for positive change

Our aim is to see vibrant democratic societies emerge and grow in the region.

Founded in 2005, the Arab Reform Initiative is governed by a Plenary of its members and an Executive Committee.

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