

## APSA Workshops in the Middle East and North Africa

APSA's MENA Workshops program continued this year with a conference held at the Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship at the American University of Beirut (AUB), from May 16 to 20. The event was part of a multi-year initiative to support political science research and networking in the Arab Middle East and North Africa. Funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the MENA Workshops program is a major component of APSA's efforts to engage with political science communities outside the United States and support research networks linking US scholars with their colleagues overseas.

The Beirut workshop was the first in a two-part series titled, "Civil Society Revisited: Researching Associational Life in Comparative Perspective." Together with a follow-up workshop in September, the 2016 program sought to revisit the concept of civil society in the wake of the Arab Uprisings. While there is broad agreement that civil society matters, the precise causal mechanisms by which it is believed to exert an influence remain understudied. As the region experiences upheavals and regime-change, a wide range of actors with sometimes competing ideologies struggle to define and operationalize the mechanisms for securing durable political reform, social stability, and lasting peace. These changing state-society dynamics

offer scholars a unique opportunity to reexamine, and potentially re-conceptualize, traditional understandings of civil-society.

More broadly, the workshops also focused on issues of research design, best practices and approaches for conducting field research, and questions associated with manuscript preparation and publication. Participants discussed an extensive set of readings and also presented their own research on topics related to civil society in the MENA region.

Coleading the workshop program were Fateh Azzam (AUB-Asfari Institute, Lebanon), Sandrine Gamblin (AUC, Egypt), Noora Lori (Boston University, USA), Richard Norton (Boston University, USA), and Denis Sullivan (Northeastern University, USA). Participants included 25 PhD students and early-career faculty from across the MENA region, Europe, and the United States. Following their participation in the five-month program, alumni received three year memberships to APSA and are eligible to apply for small grant funding to advance their research.

Since 2013, APSA has organized eight workshops throughout the MENA region. More than 100 scholars have taken part in the program, which is funded through 2017. For more information, visit APSA's MENA Workshops website at <http://web.apsanet.org/mena/>. ■



Workshop co-leaders and participants on campus at the American University of Beirut (AUB).