

## WORKSHOP 2

### 2. Civil Society Dynamics Under Authoritarian Rule

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The purpose of this panel is to examine the theoretical and comparative perspectives on civil society activism under authoritarian constraints and offer a better understanding of its relationship with regime change. The literature on civil society contends that civil activism and vibrancy do not only help in sustaining democracy, but are a vital factor in explaining processes of democratisation. The cases of eastern European and Latin American transitions are often cited to substantiate the latter claim. More recently however the theoretical and empirical bases of these claims have been severely questioned. In particular, it seems that civil society activism in authoritarian states has very different dynamics from the one in established democracies. In addition, there seem to be radical temporal and regional variations in the impact that civil society has on authoritarian systems. Understanding whether and how this is the case and what kind of differences might exist between diverse authoritarian regimes will provide a clearer understanding of the concept of civil society and will also lead to better policy-making formulation in light of current international strategies of democratisation. This panel intends to examine these issues through both theoretical and empirical papers.