Less than five years after the 2011 ‘Arab Uprisings’, much of the MENA region remains mired in political turbulence. The democratic visions which initially fuelled the uprisings have been overshadowed by the renewal of authoritarian governance, sectarian violence, national disintegration, gender injustice and revival of jihadi ideologies. Many authoritarian regimes that withstood the uprisings have been buttressed by the international and regional campaign against ISIL and other militant groups. Much like the erstwhile ‘war on terror’, complex cultural, political, socio-economic, historical grievances have been sidelined by the international campaign against jihadists intent on re-establishing a caliphate. In this latest offensive, political and civil society actors committed to democracy, social justice and citizenship rights are back-footed as the international community and regional states appear intent on maintaining the political status quo.

The symposium will focus on the key factors and forces which have contributed to the resilience of authoritarian regimes as well as the chequered shifts towards democratic governance. Towards these ends, the following questions will be addressed:

- What are the challenges confronting social movements in the climate of counter-revolution and political backsliding?
- With the narrowing of political space, what are the alternative options for non-violent resistance against authoritarian regimes?
- Why did Egypt suffer from a democratic backlash and a return to military-led rule while Tunisia remains a civilian-based electoral democracy?
- What are the salient lessons of Indonesia’s experience of democratisation based on incremental constitutional and political reform?
- Why have the major Islamist-based parties in Tunisia and Indonesia been willing to accommodate the secular/quasi-secular state and engage in coalition-building with secular political parties?
- To what extent are the secular-based electoral democracies in Turkey, Tunisia and Indonesia viable political models for other Muslim-majority states?
- To what extent is Iran’s republican clerical state on the path of policy and political reform under the Rouhani Presidency?
- What lessons can be learnt from Pakistan and Malaysia’s shift from a secular democratic state towards the Islamic state paradigm?
- What are the longstanding and more recent challenges confronting feminist and women’s movements?
- To what extent have feminist and women’s movements articulated innovative gender discourses and forms of political activism in response to challenges in the last five years?
- Why have sectarian tensions been contained in some states but unraveled in others?
- Why have jihadi visions of re-establishing a caliphate attracted transnational Muslim support?
- Are citizenship rights compatible with traditional interpretations of sharia law?
- How have scholarly theoretical perspectives, since the 2011 uprisings, been re/shaped by the variegated socio-political and cultural shifts in the Muslim-majority states, characterised by continuity within change, incremental reform, backsliding and protracted resistance?
- How significant are international factors and forces in driving these variegated shifts?

Submission of Abstracts
We welcome disciplinary and inter-disciplinary contributions. Please submit an abstract of no more than 300 words, along with your contact details and institutional affiliation to A/Professor Lily Zubaidah Rahim (lily.rahim@sydney.edu.au) and/or Dr Lucia Sorbera (lucia.sorbera@sydney.edu.au) by 28 Jan. 2015. You will be informed of the outcome by 10 Feb. 2015.

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