

Elana Stern



Elana has extensive volunteer experience both locally and internationally. Before matriculating at Penn, Elana deferred her acceptance for one year to live and volunteer in Israel and Rwanda. Since the start of her Penn career, Elana has been involved in education, anti-violence, and women's rights-related social justice initiatives. Elana began mentoring local students as a college preparation coach in her freshman year, and has since become the student director of ATID Junior Jumpstart, a college readiness and tutoring program at West Philadelphia High School (WPHS) that partners Penn student volunteers with WPHS upperclassmen. Elana has also been very involved at the Penn Women's Center as both a two-time Chair of Education of Abuse and Sexual Assault Prevention (ASAP) and as a cast member of Penn's production of the Vagina Monologues. Elana has served as a PennCORP pre-orientation program student leader, a Co-Chair of Penn Hillel's Tzedek Social Justice Committee, and was a leader of the Green Ribbon Movement, an organization that led the student response to recent mental health and wellness issues on campus. A passionate researcher, Elana has worked for several Political Science professors and spent time on a fieldwork project in Uganda. With generous support from the Civic Scholars program, Elana was extremely fortunate to work for Lambda Legal's Fair Courts Project in New York last summer. Next year, Elana looks forward to beginning law school as a member of Penn Law's Class of 2018.

CAPSTONE PROJECT

“All Work and No Pay: How Labor Force Demographics Explain Regional Variation in the Arab Spring Uprisings”

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Alex Weisiger, School of Arts and Sciences, Political Science Department

Despite predictions that the 2011 Arab Spring would end authoritarianism and create democratic governments across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), anti-regime uprisings only occurred in a small subset of MENA nations. This Political Science Honors Thesis and Civic Scholars Capstone aims to address the puzzle of the Arab Spring’s partial contagion; the particular interest of this work is to explore why the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries escaped the Arab Spring virtually unscathed. The hypothesis offered here argues that variation in the Arab Spring uprisings can be explained by labor force demographics in the GCC. Dominated by Asian migrant laborers, GCC workforces depend on the exploitative kafala sponsorship system that ties workers to Gulf employers in a mode of quasi-indentured servitude. The kafala system and the labor force demographics it has created in the GCC are significant to the Arab Spring in two ways: first, migrant workers strike and protest their living and working conditions often, and suffer harsh consequences as a result. Gulf migrant workers’ collective action operated as a mode of demonstration effect that deterred Gulf citizens from engaging in similar behavior against their respective governments. Second, Asian migrant workers have supplanted intraregional labor imports from poorer MENA nations; the preference of GCC employers for Asian migrant workers led to increased unemployment in non-GCC MENA countries, which contributed to the mass discontentment that resulted in upheaval in these nations. Ultimately, the exigencies of the GCC labor markets make meaningful or sustained transition toward democracy unlikely in the entirety of the MENA region in the foreseeable future.