POLS1270: Middle East Politics

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Spring 2012
Tues./Thurs. 1-2:20pm
Office Hours: Tues., 2:30-4:30pm

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Course Description
For decades, the Middle East was widely perceived as a bastion of authoritarianism and a hotbed of ethnic and religious politics and political violence. What explains the persistence of these perspectives and why have citizens across the region risen up to try to overthrow dictators and authoritarian regimes? Why have Islamists gained prominence in many Middle Eastern countries and why has sectarian violence appeared to spike in recent decades? By learning about key questions and debates in the field of Middle East politics, this course aims to give students a critical understanding of politics in the region. The course combines systematic analytical approaches to big questions with concrete knowledge of events and developments in specific countries. Topics include “persistent authoritarianism” in the Middle East, Political Islam, sectarian violence, economic development and underdevelopment, and social mobilization and the foundations of the Arab Spring. No prerequisites are required and the course is suitable for students with all levels of knowledge on the region.

Course Requirements
1) Attendance and Participation (10%)
   - Class and section meeting attendance is mandatory.
   - Participation in class and section meetings is vital.
   - Strongly recommended: Attendance at events and lectures sponsored by the Middle East Studies (MES) Program at Brown. (Events will be posted on the course website and on the MES website: http://www.middleeastbrown.org/).
2) Online midterm exam (25%)
   - Released on course website on Tues., Mar 6 at 12pm
   - Due Thurs., Mar. 8 at 12pm (upload to course website)
3) Policy brief (5-7 pages) (30%)
   - Released on course website on Tues., Apr. 3 at 12pm
   - Due Thurs., Apr. 10 at 12pm (upload to course website)
4) Online final exam (35%)
   - Wed., May 16, 2-5pm

Course Materials
- POLS1270 is an “early adopter” of the new course software Canvas. The course website is available at https://brown.instructure.com/courses/182449.
- The following books are available for purchase at the Brown Bookstore and are on reserve at the Rockefeller Library:
- The remaining readings and films are available electronically through e-reserves, which can be accessed through OCRA on the Brown Library website. (OCRA password is “MENA.”)
How to Succeed in this Course

Succeeding in this course is in part a function of your own effort. You need to be an active, engaged and committed learner. Here are some tips:

*Do the reading.* The lectures are not a substitute for the readings. Exams and papers will demand familiarity with material not covered in lecture but found in the readings.

*Come to class.* Likewise, lectures may include material not in the readings and will help you to build up critical thinking skills.

*Read critically:* Focus on the big picture to glean the main arguments in the texts. Think about the logics of the arguments and draw linkages and contrasts among the texts.

*Ask questions.* Although this is primarily a lecture course, you should not hesitate to ask questions or raise issues during lectures. Your comments and questions will enrich the course and, of course, are essential during section meetings.

*Come to office hours.* Professor Cammett and the Teaching Assistants are here to help and invite you to share your responses and reactions to the course material.

*Follow relevant issues outside of class.* Reading about current (or not so current) events in important journals and newspapers will help you to assess and apply the concepts you encounter in the course. Try to look at newspapers such as the New York Times, Washington Post, Financial Times, Wall Street Journal and/or periodicals such as the Economist, New Yorker, New York Review of Books and Atlantic, among others. In addition, the course website includes a range of websites and sources devoted to Middle East politics.


*Laptop/Wireless Policy:* Laptops and other wireless devices may be used for note-taking and course-related purposes only. Out of respect for others and to ensure that you derive the maximum benefits from the course, they are not permitted for other uses.
Introduction: Framing the Middle East

Jan. 26: Introduction and Overview

Jan. 31: What is the Middle East and How Can We Study It?

Feb. 2, 7: The Colonial (and Pre-Colonial) Origins of the Modern Middle East
• Michael Gasper. “The Making of the Modern Middle East.” In Lust, ed., pp. 1-64. [Skim pp. 1-38; Read pp. 38-64].
• David Fromkin. “How the Modern Middle East Map Came to be Drawn.” In Smithsonian (May 1991): 166-170.
• Recommended films:
  - “Islam: Empire of Faith”
  - “Promises and Betrayals: Britain and the Struggle for the Holy Land”

The Many Shapes and Sizes of Authoritarianism in the Middle East

Feb. 9: Authoritarianisms in the Middle East/North Africa
• Ellen Lust, “Institutions and Governance.” In Lust, ed. pp. 143-192

Feb. 14: The Islamic Republic of Iran
Special guest: Dr. Hussein Banai, Instructor, Naval War College
• Mehrzad Boroujerdi “Iran.” In Lust, ed.
• Ervand Abrahamian, “Why the Islamic Republic Has Survived,” Middle East Report 250(Spring 2009), 10-16.

Feb. 16: The Oil and Non-Oil Monarchies

Feb. 21: University holiday, no class meeting.

Feb. 23: Single-Party Regimes (Egypt, Tunisia, Syria)
• “Tunisia’s Durable President: One-Man Show.” In Economist, October 29, 2009.
• Background reading:
• Film: “Al Irhab wa al Kabab”
Feb. 28, Mar. 1: The Roots of “Persistent Authoritarianism”

Islamism

Mar. 6, 8: What is Political Islam and Why did it Emerge?
• Alaa Al-Aswany. The Yacoubian Building (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2005).
Mar. 8: Midterm exam due at 12pm (upload to course website)

Mar. 13: Does Inclusion lead to “Moderation”?

Sectarianism

March 15: “Sectarian” Conflict and Violence in Lebanon and Iraq

March 20: Why Sectarian Conflict?

Mar. 22, 27, 29: Spring break - No class meetings
Development and Underdevelopment in the Middle East

Apr. 3: Paths and Trajectories
• Melani Cammett. “The Political Economy of Development in the Middle East.” In Lust, ed.

Apr. 5: Does Oil Wealth Hinder Development?

Apr. 10: Special Lecture on Libya
• Romano Prodi, Former Prime Minister of Italy, Former President of the European Commission, and professor-at-large at Brown. 
Policy brief due at 12pm (upload to course website)

Apr. 12: Why Underdevelopment in the Middle East?

The Arab “Revolutions”

Apr. 17, 19: Why the “Arab Spring”? And Why the Experts Missed it . . .
• Omar S. Dahi. “Understanding the Political Economy of the Arab Revolts.” In MERIP 41, no. 259(Summer 2011).
• Gregory F. Gause. “Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring: The Myth of Authoritarian Stability.” In Foreign Affairs (July/August 2011).
• Eva Bellin. “Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Lessons from the Arab Spring.” In Comparative Politics 44, no. 2(January 2012): 127-149.
Apr. 24: The Victories and Challenges of the Arab Revolutions
• Wendell Stephenson. “Who Owns the Revolution? The Army or the People?” In The New Yorker 87, no. 22 (August 1, 2011).
• Toby Jones. “Saudi Arabia’s Regional Reaction.” In The Nation, September 11, 2011.

Apr. 26: Islamists and the Arab Revolutions
• Melani Cammett. “The Limits of Anti-Islamism.” In Foreign Policy Online, October 31, 2011.

Conclusion

May 1: Change and continuity in the Middle East
• Review readings on the Arab Revolutions

Final Exam: Wed., May 16, 2012, 2-5pm