Govt 339: Middle East Political Systems

Tues & Thurs, 12:30-1:50pm (section 1)
Tues & Thurs, 2:00-3:20pm (section 2)
Morton Hall 40

Government Department • College of William & Mary • Spring 2012

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Office Hours: Tues 4-5:30 and Fri 1:30-3pm

Course Description:

This course is about the comparative politics of the Middle East. It will familiarize students with politics in the modern Middle East, focusing on the dynamics of domestic politics within states. As context for the political development of these states, we begin by looking back to formative conditions, including the experience of Ottoman rule and European colonialism, the growth of local nationalisms, and the impact of the Arab-Israeli conflict. We then delve into the political economy of the region and examine the impact of late development, demographic change, and oil wealth. In order to understand the authoritarian regimes that continue to preside over much of the region, we compare single-party states and monarchies, and analyze the means employed by autocrats to control their populations and remain in power. Turning to the relationship between religion and politics in the Middle East, we examine arguments regarding the (in)compatibility of Islam with democracy and look at the diverse arrangements between religion and state that prevail in the region, including theocracy in Iran, strained coexistence between political Islamists and democracy in Turkey, sectarian representation in Lebanon, and Israel’s attempts to reconcile democracy with its identity as a Jewish state. We delve into the question of political reform, looking at regime attempts to stave off challenges through reform from above and also examine grassroots pressure on regimes from below. To what extent are the spread of media access and female participation likely to change politics in the region? This brings us to the change that has roiled the region over the past year. How did Tunisia light the spark, Egypt’s Mubarak succumb to revolution, and what will be the outcome of protests and violence in Syria? We will endeavor to understand the Arab Spring in light of recent history, as we consider the shape of the Middle East going forward.

Course Goals:

There are three objectives to this course:

1) Substantively, it will enable students to develop their understanding of domestic politics within the Middle East, particularly with respect to degrees of democracy and authoritarianism. The class proceeds by focusing on themes and concepts, giving students the opportunity to make comparisons among states, both within the Middle East and in the broader developing world.
2) From the standpoint of academic skills, it seeks to deepen students’ analytical ability by focusing on the use of critical thinking skills to formulate written and oral arguments that are logical, clearly elaborated, persuasive, and factually supported.

3) In fulfillment of General Education Requirement 4B, this course facilitates learning about parts of the world outside Europe and North America. The demands of a globalized world require broadening horizons, expanding realms of knowledge, and seeing ourselves in comparative perspective.

Graded Requirements:

Attendance: Each student may miss up to 2 classes without reason or penalty. Each absence beyond the second will result in the deduction of 1% from the student’s final grade, unless there are “dire extenuating circumstances,” documented by a Dean or the Health Center. Attendance requires that students arrive on time and prepare to leave when class is dismissed. The attendance sheet is the official record of class attendance. It is the responsibility of all students to mark their initials on the attendance sheet during each class period. A blank space next to a student’s name will be recorded as an absence and (beyond the second absence) penalized as such. Forgetting to initial the attendance sheet is not an acceptable excuse.

Participation. Contributions to in-class discussions are an important part of this course. Student comments should reflect required readings, which must be completed prior to class. Class members should work together in a respectful way during small group discussions. In addition, students may improve their participation scores by participating in our online discussion group through Blackboard. Students are invited to post Middle East politics-related articles to the discussion board and add their own reflections and questions, and may also contribute substantive comments to postings by fellow students.

Midterm. This exam, which will consist of multiple choice, identification terms, and short essays, will be held in class on Tuesday, 28 February.

Research Paper. Students will write a 6-8 page research paper, examining the current state of governance in a particular Middle Eastern country, and exploring the potential for fuller democratization. Rather than focusing on a single country, students may choose to compare and contrast the regimes and prospects for democratization in two countries within the region. This paper must contain an argument, articulated in the thesis statement, and supported by logical arguments and empirical evidence. Students are strongly encouraged to speak with me about their choice of topic, thesis, and sources. I will provide more specific guidance and guidelines for this project in due course. Late papers will be penalized, with the sole exception of “dire extenuating circumstances,” documented by a Dean or the Health Center. For each day a paper is late, it will lose one-third of a letter grade. The paper is due on Monday, 2 April by 5:00pm by dual submission (an electronic copy submitted to Blackboard and a paper copy in my mailbox in Morton 10).

Final Exam. The exam will focus on the latter half of the course, in that multiple-choice questions, identification terms, and short-answer questions will be based on post-midterm material. It will, however, have an important cumulative component, as essays will ask students
to synthesize material and concepts from across the whole course. The final exam will be administered on Tuesday, 1 May and Wednesday, 2 May. Students may take the final on whichever of these two days they prefer.

Grades for requirements will be weighted as follows. Please note that students must complete all assignments in order to pass the course.

- Participation: 10%
- Midterm: 25%
- Paper: 30%
- Final Exam: 35%

Other Policies:

All students will adhere to the Honor Code and should note its provisions against lying, cheating, and stealing (see http://www.wm.edu/deanofstudents/judicial/thehonorcode.php). Plagiarism is a particularly serious violation. Please see me with any questions about proper attribution and citation.

I encourage students to come to Office Hours and talk with me about any questions, ideas, and paper topics. I am happy to discuss particular needs or concerns, including disability accommodations.

I may make Syllabus Changes during the course of the semester.

Students may earn Extra Credit by attending Middle East-related events and lectures. I will compile and add to the list of eligible events, which can be found on Blackboard’s Course Information page, through the course of the semester. By attending an eligible event and submitting a short reflection on the event within 72 hours, students can augment their final grades by 0.5%, up to a total of 2% for four events.

Required and Recommended Texts:

All required readings for this course can be accessed through Swem’s electronic journals, are available on the Internet, or will be posted to our Blackboard site under Course Documents. Students are not required to purchase any books for the class. For students interested in background readings, I recommend the following:


Course Outline and Schedule:

I. MAKING THE MODERN MIDDLE EAST

Thurs., January 19
What is Comparative Politics? / What is the Middle East?
no assigned reading

Tues., January 24
End of the Ottoman Empire
Cleveland, pp. 81-102, 133-143, 149-170 [Blackboard]

Thurs., January 26
European Colonialism & Local Nationalisms
Michael N. Barnett, Dialogues in Arab Politics, pp. 55-83. [Blackboard]

Tues., January 31
Palestine/Israel and Its Impact on Regional States
Michael N. Barnett, Dialogues in Arab Politics, pp. 85-120. [Blackboard]

II. POLITICAL ECONOMY

Thurs., February 2
Late Development & Its Consequences
Richards and Waterbury, Chapter 3, pp. 44-70.

Tues., February 7
Demographics, Economics, and Politics
Richards and Waterbury, Chapter 4, pp. 71-97.

Thurs., February 9
Rentier Economics & the Resource Curse

III. AUTHORITARIANISMS: MEANS & VARIATIONS

Tues., February 14
Repression & Fear: IRAQ
Kanan Makiya, Republic of Fear: The Politics of Modern Iraq, Introductory Chapter. [Blackboard]

Thurs., February 16
Single-Party Regimes: SYRIA
Raymond Hinnebusch, Syria: Revolution from Above, Chapters 3 & 4, pp. 47-88 [Blackboard]
Tues., February 21
**Ritual Obedience: SYRIA**

Thurs., February 23
**Dynastic Succession: GULF MONARCHIES**

Tues., February 28
MIDTERM (in class)

IV. RELIGION & POLITICS

Thurs., March 1
**Islam & Politics**

Tues., March 6 & Thurs., March 8
NO CLASS. *Enjoy Spring Break!*

Tues., March 13
**Revolution and Theocracy: IRAN**

Thurs., March 15
Class Canceled

Tues., March 20
**One Man, One Vote, One Time? ALGERIA**

Thurs., March 22
**A Model for the Region? TURKEY**

Tues., March 27
**Sectarian Representation: LEBANON**


Thurs., March 29
**Jewish & Democratic? ISRAEL**
Alexander Yakobson and Amnon Rubinstein, *Israel and the Family of Nations: The Jewish Nation-State and Human Rights* (Routledge, 2009), Chapter 4, pp. 97-123 [Blackboard]


V. REFORM FROM ABOVE

**PAPER DUE by 5pm on Monday, April 2**

Tues., April 3
**Defensive Democratization: JORDAN**

VI. PRESSURES FROM BELOW

Thurs., April 5
**Women in Politics: MOROCCO**

Tues., April 10
**Civil Society without a State: PALESTINE**

Thurs., April 12
**Media & the Public Sphere**

VII. THE ARAB SPRING

Tues., April 17
The Spark: TUNISIA
Laryssa Chomiak, "The Making of a Revolution in Tunisia," Middle East Law and Governance 3 (2011), 68-83 [e-mailed to students as PDF attachment]


Thurs., April 19
The Revolution and After: EGYPT

Tues., April 24
The Struggle: SYRIA


VIII. WRAP-UP

Thurs., April 26
Concluding Remarks & Review for Final Exam
No reading assignment

Tues., May 1 (9am) or Wed., May 2 (2pm)
FINAL EXAM