GOVT 632
The Politics and Societies of the Middle East
Fall 2019

Monday 7:20 – 10:00 PM, Robinson B 118
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Office: Research 347 | Office hours: Monday, 5-7 pm and by appointment

Overview
This course is an advanced survey of the politics and society of the Middle East. It covers salient and central themes in the history, politics, culture, and economics of the region, and addresses a number of methodological debates raised in, and by, the field. The course is analytically divided into five parts. The first introduces students to the political sociology of the "Developing World" with special reference to Middle Eastern societies as well as the topic of how the Middle East was studied historically. The second overviews the social and political history of the region and of its cultural specificities. The third assesses the character, stages, and consequences of European imperialism and formation of modern states in the region. The fourth examines the structure and dynamics of contemporary Middle Eastern societies, including the questions of ethnicity, religious sects, and social class and their intersection. In this section, the issues of gender and family are closely examined. The second section analyzes the impact of state-led growth and/or post-colonial development on Middle Eastern societies. The fifth and final part of the course assesses prospects for the region in light of the Arab uprisings of 2011 and their aftermath, particularly in terms of for political transition, revolution and counter-revolutions, , the social impact of the economic reforms, the growing developmental gap, the increasing radicalization and militarization of totalitarian groups/movements, and the impact of globalization and the “war on terrorism,” in its “classic” post-2011 form and its rejuvenation after the emergence of ISIS in 2013-2014.

Grading
Your grade for this class will be determined by the following assessed components (weighted as specified):

Presentations and Effective* Participation: 20%
Response Paper: 10%
Midterm Exam: 20%
Research Paper Presentation: 10%
Final Paper: 40%

*Effective participation means active engagement in the classroom based on the readings.
Full details of all assignments are available in the relevant website section.
**Attendance**
Class participation will be essential in this course, the more so because we meet only once a week. Therefore, class attendance is a must. Unexcused absences will not reflect well in your participation grade. Missing 3 classes (unexcused) will affect your final grade because you would not benefit from classroom lectures, presentations, discussions, and q&a.

**Services for Students with Difference**
If you have a documented difference (learning, physical, psychological) for which you are or may be requesting reasonable academic adjustments, you are encouraged to inform me as early as possible in the semester. I, personally, would be happy to accommodate all your legitimate requests regarding such matters, with or without documentation.

**Academic Integrity**
“The pursuit of knowledge can only take place in an atmosphere of honesty, integrity, and mutual trust.” In order to accomplish this, we must all be “committed to a policy that regards the highest degree of academic honesty as the norm.” Academic dishonesty is not tolerated at George Mason University, nor is it in this course. Based on University policy, such acts of dishonesty may result in a failing grade for the relevant assignment or a failing grade for the course.

**Required Books (partial list)**

**Course Themes**
1. Class Introduction + Introduction to Middle East Politics
2. The Middle East: An Overview of Salient Issues and Themes
3. Politics and Society in the Middle East: Historical Background
4. Classic Orientalism and Other "Essentialisms:" The Study of the “East”
5. Politics, the State, and Authoritarian Rule (March 3)
6. Political Economy of (Post-Colonial) Development
7. The Arab Uprisings: Revolutions and Counter-Revolutions
8. Case-Study: The Egyptian Uprising
10. Religion and Politics: Islamism and its Discontents
11. Social Dynamics: Family and Women
12. The Israel-Palestine Conflict
13. Looking Forward: Reimagining the Middle East
WEEKLY READINGS

(C1) Introduction to the Course:
No Reading

C2: The Middle East: An Overview
A. Geography; B. Population; C. Politics; D. Religion; E. Ethnicity; F. Resources; G. Regimes; H. Uprisings

Readings:


Recommended: [for those who seek further background]

1. Deborah J. Gerner, Chapter 1, “Introduction,” in Deborah J. Gerner and Jillian Schwedler, eds., *Understanding the Contemporary Middle East* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2004). [Text]
4. Interview with Bassam Haddad (November 2003), on Culture, Islamic Values, and Democracy in the Arab World. [CW]

Questions & Issues to Consider: What, if anything, is “special” about studying the Middle East? What are the most significant challenges to studying the Middle East in the United States? What are the fundamental historical experiences in the 19th and 20th century that shaped the contemporary Middle East? What does it mean to say something is “constructed” (e.g., Middle East as construct)? What does it mean to think “critically?”

C3: Politics and Society in the Middle East: Historical Background and Colonialism
A. Early Arab/Islamic Empires (7th to 13th Century) and Ottoman Dominion (1516-1917)
B. European Imperialism, 1800-1917; Decline and Fall of the Ottoman Empire
C. European Colonialism, 1919-1950
D. The Demise of Palestine; Rise of Israel
E. Economic, Political, Social and Ideological Transformation: Rise of Radical Arab Nationalism
F. Who are the Arabs; Arab Identity
G. What is Islam? Islamic Beliefs and Sects

Readings:

3. Roger Owen, *State, Power, and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*, introduction and Chapter 1, "States and State Building" (3 pages), and "The End of Empires" [CW]
Recommended:

2. Simon Bromley, "From Tributary Empires to States System," in Rethinking Middle East Politics. [CW]

C4: Classic Orientalism and Other "Essentialisms:" The Study of the “East”
A. Orientalism
B. Theologocentrism
C. Cultural Exceptionalism
D. Middle East Exceptionalism
E. Arab/Muslim Apologists

Readings:

3. Edward Said, "Introduction" and Chapter 1, in Orientalism. [CW]
4. Mahmood Mamdani, Introduction and Chapter 1, in Good Muslim, Bad Muslim. [CW]

Recommended:


Questions & Issues to Consider: How has the Middle East (or the “East”) been studied historically? What influenced the study of the Middle East from a European perspective? Or, later, from an American perspective? How do power relations affect the production of knowledge, or notions of “objectivity?” What are the most salient categories in pop culture for understanding the Middle East? Where do they come from and how are they perpetuated? Can we produce objective knowledge about the “other?” Most importantly, what is the relationship between knowledge and power?

C5: Politics, the State, and Authoritarian Rule

Readings:

1. Deborah J. Gerner, Chapter 4, “Middle Eastern Politics,” in Deborah J. Gerner and Jillian Schwedler, eds., Understanding the Contemporary Middle East (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2004). [Text]
Questions & Issues to Consider: Is authoritarian rule unique to the Middle East? What produces authoritarian rule? What sustains it? How does authoritarian rule affect state-opposition dynamics? Is there a relationship between levels/kinds of authoritarianism and extremist opposition? What are the bases of conflict in the Middle East?

C6: The Political Economy of Development in the Middle East
A. Colonial Legacies
B. The political economy of development
C. State-Led Development
D. The political economy of oil

Readings:

Recommended:
1. Elias H. Tuma, Chapter 7, “The Economies of the Middle East,” in Deborah J. Gerner and Jillian Schwedler, eds., Understanding the Contemporary Middle East (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2004), pp. 234-End. [Text]

C7: Causes and Dynamics of the Arab Uprisings (Part 1)

Readings
3. Adam Hanieh, Lineages of Revolt (Chicago: Haymarket, 2013), Chapters 1, 2, 3. [PDF]
4. Jason Brownlee, et. al, Pathways of Repression and Reform (Oxford University Press, 2015). Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, 6. [PDF]

(C8) Religion and Politics: The Rise and Use of Political Islam(s) and Islamist Parties/Movements

A. What is Political Islam
b. Underlying causes: Various interpretations
C. Authoritarian Rule, International Intervention, and Islamism
D. Islamic Parties and Islamist Non-State Actors
E. The Rise, Expansion, and Limits of ISIS.

Readings:
1. John Esposito, Mohammed A. Muqtedar Khan, and Jillian Schwedler, Chapter 12 “Religion and Politics in the Middle East,” in Deborah J. Gerner and Jillian Schwedler, eds., Understanding the Contemporary Middle East (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2004).
6. Various authors, Rethinking Islamist Politics, Washington DC: Project on Middle East Political Science (POMEPS), 2014. [PDF]

Recommended:
Talal Asad, “Towards an anthropology of Islam.”
Adam Hanieh, "A Brief History of ISIS," Jacobin [Link]

Islamist Movements: A Brief Encounter

Recommended on ISIS:
- "The Terror Strategist: Secret Files Reveal the Structure of Islamic State," (18 April 2015). Spiegel has been given exclusive access to the papers of an Iraqi officer who planned Islamic State's takeover in Syria. The papers portray an organization that, while seemingly driven by religious fanaticism, is actually coldly calculating. http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/islamic-state-files-show-structure-of-islamist-terror-group-a-1029274.html

C9: Case-Study: The Political Economy of Authoritarianism and the Syrian Uprising (Part 2)

Readings

C10: Case-Study: The Syrian Uprising (Part 3)

Readings
2. Bassam Haddad, "The Debate Over Syria Has Reached a Dead End," The Nation, October 2016. [Link]

C11: Social Dynamics: Family and Women, Community, Ethnicity and Class
A. Community, Ethnicity, Class
B. The Family: Changing patterns
C. Women: Differential roles
D. The Veil: Meaning and Symbolism
E. Colonial Feminism and the Use of Gender Equality in Politics

Readings:

1. Lisa Taraki, Chapter 11, “The Role of Women,” in Deborah J. Gerner and Jillian Schwedler, eds., Understanding the Contemporary Middle East (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2004). [Text]

Recommended:
Leila Ahmed, Women and Gender, “Introduction.” [CW]
Laurie King Irani, Chapter 10, “Kinship, Class, and Ethnicity,” in Deborah J. Gerner and Jillian Schwedler, eds., Understanding the Contemporary Middle East (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2004). [Text]
As‘ad AbuKhalil, “Women in the Middle East,” Foreign Policy in Focus, Vol. 5, No. 30, September 2000 [CW]

Questions & Issues to Consider: What is the relationship between societal development and the role of the family? What is the relationship between the role of the family in the society and gender roles? What are the bases of political action in the Middle East (e.g., communal, sectarian, religious, class, political, economic, cultural)? In studying the Middle East, why does the question of the “veil” become an all-too-important issue when other issues are clearly more significant? Should we take liberal discourse on feminism at face value (e.g., “we invaded Afghanistan partly to liberate their women”)?

C12: Presentation of Paper Outlines

Please prepare an outline of your paper that includes a) clear thesis, b) summary of literature review, c) methodology and sources, d) brief outline of argument