

Democracy and Authoritarianism in the Middle East and North Africa

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Fall 2024

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Class Hours: M 12.45-2.45pm

Course Description

This course provides an in-depth examination of the political landscape in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, with a focus on the historical development, challenges, and dynamics of democracy and authoritarianism. We will explore the historical, cultural, economic, and geopolitical factors that have shaped the political systems in the region.

We will start by examining the historical foundations of political systems in the Middle East and North Africa. In the first two weeks of the class, we will discuss the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire into nation-states, and analyze the impact of colonial and post-colonial developments on the political institutions of the region. Next, we will move on to exploring the various forms of governance in the region, from democratic experiments to autocratic regimes. We will discuss the factors that contribute to the resilience or fragility of democratic institutions, analyze the structure and functioning of political institutions in the MENA region, and assess the role of electoral systems, legislatures, and the military in shaping political outcomes.

We will put special emphasis on investigating the role of civil societal organizations in advocating for political change and examining patterns of political participation and activism among the diverse populations in the region. While doing so, we will examine specific country case studies to provide a nuanced understanding of democracy and authoritarianism in different contexts and analyze successful and unsuccessful attempts at political reform in the region.

Expectations

Students will engage in critical analysis, discussions, and research projects to deepen their understanding of the complex and evolving political landscape in the MENA. Students are expected to read all the assigned material prior to the lecture (unless the reading is marked as *suggested*). Lecture material and reading assignments are complementary and should not be considered substitutes for each other. Students are highly encouraged to ask any questions and participate in class discussions. Our classes will be open to expression of all views and questions.

Typical Enrollees

This course is primarily designed for undergraduate students beyond their freshman year. The course does not assume prior knowledge of the politics of the Middle East. Government concentrators will be prioritized.

Accommodations

Students who need academic accommodations should submit the appropriate paperwork by the last business day of the third week of classes (September 20th).

Course Structure

Readings and Discussion Participation

This is a seminar-form class. For this type of class to run best, the active contribution of all students is necessary. Students are thus expected to attend and positively contribute to the class atmosphere. This means paying attention to when others are contributing, not being disruptive, and, of course, offering your opinions and ideas when appropriate.

Take-Home Response Papers

Students will write two response papers to their choice of two class readings. Each response paper should be up to 1000 words. Each response paper is due in the class session corresponding to the paper you chose to write about.

In-Class Case Study Presentation

Each group of 4-5 students will present a case study in class hours. Each student presentation should take no more than 10 minutes. Please think of these case studies as a group project where every participant can contribute their strengths. Slides or some other form of visual aid is highly encouraged but is not necessary. Feel free to be creative!

Final Paper

The final paper should be a research paper of no more than 3000 words. You are free to choose any topic that is relevant to our course material. Your research paper should include a thesis statement supported by empirical evidence such as historical, statistical, or anecdotal evidence. Required books and readings should have enough resources to support your papers. However, additional research on your topic of interest is welcome.

Fun Sections

The course schedule provides a movie and a song from a different country every week to introduce pieces of the MENA culture. Students are not required to watch these movies/listen to these songs. However, lectures will mention these pieces when appropriate.

Grading Policy

The typical school grading scale will be used. I reserve the right to adjust the grading scale based on overall class performance at the end of the semester. Any adjustment will only make it easier to obtain a certain letter grade, will be to the benefit of students, and will be communicated clearly. The grade will count the assessments using the following proportions:

- 10% Discussion Participation
- 30% 2 Take-home Response Papers (15% each).
- 20% In-class Case Study Presentation
- 40% Final Paper

Absence and late work policies

Late submission of take-home papers will not be accepted. One letter grade will be deducted for each day the final paper is submitted late. Attending the class hours is a requirement of the class. Missing more than one class hour without a doctor's note will result in a poor discussion participation grade.

Schedule

Week 1, September 2: Labor Day – NO CLASS

Week 2, September 9: What/Where is the Middle East?

- *Quiz:* Map the Countries in the Middle East (Not Graded)
- Middle East? Near East? Middle East and North Africa?

Readings

- Amanat, A. 2011. "Introduction: Is There a Middle East? Problematizing a Virtual Space" in *Is There a Middle East? The Evolution of a Geopolitical Concept* eds. Bonine, M. E., Amanat, A., Gasper, M. E. Stanford University Press. pp. 1-10.
- Held, C. H. and Cummings, T. 2013. "The Peoples and Cultures of the Middle East." in (ed) Yambert, K. *The contemporary Middle East: a Westview reader*. Westview Press. pp. 1-23.
- *Suggested:* Bromley, S. 1994. "Understanding the Middle East" in *Rethinking Middle East Politics* University of Texas Press. pp. 6-45.
- *Suggested:* Davison, R. H. 1960. "Where Is the Middle East?" *Foreign Affairs*. 38(4): 665-675.

Fun Section — Egypt

- *Movie of the Week:* Shadi Abdel Salam, 1969 – The Night of Counting the Years (Al-mummia)
- *Song of the Week:* Mohamed Mounir, 2022 – **Lelly**

Week 3, September 16: Historical Foundations of Political Systems in the MENA

- The Ottoman *Millet* System, Dissolution of the Ottoman Empire
- The Continuation and Disruption of Political Systems

Readings

- Owen, R. 2004. "The end of empires: The emergence of the modern Middle Eastern states" in *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*. Routledge: NY. pp. 5-22.
- Hinnebusch, R. 2003. "Identity and sovereignty in the regional system" in *The international politics of the Middle East*. Manchester University Press. pp. 54-72.
- *Suggested*: Gelvin, J. L. 2011. "The Introduction and Spread of Nationalism (Ch. 13)" in *The Modern Middle East*. Oxford University Press. pp. 208-216.

Fun Section — Turkey

- *Movie of the Week*: Şerif Gören and Yılmaz Güney, 1982 – Yol (Road)
- *Song of the Week*: Mabel Matiz, 2022 – **Karakol**

Week 4, September 23: Colonialism, Decolonization and State Formation

- How are the state borders drawn? What are the characteristics of Colonial rule?
- Discussion of some of the decolonial movements: Algeria and Egypt

Readings

- Gelvin, J. L. 2011. "Imperialism (Ch. 6)" in *The Modern Middle East*. Oxford University Press. pp. 87-99.
- Hinnebusch, R. 2003. "State formation and international behaviour" in *The international politics of the Middle East*. Manchester University Press. pp. 73-90.
- Anderson, L. 1987. "The State in the Middle East and North Africa." *Comparative Politics*. 20(1): 1-18.

Fun Section — Algeria

- *Movie of the Week*: Gillo Pontecorvo, 1966 - The Battle of Algiers (**CAUTION**: This is a war movie with fighting scenes that may be uncomfortable for some)
- *Song of the Week*: Rachid Taha, 1993 - **Ya Rayah**

Week 5, September 30: Democracy and Authoritarianism

- Defining democracy and authoritarianism. Which country is which?
- Characteristics of and strategies employed by authoritarian regimes in the MENA region

Readings

- Schmitter, P. C. and Karl, T. L. 1991. "What Democracy Is . . . and Is Not." *Journal of Democracy*. 2(3): 75-88.
- Bellin, E. 2004. "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective." *Comparative Politics*, 36(2): 139-157.
- Owen, R. 2004. "Parties, elections and the vexed question of democracy in the Arab world" in *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*. Routledge: NY. pp. 178-199.

Fun Section — Jordan

- *Movie of the Week*: Amjad Al-Rasheed, 2023 - Inshallah a Boy
- *Song of the Week*: Hani Mitwasi, 2020 - **Champions Anthem**

Week 6, October 7: Case Studies 1: Political Systems of Iraq, Israel, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Morocco

- Each student chooses a country and discusses its political institutions
- The group of all students presenting this week comes together and presents a comparison of chosen countries' political institutions

Readings

- Yom, S. 2017. "Introduction: the MENA in Comparative Perspective." in *Government and Politics of the Middle East and North Africa: Development, Democracy, and Dictatorship*. Routledge. pp. 1-46.

Fun Section — Morocco

- *Movie of the Week*: Maryam Touzani, 2019 – Adam
- *Song of the Week*: Saad Lamjarred, 2024 – **Bashufak**

Week 7, October 14: Political Elites

- The types of political elite in different countries. Historically influential families? Military? Intelligence? Judiciary?
- Brief discussion of populism in the Middle East

Readings

- Owen, R. 2004. "The military in and out of politics" in *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*. Routledge: NY. pp. 178-199.
- Owen, R. 2004. "Some important non-state actors" in *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*. Routledge: NY. pp. 200-216.

- Henry, C.M. 2018. "Political Elites in the Middle East and North Africa." In: Best, H., Higley, J. (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Political Elites*. Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 181-202.

Fun Section — Lebanon

- *Movie of the Week*: Ziad Doueiri, 1998 - West Beirut
- *Song of the Week*: Fairuz, 1975 - **Saaltak Habiby**

Week 8, October 21: Civil Society and Nonprofit Associations

- Does civil society exist in the Middle East?
- What are the differences and similarities between Western NGOs and MENA NGOs?

Readings

- Kienle, E. 2011. "Civil Society in the Middle East." in *The Oxford Handbook of Civil Society*. ed. Edwards, M. Oxford University Press. pp. 146-159
- Haddad, T. and Zalzal, Y. 2019 "Civil Society and Non-Profit Governance in the Arab World" in Haddad, T. and Al Hindy, E. (eds) *Religion and Civil Society in the Arab World: In the Vortex of Globalization and Tradition*. Routledge. pp. 48-69.

Fun Section — Iran

- *Movie of the Week*: Saeed Roustayi, 2022 - Leila's Brothers
- *Song of the Week*: Shahin Najafi, 2023 - **Shah**

Week 9, October 28: Political Movements: Arab Spring, Protests in Turkey, Israel and Iran

- Overview of the historical context and conditions that led to the emergence of the Arab Spring: Political repression, economic inequality, and social grievances
- The role of social media and technology in mobilizing and organizing protests

Readings

- Anderson, L. 2011. "Demystifying the Arab Spring: Parsing the Differences Between Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya." *Foreign Affairs*. 90(3): 2-7.
- Brownlee, J., Masoud, T. and Reynolds, A. 2015. "Theorizing the Arab Spring" in *The Arab Spring: Pathways of Repression and Reform*. Oxford University Press. pp. 1-40.

Fun Section — Palestine

- *Movie of the Week*: Hany Abu-Assad, 2005 – Paradise Now
- *Song of the Week*: Mohammed Assaf, 2013 – **Ally Alkofeyah**

Week 10, November 4: Case Studies 2: Arab Spring in Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Tunisia and Syria

- Each student chooses a country and discusses the trajectories of Arab Spring
- The group of all students presenting this week comes together and presents a comparison of the Arab Spring in chosen countries

Readings

- Rogan, E. 2013. "The Arab Spring, 2011." in (ed) Yambert, K. *The contemporary Middle East: a Westview reader*. Westview Press. pp. 330-340.
- Gelvin, J. 2013. "The Arab World at the Intersection of the National and the Transnational." in (ed) Yambert, K. *The contemporary Middle East: a Westview reader*. Westview Press. pp. 360-370.
- Masoud, T. 2021. "The Arab Spring at 10: Kings or People?" *Journal of Democracy*. 32(1): 139-154.

Fun Section — Tunisia

- *Movie of the Week*: Nacer Khemir, 1991 – The Dove's Lost Necklace
- *Song of the Week*: Ghalia Benali, 2006 – **Ya Msafer**

Week 11, November 11: Foreign Policy, Regional Conflicts and Geopolitics

- Who runs the Middle East? Saudi Arabia? Qatar? Egypt? Dare I ask... Turkey?
- What is the relationship between the "West" and various Middle Eastern leaders?
- Oil Resources: Curse or Blessing?

Readings

- Cleveland, W. L. and Bunton, M. 2008. "The Arabian Peninsula in the Petroleum Era" in *A History of the Modern Middle East*. Westview Press. pp. 451-472.
- Hinnebusch, R. 2014. "Foreign Policy in the Middle East." in (eds) Hinnebusch, R. and Ehteshami, A. *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States*. Lynne Rienner Publishers. pp. 1-34.
- Gasiorowski, M. 2013. "Islamic Republic of Iran: Political Dynamics and Foreign Policy." in (ed) Yambert, K. *The contemporary Middle East: a Westview reader*. Westview Press. pp. 259-269.

Fun Section — Israel

- *Movie of the Week*: Michael Mayer, 2012 – Out in the Dark
- *Song of the Week*: Yaakov Rotblit and Yair Rosenblum, 1969 – **Shir LaShalom**

Week 12, November 18: Case Studies 3: Regional Conflicts in Saudi Arabia vs. Qatar, Egypt vs. Turkey, Jordan vs. Syria, Saudi Arabia vs. Yemen, Israel vs. Iran

- Each student chooses a pair of countries discusses the relationship between them
- The group of all students presenting this week comes together and presents an overview of regional conflicts

Readings

- Hinnebusch, R. 2014. "The Middle East Regional System." in (eds) Hinnebusch, R. and Ehteshami, A. *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States*. Lynne Rienner Publishers. pp. 35-74.
- Dorraj, M. 2013. "Iran's Regional Foreign Policy." in (ed) Yambert, K. *The contemporary Middle East: a Westview reader*. Westview Press. pp. 270-278.

Fun Section — Iraq

- *Movie of the Week*: Shahram Alidi, 2009 – Whisper With the Wind
- *Song of the Week*: Kadim Al Saher, 1999 – **Hiya**

Week 13, November 25: Thanksgiving – NO CLASS

Week 14, December 2: What is Next? Challenges and Prospects

- Exploration of emerging trends and potential future scenarios for political development in the MENA region
- Assessing potential avenues for political reform and the prospects for democratization
- Discussion of the role of technology and globalization in shaping political dynamics

Readings

- Brownlee, J., Masoud, T. and Reynolds, A. 2015. "Limits and Legacies of the Arab Spring" in *The Arab Spring: Pathways of Repression and Reform*. Oxford University Press. pp. 211-228.
- Gelvin, J. L. 2011. "The Middle East in the 'Age of Globalization' (Ch. 21)" in *The Modern Middle East*. Oxford University Press. pp. 319-326.

Fun Section — Egypt... Again!

- *Movie of the Week*: Tarik Saleh, 2017 – The Nile Hilton Incident
- *Song of the Week*: Mai Farouk, 2023 – **Aftkerlak Aih**

Final Paper Due Date: December 9 (Tentative)

- The due date is currently tentative. On the first day of the class, we will discuss the best due date for all students and finalize it together.