

PSC 2377: Comparative Politics of the Middle East

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Office Hours: Online by appointment

The George Washington University
Class Hours: M/W 2:20 - 4:40pm

All knowledge that is about human society, and not about the natural world, is historical knowledge, and therefore rests upon judgment and interpretation. This is not to say that facts or data are nonexistent, but that facts get their importance from what is made of them in interpretation – Edward Said

Course Description

This online course explores theoretical and policy debates surrounding major events and developments in the politics of the Middle East. The course takes a comparative approach to examining themes such as colonial legacies, institutions, authoritarian persistence, social movements, Islamism, gender, sectarian division, pop culture and identity politics.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Apply a wide range of theories from the field of comparative politics to current events in the Middle East
2. Compare the divergent political trajectories of Arab states
3. Evaluate existing explanations for major trends in the region's political sphere
4. Critically read and respond to debates and recent research in middle east comparative politics
5. Demonstrate empirical knowledge of MENA countries through weekly online posts, written assignments, and class discussions.

Required Materials

- The required readings for this course are all available on Blackboard. They come from peer-reviewed academic books and journals in addition to news and policy outlets.

Prerequisites

Prior to registering for this course, students are expected to have completed PSC 1001 (Introduction to Comparative Politics) or an equivalent course.

Grading

Students will be graded according to the following:

Map Quiz	5%
Leading Discussion	5%
Attendance and In-Class Participation	20%
Online Engagement	10%
Paper	25%
Topic Proposal and citations	5%
Final Exam	30%

Course Requirements

Map Quiz

Students are expected to complete a map quiz to demonstrate familiarity with the geography of the region. A perfect score on the quiz will earn the student one extra point that will be added to their overall grade in the course toward the end of the semester.

Leading Discussion

Each student will sign up to lead the discussion alongside a student peer twice a semester. The student is expected to offer brief opening remarks synthesizing the assigned readings. Students will write up and email the instructor a list of 3-5 discussion questions at least 12 hours before the start of class. These questions are meant to encourage thoughtful discussion about the topic of the week.

Attendance and Participation

Attendance via Blackboard Collaborate Ultra is required unless prior accommodations have been granted in coordination with the instructor. Students will be evaluated each week on their contributions to the discussion. Students should come prepared with questions and comments about the week's readings in order to engage meaningfully with their peers on the subject. Missing

multiple sessions without an excuse or prior arrangement will significantly impact the student's grade. In order to foster a sense of community in a seminar setting, I strongly encourage all students to turn their cameras on during class.

Online Engagement

To facilitate interactive online learning, I have created a private Facebook group for the class. This will be a platform for students to share weekly reflections on readings, discuss issues related to MENA politics with their peers, and share events and informational material with the class.

Paper

You will be asked to write one analysis paper on a topic related to theme of the week. Students will sign up at the beginning of the semester to select the week in which they will write their paper. Students are encouraged to speak to the instructor about their ideas for the paper prior to writing.

Papers should be between **7-10 pages** double-spaced. Papers must be submitted by **noon** on the day they are due. Any citation format is appropriate as long as it is correct and consistent.

You will receive comments on the paper and will have **one week** to submit your revisions and can receive up to one full letter grade improvement on your grade for the assignment. For more details, refer to the assignment description handout on Blackboard.

Final Exam

A final exam project will be handed out one week before the end of the course. The project will assess students' ability to reflect on the themes of the course and take a position on contemporary debates in the discipline of Middle East comparative politics. Students will be tested on material covered in the lecture as well as the assigned readings. The exam will be take-home and students will have a full week to complete it.

Grading Policy

The following scale will be used to determine your overall grade in the course:

>= 93.00	A	73.00 - 76.99	C
90.00 - 92.99	A-	70.00 - 72.99	C-
87.00 - 89.99	B+	67.00 - 69.99	D+
83.00 - 86.99	B	63.00 - 66.99	D
80.00 - 82.99	B-	60.00 - 62.99	D-
77.00 - 79.99	C+	<= 59.99	F

Course Policies

During Class

This course is taught synchronously and as such students are required to remain engaged throughout the session and participate frequently.

Policies on Late Assignments

Any assignment that is turned in late will lose 1/3 of a letter grade for each 24-hour period that you have not turned it in after the due date and time. Late assignments will be accepted for no penalty if a valid excuse is communicated to the instructor before the deadline. If you need help or an extension, I encourage you to reach out to me as early as possible more than 24 hours prior to the deadline.

Academic Integrity and Honesty

All members of the university community are expected to exhibit honesty and competence in their academic work. Students have a special responsibility to acquaint themselves with, and make use of, all proper procedures for doing research, writing papers, and taking exams. Members of the community will be presumed to be familiar with the proper academic procedures and will be held responsible for applying them. Deliberate failure to act in accordance with such procedures will be considered academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty is defined as "cheating of any kind, including misrepresenting one's own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information." Acts of academic dishonesty are a legal, moral, and intellectual offense against the community and will be prosecuted through the proper university channels. The University Code of Academic Integrity can be found at <http://www.gwu.edu/~ntegrity/code.html>.

Support for Students With Disabilities

GW's Disability Support Services (DSS) provides and coordinates accommodations and other services for students with a wide variety of disabilities, as well as those temporarily disabled by injury or illness. Accommodations are available through DSS to facilitate academic access for students with disabilities. Additional information is available at <https://disabilitysupport.gwu.edu/>.

Please speak with me in the first week of class to discuss what kinds of accommodations can be made for you.

Mental Health Services 202-994-5300

The University's Mental Health Services offers 24/7 assistance and referral to address students' personal, social, career, and study skills problems. Services for students include: crisis and emergency mental health consultations, confidential assessment, counseling services (individual and small group), and referrals. For additional information see: <https://healthcenter.gwu.edu/counseling-and-psychological-services>

University Policy on Religious Holidays

Students should notify me during the first week of the semester of their intention to be absent from class on their day(s) of religious observance.

Schedule and weekly learning goals

The schedule is tentative and subject to change.

1. Introduction – State formation and colonial legacies (June 29)

Required readings:

- Gasper, Michael. (2017). The Making of the Modern Middle East. In *The Middle East*, 14th Edition. ed. Ellen Lust. pp. 39-72 (SKIM)
- Fromkin, David. (1991). How the modern Middle East map came to be drawn. *Smithsonian*, 22(2)
- Spencer Hartnett, Allison. (2018). Colonial legacies of uneven state development in MENA. *POMEPS Studies* 31.

Recommended Readings:

- Said, Edward W. (1979). *Orientalism: 25th Anniversary Edition*. Vintage Books.
- Owen, Roger. (2013). State, power and politics in the making of the modern Middle East. Routledge. Chapter 1.

Questions:

1. What explains the rise of modern nation states in the MENA region?
2. What is Arab nationalism and how secular is it?
3. How does colonial legacy affect political outcomes such as development, state capacity, and conflict today?

2. Authoritarian Rule and Institutions (July 1)

Required readings:

- Bellin, E. (2004). The robustness of authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in comparative perspective. *Comparative politics*, 139-157.
- Bush, S. S., Erlich, A., Prather, L., and Zeira, Y. (2016). The effects of authoritarian iconography: An experimental test. *Comparative Political Studies*, 49(13), 1704-1738.
- <https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/81611>. *Carnegie*. April 22, 2020.

Recommended Readings:

- De Miguel, C., Jamal, A. A., and Tessler, M. (2015). Elections in the Arab World: Why do citizens turn out?. *Comparative Political Studies*, 48(11), 1355-1388.
- Jones, C. W. (2015). Seeing like an autocrat: liberal social engineering in an illiberal state. *Perspectives on Politics*, 13(1), 24-41.
- Jones, C. W. Calvert. (2019). All the King's Consultants: The Perils of Advising Authoritarians. *Foreign Affairs*.
- Masoud, T. (2015). Has the door closed on Arab democracy? *Journal of Democracy*, 26(1), 74-87.

Questions:

1. What explains the resilience of autocracy in the MENA region?
2. What strategies do autocratic rulers pursue to co-opt and repress opposition in the region? And what explains variation in their approach across MENA states?
3. What role do elections, parties, and parliaments play in semi-authoritarian environments?

3. Iran, Jordan, Algeria (July 6)

Required readings:

- Gause, F. G., and Yom, S. L. (2012). Resilient royals: How Arab monarchies hang on. *Journal of Democracy*, 23(3), 74-88.
- Memarian, Omid. (2019). Iran's Green Movement Never Went Away. *Foreign Affairs*.
- Grewal, Sharan (2019). "Why Algeria's army abandoned Bouteflika." Monkey Cage, *The Washington Post*. April 5.
- Brand, Laurie. (2017). Jordan. In *The Middle East*, 14th Edition. ed. Ellen Lust.
- Lahouari, Addi. (2017). Algeria. In *The Middle East*, 14th Edition. ed. Ellen Lust.

Questions:

1. How do revolutionary legacies shape Iran's political institutions today?
2. In what ways are monarchies and republics different in the Middle East?
3. How can the literature on civil-military relations in authoritarian settings help us make sense of the recent uprising in Algeria?

4. Religion and Politics: Islamism and the Muslim Brotherhood (July 8)

Required readings:

- [Islamic Authority and Arab States in a Time of Pandemic](#). *Carnegie*. April 16, 2020.
- Masoud, T., Jamal, A., and Nugent, E. (2016). Using the Quran to empower Arab women? Theory and experimental evidence from Egypt. *Comparative Political Studies*, 49(12), 1555-1598.
- Schwedler, Jillian. (2017). Why Exclusion and Repression of Moderate Islamists Will Be Counterproductive. *POMEPS Studies* 26
- Sheline, Annelle. (2017). Middle East regimes are using 'moderate' Islam to stay in power. Monkey Cage, *The Washington Post*. March 1.

Recommended Readings:

- Grewal, S., Jamal, A. A., Masoud, T., and Nugent, E. R. (2019). Poverty and Divine Rewards: The Electoral Advantage of Islamist Political Parties. *American Journal of Political Science*.
- Ross, M. (2008). Oil, Islam, and Women. *The American Political Science Review*, 102(1), 107-123.
- Nugent, E., Masoud, T., and Jamal, A. A. (2018). Arab Responses to Western Hegemony: Experimental Evidence from Egypt. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 62(2), 254-288.
- Schwedler, J. (2011). Can Islamists become moderates? Rethinking the inclusion-moderation hypothesis. *World Politics*, 63(2), 347-376.
- Hoffman, M., and Jamal, A. (2014). Religion in the Arab Spring: Between two competing narratives. *The Journal of Politics*, 76(3), 593-606.

Questions:

1. What is political Islam and is it in tension with Arab nationalism?
2. Is Islamism a response to resilient authoritarianism?
3. What role does the state play in shaping religious discourse?
4. Does the inclusion of Islamists in electoral politics lead to "moderation"? If so, how?
5. Do Islamists enjoy an electoral advantage? Why?

5. Identity Politics in The Age of Sectarianism: Lessons from Lebanon and Iraq (July 13)

Required readings:

- Rorbaek, L. L. (2019). Religion, Political Power, and the 'Sectarian Surge': Middle Eastern Identity Politics in Comparative Perspective. *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 19(1), 23-40.
- Caryl, Christian. (2013). It's Not About Us: Forget about the 'war on terror.' The next few decades will be dominated by the bitter divide within Islam itself. *Foreign Policy*.
- Salloukh, Bassel. (2015). Lebanese protesters united against garbage and sectarianism. *Monkey Cage, The Washington Post*.

Recommended Readings:

- Valbjorn, M. (2019). What's so Sectarian about Sectarian Politics? Identity Politics and Authoritarianism in a New Middle East. *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 19(1), 127-149.
- Cammett, Melani. (2014). "Welfare and Sectarianism in Plural Societies." Chapter 1 in *Compassionate Communalism: Welfare and Sectarianism in Lebanon*. Cornell University Press
- Al-Rasheed, M. (2011). Sectarianism as counter-revolution: Saudi responses to the Arab Spring. *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 11(3), 513-526.
- Al-Ali, Z. (2014). *The struggle for Iraq's future: how corruption, incompetence and sectarianism have undermined democracy*. Yale University Press.

Questions:

1. What is sectarianism? Is the Middle East a unique region when it comes to the predominance of religious identity divides?
2. When do identity divides become politically salient?
3. What effect does identity-based political inequality play in fueling violence in the region?
4. How do primordialist and instrumentalist explanations of sectarianism differ from each other?

6. The Political Economy of the Middle East: Oil and Clientelism (July 15)

Required readings:

- Brooke, S. (2019). *Winning Hearts and Votes: Social Services and the Islamist Political Advantage*. Cornell University Press. Chapter 1,2 (skim ch 8)
- Blaydes, L., and Linzer, D. A. (2008). The political economy of women's support for fundamentalist Islam. *World Politics*, 60(4), 576-609.
- Tsourapas, G. (2019). The Syrian Refugee Crisis and Foreign Policy Decision-Making in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. *Journal of Global Security Studies*

Recommended Readings:

- Ross, M. L. (2001). Does oil hinder democracy? *World politics*, 53(3), 325-361.
- Kuran, T. (2004). Why the Middle East is economically underdeveloped: historical mechanisms of institutional stagnation. *Journal of economic perspectives*, 18(3), 71-90.
- Cammett, M. (2013). Development and underdevelopment in the Middle East and North Africa. *The Oxford Handbook of Politics of Development*.

Questions:

1. How do the phenomena of *oil rentierism* and *refugee rentierism* explain governance patterns across the region?
2. To what extent do Islamists derive their political advantage from *clientelism*?
3. How do economic considerations shape political and social attitudes among MENA citizens?

7. Democratization and the Arab Spring (July 20)

Required readings:

- Bellin, E. (2012). Reconsidering the robustness of authoritarianism in the Middle East: Lessons from the Arab Spring. *Comparative Politics*, 44(2), 127-149.
- Hoffman, M., and Jamal, A. (2012). The Youth and the Arab Spring: Cohort Differences and Similarities. *Middle East Law and Governance*, 4(1), 168-188.
- Lynch, M. (2013). *The Arab Uprising: The unfinished revolutions of the new Middle East*. Public Affairs. Chapter 1, skim Ch 6.

Recommended Readings:

- Gause III, F. G. (2011). Why Middle East studies missed the Arab Spring: The myth of authoritarian stability. *Foreign Affairs*, 81-90.
- Lynch, M. (2015). How the media trashed the transitions. *Journal of Democracy*, 26(4), 90-99.
- Langohr, V. (2004). Too much civil society, too little politics: Egypt and liberalizing Arab regimes. *Comparative politics*, 181-204.
- Brownlee, J., Masoud, T., and Reynolds, A. (2013). Tracking the Arab Spring: Why the modest harvest?. *Journal of Democracy*, 24(4), 29-44.
- Pearlman, W. (2013). Emotions and the Microfoundations of the Arab Uprisings. *Perspectives on Politics*, 11(2), 387-409.

Questions:

1. Does the Arab Spring force us to consider the logic of authoritarian persistence in the region?
2. How did the emergence of a new Arab public sphere play in facilitate these uprisings?
3. What accounts for the diverging outcome of this wave of protests across the region?

8. Tunisia, Egypt, Sudan (July 22)

Required readings:

- Beissinger, M. R., Jamal, A. A., and Mazur, K. (2015). Explaining divergent revolutionary coalitions: regime strategies and the structuring of participation in the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions. *Comparative Politics*, 48(1), 1-24.
- Clarke, Killian. (2019). What Algeria and Sudan Can Learn From Egypt: Lessons from a failed revolution. *Foreign Affairs*.
- Grewal, Sharan. (2019) Why the Tunisian military ignored orders and sided with protesters. *Monkey Cage, The Washington Post*.

Recommended Readings:

- Clarke, K., and Kocak, K. (2018). Launching Revolution: Social Media and the Egyptian Uprising's First Movers. *British Journal of Political Science*, 1-21.
- Brown, N. J. (2013). Tracking the Arab Spring: Egypt's Failed Transition. *Journal of Democracy*, 24(4), 45-58.
- Balakrishnan, Nandita. (2019) Sudan's upheaval is the latest example of a 'gray-zone coup'. *The Washington Post*
- Salehi, Mariam. (2019). How Tunisia is addressing its authoritarian past – and why it matters. *Monkey Cage, The Washington Post*. April 19.

Questions:

1. Why did people participate in the Arab Spring uprisings?
2. Why does the composition of protest participants vary significantly across different Arab states?
3. What explains the differences in how the military responded to uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria, and Sudan?

9. Social Movements: Gender and LGBT Rights Issues (July 27)

Required readings:

- Allam, N. (2017). *Women and the Egyptian revolution: Engagement and activism during the 2011 Arab uprisings*. Cambridge University Press. (Read Chapter 1)
- Weiss, M. L., and Bosia, M. J. (Eds.). (2013). *Global homophobia: States, movements, and the politics of oppression*. University of Illinois Press. (Read Chapter 1, Skim Ch 8,9)
- Nielsen, R. A. (2019). Women's Authority in Patriarchal Social Movements: The Case of Female Salafi Preachers. *American Journal of Political Science*. Forthcoming.
- Bush, S. S., and Gao, E. (2017). Small Tribes, Big Gains: The strategic uses of gender quotas in the middle east. *Comparative Politics*, 49(2). (Read only pp 149- 156).

Recommended Readings:

- Haddad, Saleem. (2017). [The Myth of the Queer Arab Life](#). *The Daily Beast*.
- Moussawi, G. (2015). (Un)critically Queer Organizing: Towards a More Complex Analysis of LGBTQ Organizing in Lebanon. *Sexualities*, 18(5/6), 593-617.
- Nagle, J. (2018). Crafting radical opposition or reproducing homonormativity? Consociationalism and LGBT rights activism in Lebanon. *Journal of Human Rights*, 17(1), 75-88.
- Massad, J. (2002). Re-Orienting Desire: The Gay International and The Arab World. *Public Culture*, 14(2), 361-385.
- Schmitt, A. (2003). Gay Rights versus Human Rights: A Response to Joseph Massad. *Public Culture*, 15(3), 587-591.
- Zanghellini, A. (2012). Are Gay Rights Islamophobic? A Critique of Some Uses of the Concept of Homonationalism in Activism and Academia. *Social and Legal Studies*, 21(3), 357-374.

Questions:

1. In what way is homophobia "political" across the region?
2. How does democratization affect the status of women and gender minorities?
3. How do queer activists in the Middle East conceptualize gay rights and what kinds of tactics do they pursue to attain them?
4. What accounts for the variation in the status of women's rights and representation across the region?

10. Middle East Politics and Pop Culture (July 29)

Required readings:

- Hintz, Lisel. (2019). Flipping the Scripts: Pop Culture as Alternative Subject and Data Source in MENA Studies. *APSA MENA Newsletter*, 2(1) Spring.
- Gordon, J. (2018). Pop Culture Roundup. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 50(4), 787-794.
- Hintz, Lisel. (2012). Reading Turkish politics from a soap opera. *Foreign Policy*.
- Alter, Alexandra. (2016). [Middle Eastern Writers Find Refuge in the Dystopian Novel](#). *The New York Times*. May 29.
- Kocamaner, H. (2017). Strengthening the family through television: Islamic broadcasting, Secularism, and the politics of responsibility in Turkey. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 90(3), 675-714.

Questions:

1. What explains regime and opposition production and engagement with pop culture?
2. How can scholars leverage pop culture as a data source in political science research especially in the Middle East?

11. Student Choice Week – Guest Speaker TBD (August 3)

Required readings:

- TBD

12. Conclusions (August 5)

No required readings on the final day of class. We will workshop final projects.
Final Project Draft Due

**Final Exam projects must be submitted via Blackboard by
August 8 at 5:00 pm**