POSC 320: Authoritarianism and Democratization in the Middle East

Carleton College - Spring 2015

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Office hours: Monday 12:30 pm – 1:40 pm. Wednesday: 3:40 pm – 5:00 pm.

Course Description

This course analyzes theories of authoritarianism and prospects for democratization in the Middle East. The course will be divided into two sections: the first will cover the main theoretical perspectives explaining the persistence of authoritarian rule in the Middle East and beyond (i.e. the cultural approach centered on Islam; the structural approach centered on Oil; and the institutional approach centered on civil-military relations and repressive apparatuses). The second section will be devoted to authoritarianism breakdown and the events of the Arab Spring with a special emphasis on Egypt and Syria. Overall, the course has three main goals: 1) To offer students the opportunity to become more conversant with the debates relating to authoritarianism and democracy in the Middle East and beyond. 2) To sharpen students’ analytical and writing skills. 3) To heighten students’ understanding of Middle Eastern politics and, by introducing them to the current events of the Middle East, encourage them to develop their own ideas on the matter.

Text


Course Requirements

Class attendance (10% of your final grade)

Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each session. Each student starts the class with 10 attendance point. You will lose 0.5 points from your attendance grade every time you are absent. For instance if you miss 4 classes you will receive 8 instead of 10 attendance points. Only documented absences will be accepted (e.g. doctor’s note).

Participation (20% of your final grade)

Students are expected to participate actively in the class. I will be asking you to contribute to class discussions and will invite you to offer your opinion on required readings or on related events unfolding as the course goes on.

Mid-term (30% of your final grade)

The Mid-term will be divided into two parts: 1) A series of questions to which you will be expected to reply with short answers. The questions will cover all the material discussed in class from the first lecture to the last. 2) An essay you will be asked to write and which will test your ability to think critically on the material we covered. For instance, you might be asked to discuss the main arguments of the cultural approach to democratization in the Middle East and explain why you agree with it or not. Reading the material and notes in class is indispensable to do well in the exam, but it takes more than just that. You must demonstrate an ability to reflect analytically on the topic and express your own opinions and ideas. You will only be responsible for the required reading; The recommended reading is for your own intellectual development.

Final Paper (40% of your final grade)

(10% presentation and 30% the paper proper)

What is expected of you as you do the readings?

The readings assigned for the course deal with the most fundamental challenges facing the Middle East today. As you read, you will be expected to think critically on the articles by asking yourselves the following questions:

1) What is the author’s main argument?
2) Do I find that argument convincing or not? Why?
3) What alternative explanations can be thought of for the author’s evidence?
4) What are the implications of the argument made by the author?
In addition to the required readings, you are encouraged to keep yourself informed about current issues related to Middle Eastern politics. Consulting newspapers helps a great deal, namely national newspapers following closely Middle Eastern events such as *The New York Times*, *The International Herald Tribune*, *The Washington Post* and *The Wall Street Journal*. You can also read magazines such as *The Economist* and *Newsweek*. Two flagship academic journals are particularly important in the field of Middle Eastern politics, namely, *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies (IJMES)* and *Middle East Journal*. Also, keep an eye on the *Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP)*.

**Reading assignments**

**Monday, 30/3: Introduction**

We will discuss the Syllabus in class.

**Wednesday, 1/4: The Cultural Approach to Authoritarianism and Democracy**


**Recommended reading**


**Monday 6/4: The Structural Approach to Authoritarianism and Democracy**


**Recommended reading:**


**Wednesday 8/4: The institutional approach to Authoritarianism and Democracy (1)**

**Required reading:**


**Recommended reading:**


**Monday 13 /4: The institutional approach to Authoritarianism and Democracy (2)**

**Required Reading:**

Roger Owen. *The Rise and fall of Arab Presidents for Life*. (Chapter 2: The origins of the presidential security state).
**Recommended Reading**


**Wednesday 15/4: Theories of Authoritarianism Breakdown**

**Required Reading**


**Recommended Reading**


**Monday 20/4: Theories of Authoritarian Breakdown (2): The Militaries’ Role**

**Required Reading**


Recommended Reading


**Wednesday 22/4: The 2011 Arab Spring, an Introduction (1)**

In-class screening and discussion of the award-winning documentary “The Square” on the Egyptian uprising.

**Monday 27/4: The 2011 Arab Spring, an Introduction (2)**


**Wednesday 29/4: No Class**

**Monday 4/5: Mid-Term Break**

**Wednesday 6/5: Mid-Term**

**Wednesday 13/5: The 2011 Arab Spring, an Introduction (3)**

**Required Reading**


**Recommended Reading**

Gregory Gause III. “Why Middle East studies missed the Arab Spring: The myth of authoritarian stability”. *Foreign Affairs*. July/August 2011.
Monday 18/5: The Arab Spring in Egypt (1)

**Required reading**


**Recommended reading:**


Wednesday 20/5 The Arab Spring in Egypt (2)

**Required reading:**


**Recommended reading:**


Monday 25/5: The Arab Spring in Syria

**Required reading:**


**Recommended reading:**


Tony Badran: “How Assad stayed in power – And how he will try to keep it” *Foreign Affairs*. 2011.

**Wednesday 27/5: Presentations and Class debate**

**Monday 1/6: Presentations and class debate**

**Wednesday 3/6: Presentations and class debate**