Instructor: Hicham Bou Nassif

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Office: Willis Hall – 408

Office hours: Tuesday 13:00 pm to 14:30 pm; Wednesday 11:00 am to 13:00 pm; and by appointment.

Course Description

Is Islam compatible with Democracy? Is oil a blessing for the population at large or for ruling autocrats? Why did Latin America and Eastern Europe democratize but not the Arab world? These are some questions which we will be debating this term. 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.

Required Texts


Course Requirements

Class Participation (25% 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 (25% 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; recommended readings are for your own intellectual curiosity.

Class presentation (10% of your final grade)

Each participant will present her or his final project in class prior to writing the final paper.

Term Paper (40% of your final grade)

Students are encouraged to think early on of a topic they would like to work on and to discuss it with the instructor.

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**

**Thursday, January 5: Introduction**

We will discuss the Syllabus in class.

**Tuesday, January 10: The Cultural Approach to Authoritarianism and Democracy**

**Required reading**


**Recommended reading**


**Thursday, January 12: The Structural Approach to Authoritarianism and Democracy**

**Required reading**


**Recommended reading:**


**Tuesday January 17: The Institutional Approach to Authoritarianism and Democracy (1)**

**Required reading:**


**Recommended reading:**

Thursday January 19: The Institutional Approach to Authoritarianism and Democracy (2)

**Required Reading:**


Joseph Sassoon, *Anatomy of Authoritarianism in Arab Republics*, 2016. (Chapter 3: The military; and Chapter 4: The Role of security services in Arab republics).


**Recommended Reading**


Tuesday January 24: Theories of Authoritarianism Breakdown (1): Nonviolence in action

**Required Reading**

**Recommended Reading**


**Thursday January 26: Theories of Authoritarian Breakdown (2): The Militaries’ Role**

**Required Reading**


David Pion-Berlin et al. “Staying Quartered: Civilian Uprisings and Military Disobedience in the Twenty First Century”, *Comparative Political Studies*, (2012)


**Recommended Reading**


**Tuesday January 31: The 2011 Arab Spring, an Introduction (1)**

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

**Thursday, February 2: The 2011 Arab Spring, an Introduction (2)**

**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.


**Tuesday February 7:** Review session

**Thursday February 9:** Mid-Term Break.

I will be available in my office all day should you need to see me for additional questions.
Tuesday February 14: Mid-Term

Thursday February 16: The 2001 Arab Spring, and Introduction (3)

Documentary screening+class discussion

Tuesday February 21: Post-Arab Spring Challenges 1: The Military in Egypt

Required Reading


Recommended Reading


Thursday February 23: Post-Arab Spring Challenges 2: The Muslim Brothers in Egypt

Required reading


Recommended reading:


**Tuesday February 28: Post Arab Spring Challenges 3: The Civil War in Syria**

**Required reading:**


**Recommended reading:**


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

**Thursday March 2: Presentations and discussion**

**Tuesday March 7: Presentations and class discussion**

**Thursday March 9: Presentations and class discussion**

Final papers are due on March 13 at 4:00 pm in my inbox.