POL 622
Comparative Politics of the Middle East

Compulsory Course for the Comparative Politics Concentration Track
Course Teacher: Dr. Samer Shehata
Credit Value: 3
Pre-requisites: SOSH 601, POL 611 and POL 612
Co-requisites: SOSH 602 and POL 621
Course Duration: 14 weeks; Semester 2
Total Student Study Time: 126 hours, including 42 contact hours of lectures and seminars.

AIMS

This course is an introduction to political science approaches to Middle East politics and, more specifically, comparative politics approaches to the region’s political dynamics. Students will become familiar with the major concepts and theories involved in the study of Middle Eastern politics. Some of the conceptual topics and themes we will cover include: states and state formation in the Middle East; the persistence and dynamics of authoritarianism in the region; political liberalization and democratization; civil society; nationalism and identity (specifically, Arab nationalism and pan-Arabism); oil and theories of the “rentier state;” Islamist politics (in its diverse forms); the Arab Uprisings (“Arab Spring”) or “revolutions” and their aftermath, and other subjects. This course is designed to provide students with a foundation in the comparative politics of the Middle East (e.g. theories, debates in the field, concepts, etc.), which they can build on as they pursue further studies of the region’s politics. As an introductory graduate course, we will focus more on conceptual/theoretical issues and cross-country questions than on the political histories of individual nation-states.

INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOME

1) Subject-specific skills:

At the end of this course, students should be able to:
- Discuss, debate, and evaluate the major theories and conceptual approaches used to analyse Middle Eastern politics
- Knowledgeably discuss the most important issues and themes in the politics of the region
- Understanding of authoritarianism (its varieties and mechanics)
- Discuss the main topics in comparative politics
- Express an advanced understanding of the major issues and challenges facing Middle Eastern polities
- Appreciate the challenges and limitations facing comparative politics when applied to specific regions
2) Core academic skills:

The course will help students acquire the following skills:
- Critical thinking, analysis, and argumentation
- Compare and assess competing theories
- Evaluate different arguments and independently assess their merits and shortcomings
- Writing skills: summary, critical analysis, and argument
- Make compelling, factually based and rigorous arguments
- Evaluate different types of qualitative and quantitative research
- Synthesize and independently assess conceptual and theoretical material, and formulate critical opinions and argument
- Conduct original research on certain topics related to Middle East politics
- Presentation and public speaking, including effective expression of ideas analytically, coherently and persuasively

3) Personal and key skills:

Students will develop both their oral and writing communication skills. Class discussions are, in part, intended to allow students to express their ideas intelligently and persuasively. Students will also gain experience conducting formal presentations (summaries and critical analysis) to their peers and faculty.

4) Contribution to Program objectives:

This is a core Comparative Politics course, with a focus on applying the key theoretical approaches and methodological tools to the Arab region. In this, it accomplishes two core objectives of the Program and the Institute: training students to the highest international standards, and helping students apply their knowledge to the local context. The combination of knowledge and key skills acquired, coupled with the appreciation of the methodological challenges facing Comparative Politics when applied in the regional context, will contribute to producing academics who are both proficient in Political Science theories and methodologies and able advance human knowledge and respond to the needs of the Arab region, resulting in social, cultural and intellectual development. Both are key objectives of the Program and the Institute.

LEARNING/TEACHING METHODS

One-Hour Lectures: Lectures will introduce the topic under discussion and provide the necessary background information in order to understand the topic’s theoretical and practical significance. Lectures will address the topic conceptually before applying the concept or theme to the Middle East. When appropriate, lectures will also discuss the history of scholarship on the subject, different schools of thought that have developed, trends in the literature, and different theoretical and methodological approaches that have been used. At times, power point presentations, audio-visual resources, and electronic media will be utilized to further student understanding.

Two-Hour Seminars: We will conduct a two-hour seminar each week following the lecture. The seminars will be focused on the close reading, discussion, and analysis of the assigned texts. Because of this, it is crucial that students come to the seminars having read the assigned
readings closely and be fully prepared to discuss them. The seminars aspire to create an open, respectful, and inviting environment in which all opinions and perspectives can be freely discussed. Students will also be required to co-lead the seminar sessions. Each student will be responsible for helping lead our discussion of each week’s topic and readings.

ASSIGNMENTS

The course assignments will include a) two “Review Essays” (1500 words each), b) a Final Essay (3000 words), and a c) Final (summative three hour) Exam.

Review Essays
Students are required to write two “review essays” on two of the weekly topics covered in class. “Review essay” should closely analyze one or two of the “optional further readings” from the syllabus (or relevant readings on the topic chosen based on the students’ interests and in consultation with the instructor) in light of that week’s required readings. The purpose of these assignments is for students to develop greater in-depth knowledge and understanding of two of the topics covered in the syllabus. These essays are not intended to be merely “book reviews” (a summary of the readings without analysis) but engaged, analytical writing assignments in which students compare and contrast texts and bring their own analysis and perspective to bear on the topics discussed. Students MUST declare an exact word count at the end of their papers. The word count should include the main body of the paper, all references and quotations but not the bibliography. Each response paper counts for 15% of the overall course grade. The first “review essay” is due on March 31 and the second is due on April 21.

Final Essay
Students are required to complete a 3000 words essay. The paper topic should be approved by the instructor in advance. The word count should include the main body of the paper, all references and quotations but not the bibliography. This assignment counts for 30% of the overall course grade. The final essay will be due on May 26th.

Final (summative) Examination
The final exam will be scheduled by the Enrollment Department at the end of the term during “Exam Week” (June 12 – 16, 2016). The exam will be a “closed-book” three-hour examination covering all of the material covered through the entirety of the semester, including lectures, seminar discussions, and assigned readings. Students will be given a list of questions from which they must choose. Answers should demonstrate an understanding of the theoretical and empirical material covered in class and an ability to synthesize ideas and make independent arguments based on evidence. The final examination counts for 40% of the overall course grade.

ASSESSMENT

Grades will be divided as follows:
- Review Essay #1  15%
- Review Essay #2  15%
- Final Essay  30%
- Final Exam  40%
SYLLABUS PLAN

Week 1 (Feb 29): INTRODUCTION to the Comparative Politics of the Middle East

• Introduction
• Course Mechanics & Requirements

Week 2 (March 7): What and Where is the “Middle East”?

Required Reading:
• “Where is the Middle East?” http://mideast.unc.edu/where/
• Roderic Davison, “Where is the Middle East?” Foreign Affairs, July 1960, pp. 665-675.

Optional Further Reading:

Week 3 (March 14): THE “FIELD” of MIDDLE EAST POLITICS

What is the history of the study of Middle East politics? What have been the most important (and recurring) questions in the study of the region’s politics? Are Middle Eastern politics somehow different than politics elsewhere (i.e., Middle East “exceptionalism”), as many have argued or assumed, and if so why? Can scholars still speak about this in 2015? Is the Middle East “unique” in some sense? Which approaches are most useful for understanding Middle East politics (e.g., political economy/culture-symbolic/ rational choice)? Should our thinking about the “field” change after the 2011 uprisings? Has the Middle East political science literature been “marginalized” compared with other regions of the world and if so, why? Is the study of politics a “science” and if so, in what sense? Should our goal be producing “theory” and prediction, or something else (e.g., “understanding” and “interpretation”)? And how are “knowledge,” politics, and power (inter)related?

Required Reading:

Optional Further Reading:
Week 4 (March 21): THE STATE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

How should we best understand the state conceptually? What is the character of the state in the Middle East? What are its historical origins and present condition? How can we characterize Middle Eastern states? How is the concept of “legitimacy” related to the state and, more specifically, Middle Eastern states? What kinds of states have existed in the Middle East – and how has state development impacted the politics of the region? What is the relationship between “state” and “nation”?

**Required Reading:**
- Emile Sahliyeh, “The Limits of State power in the Middle East,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* vol. 22, no. 4, Fall 2000, pp. 1-29.

**Optional Further Reading:**
The Recent “Sykes-Picot” Debate:

Week 5 (March 28): NATIONALISM(S) & POLITICS – Arab Nationalism(s) & Pan-Arabism

What is Arab nationalism and pan-Arabism? Is Arab nationalism different from other kinds of nationalism? How important has Arab nationalism been in Arab politics? Is Arab nationalism “dead,” as some analysts have claimed? Is it related to Islamist politics and if so how? Have recent developments, such as Al Jazeera, the Iraq war, and the Arab uprisings revived feelings of Arab nationalism? Do the uprisings in 2011, and their spread throughout the region, say anything about Arab nationalism, pan-Arabism or more generally, the type of connections (e.g., identity, state) that exist within the region?

Required Reading:

Optional Further Reading:
Week 6 (April 4): AUTHORITARIANISM: Origins & Causes

Before 2011 and possibly still today, the dominant question in the study of the region's politics was – “what explains the persistence of authoritarianism in the region” – or alternatively – “Why is there no democracy in the Middle East?” Are these questions the same? Is this question(s) still valid today? Before we can answer this question, we also need to be clear about democracy. What is democracy and what are its empirical indicators, what accounts for its emergence and what are the “obstacles” to its development in the Middle East? How much variation in politics (and “regime type”) is there in the region (before and after 2011)?

Required Reading:
- Freedom House – familiarize yourself with Freedom House’s work, reports, & methodology [https://www.freedomhouse.org/]

Optional Further Reading:
- Nazih Ayubi, Over-Stating the Arab State, Skim pp. 164-288.
Week 7 (April 11): AUTHORITARIAN POLITICS, “INSTITUTIONS,” & PERSISTENCE

What are the mechanisms and dynamics of authoritarian regime survival? How do authoritarian regimes “work”? What is “political liberalization” and how should we understand its relation to “democratization”? What are “hybrid” or semi-authoritarian regimes? Are states such as Morocco Egypt, and Jordan undergoing “transitions to democracy” or are there new forms of authoritarian politics emerging?

Required Reading:

Optional Further Reading:

Week 8 (April 18): OIL, POLITICS & POLITICAL ECONOMY

Required Reading:
**Media Readings:**

**Optional Further Reading:**
- Rex Brynen & Pete Moore (eds.), Chapter 9, “Rentierism and Resource Politics,” in *Beyond the Arab Spring: Authoritarianism and Democratization in the Arab World* (Lynne Rienner), 2013.

**Week 9: April 25 – Reading Week**

**Week 10 (May 2): CIVIL SOCIETY & SOCIAL MOVEMENTS**

What is civil society and is it related to democracy? What is the state of civil society in the region? What is the relationship between state and civil society? Is civil society important in bringing about – and/or maintaining – democracy? How do youth groups and activism fit into concepts of civil society? How about media, social media and activism? What role did civil society play in mobilizing social protest in the Arab uprisings?

**Required Reading:**
Optional Further Reading:

Week 11 (May 9): ISLAM & POLITICS
VIDEO-CONFERENCE with American University in Cairo

What explains the popularity and success of Islamist movements in the region? When did political Islam emerge (historically) as a major political force and why? How should we define and understand political Islam? What is the extent of variation within Islamist politics (or the varieties of Islamist politics)? What are the main components, goals, and discursive themes in Islamist politics? Is there anything distinctive about Islamist politics? We often hear the questions, “Is Islam compatible with democracy?” How should we address this question?

Required Reading:

**Optional Further Reading:**
- Rex Brynen and Pete Moore (eds.), Chapter 6 ("Islamist Movements and Democratic Politics"), *Beyond the Arab Spring: Authoritarianism and Democratization in the Arab World* (Lynne Rienner), 2013.

**Week 12 (May 16): Islamist Politics & Movements**

How have Islamist political parties and movements fared in different states in the region (e.g. Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Turkey, etc.)? How have different regimes in the region dealt with Islamist political movements? How has the study of political Islam evolved over the last 30 years? How should we understand the continuing phenomenon of violent Islamist groups?


**Week 13 (May 23): THE ARAB UPRISINGS OR “ARAB SPRING”**

What were the causes and dynamics of the Arab uprisings? How important were economic factors as causes of social protest (and what role did labor play)? What role did social media and digital technology play in mobilization and protest? Why were youth particularly active in the protests? What explains (or how should we understand) the diffusion of protest across borders during the Arab uprisings?

**Required Reading:**

**Optional Further Reading:**
- Rex Brynen and Pete Moore (eds.), Chapters 1, 2, and 13, in *Beyond the Arab Spring: Authoritarianism and Democratization in the Arab World* (Lynne Rienner), 2013.
- F. Gregory Gause, “The Middle East Academic Community and the “Winter of Arab Discontent”: Why Did We Miss It?” in *Seismic Shift: Understanding Change in the Middle East* (Stimson Center, Washington), May 2011, pp. 11-26.
Week 14 (May 30): THE ARAB UPRISINGS FOUR YEARS LATER: From Hope to Despair?

What explains the different trajectories of political change in the Arab world in the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings? Have we moved from “revolution” to “counter-revolution” and the “resurgence of the deep state” in some countries? What explains “state failure” in Libya, Yemen, and other cases? What explains “success” in Tunisia? Why did similar protests lead to such different outcomes? Have the Arab uprisings led to increasing sectarianism and regional conflict? What are the lessons to be learned from the Arab uprisings for understanding authoritarianism and democratization in the region?

Required Readings:

Optional Further Reading:

Week 15 (June 6): CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN ARAB POLITICS

Required Reading:

Optional Further Readings:
- Steven Cook, Ruling but not Governing: The Military and Political Development in Egypt, Algeria and Turkey (Johns Hopkins University Press), 2007 (Selections)
- Derek Lutterbeck, Arab Uprisings and Armed Forces: Between Openness and Resistance, Geneva Centre for Democratic Control of Armed Forces, DCAF, SSR Paper 2, 2011.

**INDICATIVE READING LIST:**
- Rex Brynen and Pete Moore (eds.), *Beyond the Arab Spring: Authoritarianism and Democratization in the Arab World* (Lynne Rienner), 2013.
• Michelle Penner Angrist (ed.), *Politics and Society in the Contemporary Middle East* (second edition), (Boulder: Lynne Rienner), 2013.

• Seismic Shift: Understanding Change in the Middle East (Stimson Center, Washington), May 2011.

• International Journal of Middle East Studies
• Arab Studies Quarterly
• Middle East Journal
• British Journal of Middle East Studies
• Journal of North African Studies
• Journal of Democracy
• Carnegie Papers