Class details

POL-UA 9540 Politics of the Near and Middle East
Spring 2015
Thursdays, 6:15pm-9:15pm
Location to be confirmed.

Instructor Details

Prerequisites

n/a

Class Description

This is a survey course exploring the politics of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), and the intersection of politics and mass public opinion. We will address in this course those themes most relevant in the MENA region, including history, politics and economics, while also examining how attitudes among ordinary citizens are influenced by these dynamics and conversely, explore the extent to which political actors are influenced by opinion. This course unfolds in five parts. The first section is introductory and discusses past approaches to understanding the MENA region and their limitations, followed by a brief history of the MENA and its colonial experience. The second section addresses the evolution of the post-colonial state and state formation. This will include an exploration of the impact of the post-colonial state on MENA societies and on the shape of contemporary institutions and governments. We then consider broader trends in the MENA, critically the Arab Spring, which led to varied responses ranging from regime collapse, government reform, and devastating civil war, as political forces compete for control of the state. Within this context, we also address economic crisis and reform as well as the gap between rich and poor, the role of Islamist movements and other non-state actors, the status of women and family, and the influence of globalization and the war on terrorism. Weekly topics will feature illustrative case study examples.

Public opinion related to these dynamics matters, though is often overlooked in understanding MENA politics. This class examines the attitudes of mass publics towards Islamist movements and the role of religion in public life, political parties and other institutions, U.S. policy in the MENA region, etc., and how such views are influenced by factors such as education, economic and political opportunity. We will integrate public opinion analysis throughout the course, particularly after the introductory portions. This will entail interesting comparative analyses across countries, between men and women and age groups in order to determine if there are similarities in views cross nationally in an
effort to develop a more nuanced understanding of MENA politics and society. We will draw on surveys and focus groups used for academic research, development organizations, think tanks, polling organizations, etc.

**Desired Outcomes**

You will hopefully come away with a greater understanding of MENA political systems and society. Students will be able to assess political systems by also using public opinion surveys along with other existing approaches. You will learn to appreciate similarities and differences in MENA public opinion and politics in comparative perspective.

**Assessment Components**

**Reaction Papers (25% each):** Each student is responsible for writing three (3) well-written, thoughtful reaction papers (5-6 pages in length, 12-point font, double-spaced) engaging the assigned readings in class. The questions will be provided for you at least a week in advance. The response papers should critically discuss the readings (while some summary is necessary it should be kept to a minimum as the papers are really about your opinions and critique). For instance, you can raise new questions based on the materials, juxtapose different texts, or focus on one set of readings. You should develop a single argument (or a couple) and adequately support them. Any standard citation format will suffice. **Papers must be submitted in class in hard copy format with the exception of the final paper.**

**Oral Presentations (20%):** Each student must complete one (1) oral presentation that discusses the readings. You may choose your week. Essentially, the student should summarize the readings from roughly 3–4 articles of their choice for a week. The presentations should point out the major arguments and conclusions. A thoughtful presentation will include your own assessment of what you found interesting about the article and will also lead the class, which involves asking interesting questions that might include, what aspects of the reading(s) were most convincing, or least convincing? Are there other examples in the region or historically that support or refute the authors’ claim? Are there any factors that should be considered in the analysis? The presentation should last roughly 30-45 minutes, though length may vary due to detail or length. PowerPoint and handouts are not necessary.

**Class Participation (5%):** The course will be organized in seminar fashion. While I may discuss key concepts and definitions, you are fully expected to come prepared and engage in a class that is structured around questions.

Failure to submit or fulfill any required course component results in failure of the class.
Assessment Expectations

**Grade A:** A-quality work is based on your use of class sources, but may go beyond those sources to draw its own conclusions. An A-quality essay will also be elegantly structured and very well argued and written.

**Grade B:** B-quality work is well organized, using a close analysis of its sources to make a useful point. Conversely, a B-quality paper may be as original, even adventurous, as an A-grade paper, but only merit a B because it is badly-structured or poorly written.

**Grade C:** C-quality work fulfils the basic conditions of the assignment. It has an argument and demonstrates a basic understanding of the subject, but this is not supported by close or wide reading. A C-quality essay may contain obvious gaps or internal contradictions and it may also be structured in a confusing way or has grammatical errors.

**Grade D:** The work passes because some relevant points are made. However, there may be a problem of poor definition, lack of critical awareness, poor research.

**Grade F:** The work shows that the research problem is not understood; there is little or no critical awareness and the research is clearly negligible.

Grade conversion

NYU Washington, DC uses the following scale of numerical equivalents to letter grades:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Numerical Grade</th>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100-94</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93-90</td>
<td>A-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89-87</td>
<td>B+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86-84</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83-80</td>
<td>B-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79-77</td>
<td>C+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76-74</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73-70</td>
<td>C-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69-67</td>
<td>D+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-66</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>below 65</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Attendance Policy

Study abroad at Global Academic Centers is an academically intensive and immersive experience, in
which students from a wide range of backgrounds exchange ideas in discussion-based seminars. Learning in such an environment depends on the active participation of all students. And since classes typically meet once or twice a week, even a single absence can cause a student to miss a significant portion of a course. To ensure the integrity of this academic experience, class attendance at the centers is mandatory, and unexcused absences will affect students’ semester grades. Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence. Repeated absences in a course may result in failure. At all Global Academic Centers, unexcused absences will be penalized with a two percent deduction from the student’s final course grade.

To seek an excused absence for medical reasons, students must email or discuss with the Academic Program Coordinator in advance of their missed class. For an excused absence, students must produce a doctor’s note dated with the exact dates of the missed class and/or exam.

Non-medical absences must be discussed with the Academic Program Coordinator prior to the date(s) in question, who will communicate the absence to all relevant faculty members. If faculty members do receive notification, the student has not procured an excused absence.

NYU Washington, DC expects students to arrive to class promptly (both at the beginning and after any breaks), to be attentive, and to remain for the duration of the class. If full class attendance and participation becomes a problem, it is the prerogative of each instructor to apply the rule for unexcused absences, which may include a two percent deduction from the student’s final course grade.

Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence. This means they should initiate email and/or office hour discussions to discuss any missed lectures and assignments and arrange a timeline for submitting missed work.

Please note that for classes involving a field trip or other external visit, transportation difficulties are never grounds for an excused absence. It is the student’s responsibility to arrive at the announced meeting point in a punctual and timely fashion. Staff members may always be reached by cell phone for advice regarding public transportation.

**Late Submission of Work**

1) Written work due in class must be submitted during the class time to the professor.

2) Late work should be emailed to the faculty as soon as it is completed. (If the assignment must be submitted in person, the Academic Program Coordinator can collect on behalf of the faculty between the hours of 9–5, M–F.)

3) Late work will be reduced for a fraction of a letter grade (e.g.,: A to A-, A- to B+, etc.) for
every day it is late, including weekends.

4) Written work during the semester that is submitted 5 days after the submission date (including weekends) without an agreed extension fails and is given a zero.

5) Students who arrive to class late for an exam do not have automatic approval to take extra time to complete the exam.

6) Students who miss an exam (including the final) without previously arranged permission will receive a zero on that exam.

7) Assignments due during finals week that are submitted more than 3 days without previously arranged extensions will not be accepted and will receive a zero. Any exceptions or extensions for work during finals week must be discussed with the Site Director.

---

**Students with Disabilities**

Accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at +1-212-998-4980 or see their website (http://www.nyu.edu/life/safety-health-andwellness/students-with-disabilities.html) for further information.

**Plagiarism Policy**

As the University's policy on "Academic Integrity for Students at NYU" states: "At NYU, a commitment to excellence, fairness, honesty, and respect within and outside the classroom is essential to maintaining the integrity of our community. By accepting membership in this community, students take responsibility for demonstrating these values in their own conduct and for recognizing and supporting these values in others." **Students at Global Academic Centers must follow the University and school policies.**

The presentation of another person’s words, ideas, judgment, images, or data as though they were your own, whether intentionally or unintentionally, constitutes an act of plagiarism.

NYU Washington, DC takes plagiarism very seriously; penalties follow and may exceed those set out by your home school. All your written work must be submitted as a hard copy AND in electronic form to the instructor. Your instructor may ask you to sign a declaration of authorship form.

It is also an offense to submit work for assignments from two different courses that is substantially the same (be it oral presentations or written work). If there is an overlap of the
subject of your assignment with one that you produced for another course (either in the current or any previous semester), you MUST inform your professor.

For guidelines on academic honesty, clarification of the definition of plagiarism, examples of procedures and sanctions, and resources to support proper citation, please see:

http://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/academic-integrity-for-students-at-nyu.html

http://gls.nyu.edu/page/gls.academicintegrity

http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity


Required Text(s)


Links Will be Provided for the Following two items:
1) Arab Human Development Report, 2009 (United Nations Development Program) (Available online; a link will also be provided for you)
2) International Crisis Group reports (Available online; a link will also be provided for you)

Readings from required texts will be indicated only by the last name of the author and chapter. Assigned articles will be available on NYU Classes and indicated in the syllabus in brackets.

Supplemental Texts(s) (not required for purchase)

Additional Readings – Other readings, mostly in the form of articles, book chapters, public opinion polls may be assigned and will be made available to you as appropriate.

Internet Research Guidelines
Just the “Plagiarism Policy” (above).

**Additional Required Equipment**

N/A

**Session 1 – February 5, 2015**

Course Introduction, Review of Syllabus, Course Themes and Topics

**Session 2 – February 12, 2015**

**Overview of the MENA:**
What, if anything, is unique about studying the Middle East? For U.S. students and practitioners, what are the most significant challenges to studying the MENA region? How can we talk about thinking critically and analytically about the MENA?

- Schwedler, Chapters 1–2

**Session 3 – February 19, 2015**

**Themes and Approaches to Understanding the MENA:**
What “approaches” historically have been used to study the MENA and what are the factors that have shaped western academic and pop culture approaches to the MENA? To what extent have power relationships influenced our study and perceptions of the MENA? What kinds of analyses (such as public opinion and comparative approaches) might help produce objective knowledge about the “other?”

- Edward Said, Introduction and Chapter 1, Orientalism [NYU Classes]
- Mahmood Mamdani, Introduction and Chapter 1, in Good Muslim, Bad Muslim (New York: Pantheon, 2004). Good Muslim/Bad Muslim [NYU Classes]
- Tessler, Introduction
- Washington Post Survey: Negative Perceptions of Islam Increasing [NYU Classes]
Session 4 – February 26, 2015

History and Culture of the MENA:
What are the critical junctures during the 19th and 20th century that shaped the contemporary MENA? What is the influence of colonialism on the economic, social and political development of the MENA?

- Schwedler, Chapter 3, “The Historical Context.”
- Rashid Khalidi “Preliminary Historical Observations on the Arab Revolutions of 2011,” Jadaliyya. [NYU Classes]

Session 5 – March 5, 2015

The Post-Colonial Era and State Formation in the MENA I:
Is the MENA inclined to be dominated by authoritarian political systems? What produces authoritarian rule and what variables account for its persistence? How does authoritarian rule shape state-society relations? What are the bases of conflict in the Middle East? (First Reaction Paper Due)

- Schwedler, Chapter 4, “Middle Eastern Politics.”
- Eva Bellin, "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East”, in Comparative Politics 36: 2 (Jan 2004), 139-158.

Recommended Readings

Regional Challenges (Iran):
Authoritarianism endures in Iran, though politics is shaped by dynamics between reformers and hardliners. The election of Rouhani in July could signal change in Iran. What drives Iran’s interests and how has Iran’s role in the Middle East and Persian Gulf changed over recent years? The panel will assess prospects of cooperation over key issues such as terrorism, Iran’s nuclear weapons program and its role in the region.

- Angrist, Michelle. Politics and Society in the Contemporary Middle East, Chapter 11, page 251-end of chapter.
- Iran surveys [NYU Classes]
- Panel Discussion: “The Rouhani Presidency: Challenge, Threat or Opportunity?” Reception and Discussion (TBA)

The Post-Colonial Era and State Formation in the MENA II: Arab Spring – Democratization or Persistence of Authoritarianism (Morocco and Tunisia)
Arab Spring dynamics have seen unprecedented change ranging from the fall of authoritarian regimes, continued liberalization, regime collapse and civil war. What are the sources of Arab Spring and what are the forces of change and persistent authoritarianism?


Class does not meet next Thursday because of Spring Break.

The Military (Egypt and Libya)
• Iksander and Haddad, Readings (TBA).
• (See Egypt Articles on NYU Classes]
• International Crisis Group: Militarization of the Conflict in Libya

Recommended Readings
• “Libya’s Defeated Islamists” at [http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2012/07/17-libyan-islamists-ashour

Session 9 – April 9, 2015

Religion and Politics in the MENA:
What is the relationship between religion and politics in the MENA and what are the debates surrounding Islam and democracy. What has been the varied influence of Islamism in the MENA and how have they impacted governance in the region? What is the structure of public attitudes towards Islamism? Experts will share findings from survey research in the region.

• Schwedler, Chapter 12, “Religion and Politics in the Middle East.”
• Hafez, Mohammed, Why Muslims Rebel: Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World, (Boulder, CO, Lynne Rienner, 2003), Introduction and Chapter 2. [NYU Classes]
• Wiktorowicz, Quintan, Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach, (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2004), Introduction
• Guest Speaker – Dr. Mark Tessler, University of Michigan-Ann Arbor: “Attitudes towards Political Islam in the MENA” (TBA)

Recommended Readings

Session 10 – April 16, 2015

Islamist Movements, Militias and Other Non-State Actors (the Levant):
Transitional dynamics in the Middle East have given way to an assertion/reassertion of Islamist organization influence. Islamist movements have challenged the legitimacy of the state in recent decades and have now emerged as political players in political transitions, though with varying
degrees of influence some would argue. What is the role of Islamist movements and other competing forces in the Middle East? (Second Reaction Paper Due)

- Angrist, Chapter 18.

Session 11 – April 23, 2015

Israel and Palestine – The conflict between Israel and Palestine have divided the region for decades. This session explores the sources of those conflict and Middle East public opinion on this issue.

- Sharoni and Abu Nimer in Schwedler
- Tessler, Chapter 12.

Session 12 – April 30, 2015

Political Economy – Economic Crisis and Reform (Algeria and Saudi Arabia):
What is the influence of colonialism on the political economy of development? What is the role of the state in development in the Middle East, and is oil a blessing or a curse in terms of facilitating the prospects for change? We look at two case studies, Algeria and Saudi Arabia, to assess these questions. In the case of Saudi, will policies under the new king reflect continuity or change?

- Schwedler, Chapter 7, “The Economies of the Middle East.”
• Tessler, Chapter 4, “Political Generations in Muslim Countries: Evidence and Insights from Algeria.”
• Angrist, Michelle. Politics and Society in the Contemporary Middle East, Chapter 17. [NYU Classes]
• Helene Cooper, “New Saudi King and U.S. Face a Crucial Point in Relationship” in http://www.nyti.ms/1Ji7OTz [NYU Classes]

Recommended Readings


Session 13 – May 7, 2015

Women and Family:
How does the role of women and family change with development. What are the bases of political action in the Middle East (e.g., communal, sectarian, religious, class, political, economic, and cultural)? In studying the MENA, why does the question of the “veil” come to dominate all other issues? When does the issue of women become politicized?

• Schwedler, Chapter 11.
• Tessler, Chapter 11.

Session 14 – May 14, 2015
The Global War on Terrorism (Iraq):
How has the global war on terrorism altered U.S. relationships in the Middle East region? Has the U.S. strategy diminished or contributed to terrorism and stability in countries such as Iraq, and how has this altered the U.S. profile in the region, according to public opinion surveys? (Third Reaction Paper Due)

- Tessler, Chapter 13
- Fred Halliday, “Terrorism in Historical Perspective,” in Open Democracy, April 22, 2004. [NYU Classes]
- John Esposito, “America’s Response to Terrorism: How to Fight Rather than Feed the Beast,” Huffington Post, January 5, 2010 [NYU Classes]
- Angrist, Michelle. Politics and Society in the Contemporary Middle East, Chapter 12.

Classroom Etiquette

Required Co-curricular Activities

N/A

Suggested Co-curricular Activities

Although this class is offered during the evening, I will also advise you of talks and presentations in the Washington, DC area that are relevant to the class and that therefore may be of interest to you. Since you may have other classes, you will not be graded on your attendance.

Your Instructor