Comparative Politics of the Middle East

MAAS 725
School of Foreign Service
Georgetown University
Fall 2010

Instructor: Samer S. Shehata
Class Meetings: Thursday 2:15 - 4:05
Location: ICC 216
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This course is an introduction to political science approaches to Middle East politics and more specifically, comparative politics approaches to the region’s politics. As such, students will be introduced to the major questions and theoretical approaches involved in the study of Middle Eastern politics. Some of the substantive topics 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 and democratization; nationalism and identity (specifically, Arab nationalism and pan-Arabism); oil; politics, and theories of the rentier state; political economy approaches to Middle East politics; Islamist politics; elections in the Arab world; and other subjects. We can not hope to be comprehensive in our coverage of these important issues in only one semester. Therefore, this course is designed to provide a foundation in Middle East politics/political science (e.g. theories, debates in the field, concepts, etc.) that can be useful as you pursue more extensive studies of the region’s politics.

Although this course is about “Middle East politics,” we will focus primarily on the Arab world, and more specifically on the Mashreq, Egypt, and the Gulf States. As an introductory course, we will focus more on theoretical issues and cross-country questions than on the political histories of individual nation-states.

Some of the major topics and questions in the study of Middle East politics include (although we will not be able to cover all of these topics in class):

1) The State: 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? Are they “strong,” “hard,” “brittle” or “weak” (i.e. Ayubi)? 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?
2) Nationalism: 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 Islamist political identities come to replace Arab nationalism? Have recent developments, such as Al Jazeera and the Iraq war revived feelings of Arab nationalism?

3) Politics: Elites & Masses: Is politics in the Middle East exclusively an elite game? Do popular classes engage in “politics” in the region? What types of relations exist between political elites and popular classes (e.g., populist authoritarianism, patron-client relations; clientalism, etc.). What form does politics take in authoritarian states and can we speak of “political participation” in such states? Is there such a thing as “everyday politics”?

4) Islam and Politics: What explains the increasing prominence, popularity, and success of Islamist movements in the region and beyond? 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? 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?

5) Oil and Politics: How does oil impact the politics of the region? Does oil hinder democracy? Does the rentier theory of the state explain the absence of democracy in oil-dominated economies? Are there other political consequences of oil wealth on the politics of individual nation states as well as on regional politics? How has oil shaped external/foreign interest in the region?

6) Authoritarianism: 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? 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 “regime type” and politics is there in the region? What are the mechanisms and dynamics of authoritarian regime survival? What is “political liberalization” and how should we understand its relation to “democratization”? What are “hybrid” or semi-authoritarian regimes?

7) Democratization: Do countries “transition to democracy”? What is “liberalized autocracy” or “semi-authoritarianism”? Are “semi-authoritarian” regimes (in the Middle East and elsewhere) stable regime types? Can democracy be imposed from the outside? Can states “push” countries along democratization paths? If so, how?
8) Civil Society: What is civil society and how 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?

9) (Neo-liberal) Economic & Political Reform: How does economic reform impact politics? Are economic reform and political reform related? Does economic reform lead to political reform? Do “free markets” eventually produce free politics? What changes take place in a country’s domestic politics as it pursues economic liberalization policies? How do regime-society alliances (i.e., class alliances and social structure) change as a result of economic reform and how are international actors, especially international financial institutions, involved in the process of reform?

10) Middle East “Exceptionalism”: Related to topics 4, 5, 6, and 7 above (Islam, oil, and authoritarianism) – is the question of the Middle East’s supposed “uniqueness.” Are Middle Eastern politics somehow different than politics elsewhere and if so why? Is the Middle East “exceptional” in some sense? Which approaches are best for understanding Middle East politics (e.g., political economy/culture-symbolic/ rational choice)?

11) Elections: How can we characterize elections in the Middle East, and more specifically in the Arab world? Are they practices of democracy or are they simply a democratic façade? Are elections harbingers of democracy? Or, in such contexts, are they institutions of patronage, clientalism, and control? Why do people vote in non-democratic (i.e., “authoritarian elections”) elections and on what basis do they vote (i.e., “voting behavior”?)? What are the “functions” of elections in such regimes? And what, if any, is the relationship between elections and democratization?

12) Regional & International Dimensions: What has been the role of regional and international conflicts (e.g., the cold war, regional wars) in the politics of the region? What have been the economic and political consequences of conflict and war on the region? On what basis have regional alliances historically been formed in the Middle East?

13) US and the Middle East: What has been the relationship of the U.S. to the region in the post World War II period? How have U.S. “national security interests” been defined (or “constructed”) with regard to the Middle East and with what consequences? How did the cold war and more recently, the war on terror impact US-Middle East relations as well as the domestic politics of states in the region?

14) Globalization: How do global changes in politics, economics, and information technology, impact local politics in the Middle East? Are developments in information technology such as satellite television, mobile phones (e.g., text messaging and twitter) and the internet (e.g., YouTube, blogs, etc.) having an impact on politics in the Middle East, and particularly on authoritarian regimes? How is the increased speed and ease at which capital and information flow impacting the region’s politics?
**Requirements:** This is a seminar based primarily on the close reading and focused discussion of set texts. The success of such an enterprise depends on the active participation of everyone. Therefore, you are required to:

1) Come to class prepared -- having read the assignments carefully and ready to discuss them.

2) Seminar participants are required to write short weekly responses (at least two paragraphs in length) distributed via Blackboard to all members of the seminar by Wednesday at 6:00 pm. These are not intended to be highly polished pieces of writing. Nor are they meant to be summaries of the week’s readings. Rather, they are your critical reactions to and reflections on the readings. They are intended to promote discussion, generate debate, and raise critical questions about the topics to be discussed in class.

3) You are required to write two “review essays” (8 double-spaced pages each) that focus closely on one week’s readings in addition to one or two of the “Further,” “Recommended,” or “Suggested” Readings’ from that week. Please note that these review essays are not to be serial reviews of the works under discussion but are intended as opportunities for you to critically engage with the main ideas and theories presented in the texts. Review essays should be textually focused and based on your own analysis of the readings. Examples of “review essays” can be found in journals such as World Politics, Comparative Politics and the International Journal of Middle East Studies.

4) Lead class discussion (individually or with a partner) once during the semester. Note that you are not permitted to lead class discussion on a topic in which you have (or will) write a “review essay.” Please also note that leading class discussion does not entail presenting a lecture in class. Leading class discussion entails reading the required (and some of the supplementary) readings thoroughly and coming to class prepared to promote discussion about the major themes and issues raised in that week’s readings. This could include preparing questions to be asked in class to stimulate discussion.

**Grading:**

- 30% Attendance, Participation & Weekly Reaction Papers
- 10% Leading Class Discussion
- 30% Review Essay #1
- 30% Review Essay #2

**Books to Purchase:**

- Marsha Pripstein Posusney and Michele Penner Angrist, eds., *Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Regimes and Resistance* (Lynne Rienner), 2005.


**Additional Suggested Books:**

• Michele Penner Angrist, ed., *Politics and Society in the Contemporary Middle East* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner), August 2010.


• R. Brynen, B. Korany and P. Noble (eds.) *Political Liberalization & Democratization in the Arab World* (vol. I Theoretical Perspectives) (Boulder: Lynne Rienner) 1995.

**Readings:**
Readings marked with an asterisk (*) will be available through Blackboard. Readings that include a web address beside them are available on the internet. All other readings are in the books to be purchased.

**Thursday September 2**
**Introduction:** Syllabus; Assignments; Mechanics, etc…

**Thursday, September 9**
**Topic 1: The Field of Middle East Politics**


Highly Recommended:

Further Reading:
- Summary of a panel session which included Martin Kramer and Lisa Anderson on Middle East Studies and the impact of Ivory Towers on Sand. http://www.martinkramer.org/pages/899527/
- Jerrold D. Green, 'The Politics of Middle East Politics,' PS: Political Science 27, no. 3 (September 1994)
- Jerrold D. Green, ‘Where are the Arabs?’ Survival 40, no. 2 (Summer 1998).
- Jerrold D. Green, 'Is Arab Politics Still Arab?' World Politics 38 (July 1986): 611-
625, 1986.


**Thursday September 16**

**Topic 2: The State in the Middle East**


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


**Further Reading:**

- Lisa Anderson, ‘The State in the Middle East and North Africa,’ *Comparative Politics* (October 1987). Available online through JSTOR


Thursday, September 23  
Topic 3: Nationalism & Politics – Arab Nationalism(s) & Pan-Arabism


Highly Recommended:


Further Reading:


- Special Issue on ‘Nationalism and the Colonial Legacy in the Middle East and Central Asia,’ *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 34, no. 2, May 2002 (esp. Introduction and article by Sami Zubaida).

**Thursday, September 30**

**Topic 4: Authoritarianism & Authoritarian Politics**


**Further Reading:**


• Kanan Makiya, *Cruelty and Silence: War, Tyranny, Uprising, and the Arab World*.

*For different cultural analyses of authoritarianism see:


**Thursday, October 7**
**Topic 5: Politics from Below**


**Further Reading:**

• Asef Bayat, *Street Politics* (Columbia University Press).

**Thursday, October 14**
**Topic 6: Oil & Politics**


  Available at: http://pdfserve.informaworld.com/955302_915549761_913977097.pdf

Further Reading:
• Kiren Aziz Chaudhry, 'Economic liberalization and the Lineages of the Rentier State,' Comparative Politics 27 (October 1994).
• Arab Studies Quarterly (two issues) vol. 10, no. 2 & 3.
Thursday, October 21
Topic 7: Political Liberalization, Democratization, or Authoritarian Persistence & Retrenchment?


Further Reading:
- “Democratization in the Muslim World: Changing Patterns of Power and Authority,” Special Issue of Democratization (June 2006).
- Eva Bellin, “Contingent Democrats: Industrialists, Labor, and Democratization in Late-Developing Countries,” in World Politics 52 (January 2000), pp. 175-205. (about democratization).
- Look over additional articles in Brynen, Noble and Korany (eds.) Political Liberalization & Democratization in the Arab World.
• M Hudson, ‘The Political Culture Approach to Arab Democratization,’ (pp. 61-76) in R. Brynen, B. Korany and P. Noble (eds.) Political Liberalization & Democratization in the Arab World (vol. I Theoretical Perspectives) (Boulder: Lynne Rienner) 1995.

• Lisa Anderson, ‘Democracy in the Arab World: A Critique of the Political Culture Approach,’ (pp. 77-92) both in R. Brynen, B. Korany and P. Noble (eds.) Political Liberalization & Democratization in the Arab World (vol. I Theoretical Perspectives) (Boulder: Lynne Rienner) 1995.

• Dankwart Rustow, ‘Transitions to Democracy,’ Comparative Politics 2:3 1970.

• Responses to Michael Hudson in the same issue of Contention by Farhad Kazemi and A. R. Norton; Suad Joseph; Clifford Chanin; Ellis Goldberg.


Thursday, October 28
Topic 8: Civil Society

• *R. Norton (ed), Civil Society in the Middle East (vol. 1) 1995 (Leiden: Brill) Introduction.


Further Reading:

• Sheila Carapico, “Civil Society,” in Michele Penner Angrist, ed., Politics and Society in the Contemporary Middle East (Boulder: Lynne Rienner), August 2010.


Case Study – Jordan:

Thursday, November 4

Topic 9: Islam and Politics


• Quintan Wiktorowicz, Conceptualizing Islamic Activism, ISIM Newsletter, 14, June 2004. Available at: http://www.isim.nl/files/newsl_14/newsl_14-34.pdf#search=%22wiktorowicz%22


• Possibly an Additional Reading TBA

Recommended:


Recommended Films (available in the GU Library):
- The Terrorist (film with Adel Imam)
- Destiny (film by Youssef Chahine - AFD) 1997.
- The Closed Door (film by Atef Hetata, 1999 - AFD)

Further Reading:
• *Mark Tessler, 'Islam and Democracy in the Middle East: The Impact of Religious Orientations on Attitudes toward Democracy in Four Arab Countries,' Comparative Politics 34 (April 2002) pp. 337-54.
• What is Liberal Islam? In Journal of Democracy (several articles) – volume 14, no.2, April 2003
• Jillian Schwedler and Janine Astrid Clark recent piece in Comparative Politics (on Islamist political activism) "Who Opened the Window? Women’s Activism within Islamist Parties," Comparative Politics 35, no. 3 (April).
• Nazih Ayubi, Political Islam (ch.. 1,2,3 (pp. 1-70) and 6,7,8 (pp. 120-200).
• J. Esposito and J. Voll, 'Islam and Democracy,' in MERIP
• J. Voll and J. Esposito, 'Islam’s Democratic Essence,' Middle East Quarterly (September 1994).

Thursday, November 11
Topic 10: Political Islam II: Islamist Politics in Egypt


Further Reading:
• *Ahmed Abdalla, 'Egypt’s Islamists and the State,' in MERIP, July-August 1993, pp. 28-31.


• http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/27/world/europe/27turkey.html?_r=1&n=Top%2fNews%2fWorld%2fCountries%20and%20Territories%2fTurkey&oref=slogin


**Thursday, November 18**

**Topic 11: Elections in the Middle East**

**IN CLASS Film Screening**

• *Larbi Sadiki, Rethinking Arab Democratization: Elections Without Democracy* (Oxford University Press), 2009 (Selections); Introduction, Chapters 1-2, pp. 1-99.


• *Jillian Schwedler and Laryssa Chomiak, “And the Winner is … Authoritarian Elections in the Arab World,”* *MERIP*, 238, Spring 2006.

**Further Reading:**


**Thursday November 25 – Thanksgiving Holiday**

**Thursday, December 2**

**Topic 12: The United States & the Middle East:**

• *Michael Hudson, “To Play the Hegemon: Fifty Years of US Policy Toward the Middle East,”* Middle East Journal vol. 50, no. 3, summer 1996.


• President Bush’s speech at the National Endowment for Democracy (November 6, 2003) http://www.ned.org/events/anniversary/oct1603-Bush.html

  http://www.lrb.co.uk/v28/n06/john-mearsheimer/the-israel-lobby

• TBD

**Further Reading:**

• Michael Massing, “The Storm over the Israel Lobby,” New York Review of Books, volume 53, number 10, June 8, 2006. Available at:
  http://www.nybooks.com/articles/19062


• Martin Indyk, ‘Back to the Bazaar,’ Foreign Affairs, January/February 2002.
  http://www.brook.edu/views/articles/indyk/20020114.htm


• http://www.twq.com/03summer/docs/03summer_haass.pdf
• Thomas Carothers & Bethany Lacina, “Quick Transformation to Democratic Middle East is Fantasy,” March 16, 2003 in the Seattle Post-Intelligencer
http://www.ceip.org/files/Publications/wp35.asp?from=pubdate
• Fouad Ajami, 'Iraq and the Arabs’ Future,' Foreign Affairs Jan/Feb 2003.
http://oz.plymouth.edu/~sshirley/Ajami.htm
• President Bush’s speech at the National Endowment for Democracy (November 6, 2003) http://www.ned.org/events/anniversary/oct1603-Bush.html
• Marina Ottaway, Thomas Carothers, Amy Hawthorne, Daniel Brumberg, Democratic Mirage in the Middle East (October 2002)
• Marina Ottaway and Martha Brill Olcott, The Challenge of Semi-Authoritarianism, (1999). Available at:
http://www.ceip.org/programs/democr/Semi-Authoritarianism%20WP.htm
• Guilain P. Denoeux, ‘The United States and the Challenge of Democratization in the Arab World,’ Occasional Paper, Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1996.
• Clement M. Henry, ‘USAID and Democracy: At Sea or off to Cyberspace?’ Middle East Policy (January 1997) 5, 1, pp. 178-198.
• C.P. Abdullah, ‘Charter to Reform the Arab Stand,’

Thursday, December 9   Last Class & Review