POLI 640
Middle East Politics

INSTRUCTOR: Prof. Rex Brynen
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CLASS HOURS: Mondays, 11h35 – 14h25 (LEA 541)

OFFICE HOURS: Mondays 10h30-11h00, Wednesdays 14h00 – 15h30, or by appointment.
In addition, I will usually be available for brief consultations immediately after the seminar.

Course Description

This course will examine selected aspects of politics in the Middle East. These will include state-society relations; ideology and transnationalism; Islamist politics; political economy; political liberalization and the persistence of authoritarianism. Given recent events in the region, there will be a particular emphasis on the political and theoretical implications of the protests and uprisings of the “Arab Spring” and their aftermath.

This course is intended to serve primarily as a literature survey and research seminar, and secondarily as an introduction to key political and policy debates. In the first part of the course we will examine significant themes and important recent contributions to the study of Middle East politics. In the second part, we will examine some pressing policy concerns in the region. This course is not intended as an introductory survey of the region. Students with little prior knowledge of the Middle East are thus advised to also purchase and read the general textbook on the region assigned for POLI 340.

Course Requirements¹

Students may choose between two different systems of evaluation. The first system emphasizes theoretical debates and academic research skills and is intended to be especially useful to current and prospective PhD students, and to MA students writing their thesis/research paper on Middle East or comparative topics. The second system stresses the policy relevance of scholarly analysis, and the ability to write shorter policy-relevant memos on key Middle East issues. This system may be useful if you are planning on a career in diplomacy, development assistance, international business, or similar areas. You are free to choose either evaluation system by marking the appropriate box on the questionnaire distributed in the first day of class. If you do not submit a completed questionnaire at that time, you

¹ McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity for more information).
will be assumed to have selected system 1. In any case, you may not change evaluation systems after you have made your selection.

**SYSTEM 1 (default)**

- review essay (15%)
- review essay critique 1 (5%)
- research paper proposal (5%)
- final research paper (30%)
- seminar participation (20%)

**SYSTEM 2**

- review essay (15%)
- review essay critique (5%)
- policy memo (15%)
- policy paper critique 1 (5%)
- policy paper critique 2 (5%)
- analytical game debrief (15%)
- final exam (20%)
- seminar participation (20%)

A **review essay** should address the readings for one of the weeks in Part 1 of the course. It should be up to 1,500 words in length and should be posted on myCourses at least 48 hours prior to the appropriate seminar in MS Word (.doc or .docx), Adobe Acrobat (.pdf) or plain text format. Late postings interfere with the operation of the course and will be penalized. All members of the class are expected to read the review essays prior to the seminar.

- **Doing this well:** A good review essay does not simply summarize the readings (which the class has already read), but rather highlights major issues, debates, problems, and/or insights. During the seminar, review essay authors are expected to make a 10-minute (maximum) presentation based on their review, and to lead subsequent discussion. In doing this, don’t simply read your review (which, once again, the class has already read), but build on what you have written. If more than one student is presenting a review in a given week, you may—with my permission—split the readings between you. You may also wish to coordinate your reviews and presentations to make sure that you aren’t repeating each other.

A **review essay critique** should be up to 750 words in length and offer an appraisal of a student’s review essay. This will also be presented verbally in class. Two hard copies of the critique (one for the instructor and one for the student critiqued) are due in class on the day of the appropriate seminar.

- **Doing this well:** In writing your critique, be thoughtful and constructive. Highlight weaknesses, logical inconsistencies, gaps, or what you see as mistaken interpretation of the week’s readings. You may also wish to draw out the implications of the review essay that you are critiquing. Avoid the temptation to focus on minor issues and style, and don’t go lightly on your friends! You will get five minutes in class to verbally summarize your critique.

A **policy memo** must address one contemporary policy issue in the Middle East (listed under the “Policy Issue” topics below). You will need to discuss with me what topics you might write about. The policy memo should be up to 1,250 words in length, plus a one-page executive summary, and up to two pages of supporting data (if relevant) in tabular or graphic form if useful. As with review essays, memos should be posted on myCourses at least 48 hours prior to the appropriate seminar in MS Word (.doc or .docx), Adobe Acrobat (.pdf) or plain text format. Late memos interfere with the operation of the course and will be penalized. All members of the class are expected to read the policy memos prior to the seminar. In addition, you are expected to recommend two online background articles (per memo) to be read by the class at least one week before your presentation.

- **Doing this well:** Make sure you’ve discussed your specific topic and approach with the instructor before your write the memo. Research your topic well and be up-to-date in your knowledge. Be clear “who” you are in writing the memo. Be succinct, logical, and to the point. Be sure to be balanced in your analysis, and don’t omit major issues or counterarguments that would affect your assessment or recommendations. Be

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2 Late posting penalties (for all components) are: up to 6 hours late: -5%; 6-12 hours late –10%; 12-18 hours late –15%; 18-24 hours late –20%; more than 24 hours late –25%. Half of this penalty will be applied as a bonus to adversely affected critiques.
realistic. You’ll have ten minutes in the seminar to argue the merits of your approach/analysis, after which time it will be thrown open for discussion and debate.

A **policy memo critique** is similar in format to a review essay critique but focuses on a student’s policy memo. It should address the logic, parsimony, coherence, and policy feasibility of the analysis. These will be handed in, but not formally presented in class—although you will be expected to lead off discussion with a few points.

A **research paper proposal** is similar to an abbreviated version of an MA or PhD thesis proposal, addressing the proposed topic of your major research paper (see below). In 4-5 pages (plus a working bibliography) it should outline your research question and its significance, and link this to relevant literatures, and discuss how you intend to undertake your analysis. It is due, by email, on **October 7**. Late proposals will be penalized 2%/day.

- **Doing this well:** It is essential that you have a clear argument, hypothesis, or research problem. What is it you intend to show in your paper? You also need to be cognizant of methodological issues—how is it you will be making your case? How will you demonstrate causal connections? Finally, set your research topic in a broader theoretical context. What literatures cast light on your topic? What contribution to scholarship might your research findings make? Don’t feel you need to be confined to using an existing theoretical approach, however: simply by making a clear argument and suggesting generalized causal linkages between variables, you’ll be making a “theoretical” argument yourself.

An **analytical game debrief** should not simply be a descriptive account of what happened. Rather, it should be a thoughtful assessment of the key dynamics and major insights from a political-military or crisis game, focusing on what strategic options were assessed, why decisions were made, critical junctures, and the key drivers of important outcomes. This should be up to 1,500 words in length.

- **Doing this well:** In this assignment you are being asked to reflect on the findings of the game, and what it suggested about the issue under examination. What insights or questions (for future study) did gameplay reveal? However, you should also assess the utility of the game mechanism being used. To what extent did it generate a valid representation of real-world dynamics? In what ways might the game outcomes be an artifact of the game’s design, or an idiosyncratic reflection of the participants involved?

A **major research paper** must address aspect of the comparative politics of the Middle East. This may include research on the domestic sources of foreign policy but may not be on narrow IR topics. It may also include non-Middle Eastern cases, provide the Middle East component represents at least half the paper. The research paper must conform to the article format required by the *Middle East Journal* in length (7-8,000 words) and footnote style. The research paper is due by email on or before **December 15** (with TAs entitled to the department’s standard two-week extension upon written notification to the instructor). Late papers will not be accepted without a documented medical or similar excuse.

- **Doing this well:** As with the research paper outline, the key here is to present a clear argument regarding a clearly-expressed research question, and to undertake your analysis in a logical and well-organized way. A good introduction is of critical importance, outlining what you are going to do, how you are going to do it, and why it matters. The conclusion is also important: be sure to summarize your major findings, highlight their significance, and possibly point out future trends, promising lines of future investigation, or future research questions. The substantive core of the paper should be clear and well-supported. Don’t be afraid to use numerical data, graphs, and charts if they are useful. Pay careful attention to format, syntax, grammar, and style, since sloppiness here will cost you grades.

**Seminar participation** is an essential part of the course. Failure to participate is the single easiest way of doing poorly in the class, so speak up! Feel free to post comments to myCourses as well, since these will also be considered in assigning the participation grade.
A take-home final exam will be distributed at the end of the last seminar (December 2), and will be due one week later (December 9).

Seminar Topics and Readings

All books are on reserve and all articles are available via myCourses, unless otherwise noted. Reviewers may find it useful to purchase the books they are reviewing, which they can do via Amazon.ca or similar.

September 9
Introduction: The Study of the Middle East

Kristen Kao and Ellen Lust, Why Did the Arab Uprisings Turn Out as They Did? A Review of the Literature (POMED, 2017).

September 16
Pathways to and from the Arab Spring


September 23
Political Culture

“Political Culture Revisited,” in Brynen, Moore, Salloukh, and Zahar, Beyond the Arab Spring.
Also: skim Arab Barometer (http://www.arabbarometer.org) and try your hand at online data analysis (http://www.arabbarometer.org/content/online-data-analysis)
September 30

**Ideas, Discourse, and Permeability**

“The New Arab Media,” in Brynen, Moore, Salloukh, and Zahar, Beyond the Arab Spring.

October 7
(No class)

October 14
(Thanksgiving—no class)

October 21

**Political Economy I: The Political Economy of Arab Revolts**

“Economic Liberalization,” in Brynen, Moore, Salloukh, and Zahar, Beyond the Arab Spring.
Filipe R. Campante and Davin Chor, “Why was the Arab World Poised for Revolution? Schooling, Economic Opportunities, and the Arab Spring,” Journal of Economic Perspectives, 26, 2 (Spring 2012).

October 28

**Political Economy II: Petropolitics and Rentierism**

“Rentierism and Resource Politics,” in Brynen, Moore, Salloukh, and Zahar, Beyond the Arab Spring.

November 4

**Middle East Militaries**

“Roundtable: Rethinking the Study of Middle East Militaries,” International Journal of Middle East Studies, 43, 3 (August 2011)—read all.

November 11
**Monarchies**


November 18
**Sectarianization**

Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel, eds., *Sectarianization: Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). Read the Introduction (Hashemi and Postel), Chapters 2 (Salloukh) and 3 (Sayigh), and any two case studies. (The reviewer should read the entire book.)

November 25
**Islamist Politics**

Janine Clark, “Islamist Movements and Democratic Politics,” in Brynen, Moore, Salloukh, and Zahar, *Beyond the Arab Spring*.


December 2
**Policy Issues I: Political development (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia)**

Readings TBA (suggested by presenters)

December 3 (counts as Monday)
**Policy Issues II: Regional conflict (Syria, Iraq, Yemen)**

Readings TBA (suggested by presenters)

Date TBD
**Analytical Game: Iran-US**

Role briefings will be circulated several days in advance.