

POLI 640

Middle East Politics

INSTRUCTOR: Prof. Rex Brynen
LEA 510
email: rex.brynen@mcgill.ca

CLASS HOURS: The seminar will take place on Fridays, from 14h35 to 17h25 in LEA 424.

OFFICE HOURS: I have general “drop-in” office hours for all classes on Fridays, 12h45-14h15, although generally it is better to make an appointment for a Zoom or in-person meeting at another time. I am also (usually) available for quick consultation immediately after the seminar.

Course Description¹

This course will examine selected aspects of politics in the Middle East. These will include the contentious politics and authoritarian adaptation of the Arab Spring era and its aftermath; the role of ideas and political discourse; political economy; civil-military relations; and religion and politics. One topic has been left “open” to accommodate student interests.

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 Requirements^{2,3}

Students may choose between two different systems of evaluation.

¹ In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University’s control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

² McGill University values academic integrity. 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).

³ In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

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, intelligence analysis, risk assessment, or international business.

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 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)	SYSTEM 2
review essay (15%)	
review essay critique 1 (5%)	
review essay critique 2 (5%)	policy memo 1 (15%)
research paper proposal (5%)	policy memo 2 (15%)
final research paper (30%)	policy paper critique 1 (5%)
	policy paper critique 2 (5%)
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 to the appropriate myCourses forum discussion **at least 48 hours prior to the online 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.⁴ 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. 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 **policy memo** must address a contemporary policy issue in the Middle East, to be determined in consultation with the instructor. 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. 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. 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.

- *Doing this well:* Make sure you've discussed your specific topic and approach with the instructor before you write the memo. Be clear "who" you are writing the memo for and why. Research your topic well and be up-to-date in your knowledge. Be succinct, logical, and to the point. Be sure to be balanced in your

⁴ Late posting penalties (for review essays and policy memos): 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%.

analysis, and don't omit major issues or counterarguments that would affect your assessment or recommendations. Be 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 **review essay critique** should be up to 750 words in length and offer an appraisal of a 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 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 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 13**. Earlier proposals will get earlier feedback! 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.

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. Comments posted to myCourses will also be considered in assigning the participation grade, although to a lesser degree.

- *Doing this well:* Try to contribute something every class. Your comments should be to-the-point and show a good understanding of the readings and issues. Innovative and critical contributions are welcomed, although conversation should always remain collegial, appropriate, inclusive, and constructive. If you are encountering difficulties with class participation, please speak to the instructor.

A **take-home final exam** will be distributed at the end of the last seminar (December 1) and will be due one week later (December 8).

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 1

Introduction: The Study of the Middle East

- Janine Clark and Francesco Cavatorta, "Introduction: The Methodological and Ethical Challenges of Conducting Research in the Middle East and North Africa," in Clark and Cavatorta, eds, *Political Science Research in the Middle East and North Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).
- Melani Cammett and Isabel Kendall, "Political Science Scholarship on the Middle East: A View from the Journals," *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 23 February 2021.

September 8

Looking Back at the "Arab Spring:" Onset and Aftermath

- Jason Brownlee, Tarek Masoud, and Andrew Reynolds, *The Arab Spring: Pathways of Repression and Reform* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
- Steven Heydemann, "Rethinking Social Contracts in the MENA Region: Economic Governance, Contingent Citizenship, and State-Society Relations After the Arab Uprisings," *World Development* 135 (2020).

September 15

Ideas and Attitudes

- "Political Culture Revisited," in Rex Brynen, Pete Moore, Bassel Salloukh, and Marie-Joëlle Zahar, *Beyond the Arab Spring: Authoritarianism and Democratization in the Arab World* (Lynne Rienner, 2015).
- Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), Chapter 1 and Preface (in that order)
- Merouan Mekouar, "No Political Agents, No Diffusion: Evidence from North Africa," *International Studies Review* 16, 2 (2014).
- Mark Lynch, "After the Arab Spring: How the Media Trashed the Transitions," *Journal of Democracy* 26, 4 (October 2015).
- Lindsay J. Benstead, "Why do some Arab citizens see democracy as unsuitable for their country?" *Democratization* 22, 7 (2015).
- Lindsay J. Benstead, "Survey Research in the Arab World: Challenges and Opportunities," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 51, 3 (July 2018).
- Skim *Arab Barometer* (<http://www.arabbarometer.org>) and try your hand at online data analysis (<http://www.arabbarometer.org/content/online-data-analysis>)

September 22

Petropolitics and Rentierism

- “Rentierism and Resource Politics,” in Brynen, Moore, Salloukh, and Zahar, *Beyond the Arab Spring*.
 Michael Herb, “No Representation without Taxation? Rents, Development, and Democracy,” *Comparative Politics* 37, 3 (April 2005).
 Michael Ross, *The Oil Curse: How Petroleum Wealth Shapes the Development of Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

September 29

Middle East Militaries

- Robert Springborg, “Arab Militaries,” in Marc Lynch, ed., *The Arab Uprisings Explained: New Contentious Politics in the Middle East* (Columbia University Press, 2014).
 Hicham Bou Nassif, “Generals and Autocrats: How Coup-Proofing Predetermined the Military Elite's Behavior in the Arab Spring,” *Political Science Quarterly* 130, 2 (Summer 2015).
 Merouan Mekouar, “Police Collapse in Authoritarian Regimes: Lessons from Tunisia,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 40, 10 (2017).
 Oren Barak, “Security Networks, Deep States, and the Democratic Deficit in the Middle East,” *Middle East Journal* 72, 3 (Summer 2018).
 Jillian Schwedler and Janine Clark, “Encountering the Mukhabarat State,” in Clark and Cavatorta, eds, *Political Science Research in the Middle East and North Africa*.

October 6

No class – Fall Break

October 13

Monarchies

- “The Politics of Monarchical Liberalization,” in Brynen, Moore, Salloukh, and Zahar, *Beyond the Arab Spring*.
 Michael Herb, *All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution, and Democracy in the Middle Eastern Monarchies* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), pp. 1-50, 157-181, 235-267.
 Jason Brownlee, “Hereditary Succession in Modern Autocracies,” *World Politics* 59, 4 (July 2007).
 F. Gregory Gause, III and Sean L. Yom, “Resilient Royals: How Arab Monarchies Hang On,” *Journal of Democracy*, 23, 4 (October 2012).

October 20

Islamist Politics

- Shadi Hamid, *Temptations of Power: Islamists and Illiberal Democracy in a New Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), OR
 Avi Max Spiegel, *Young Islam: The New Politics of Religion in Morocco and the Arab World* (Princeton University Press, 2015).
 Massimo Rameoli, “Interviewing Salafis: Negotiating Ethics and Access,” or Zoltan Pall and Mohamed-Ali Adraoui, “Interviewing Salafis: Overcoming Fear and Mistrust in Middle Eastern and European Contexts,” in Clark and Cavatorta, eds, *Political Science Research in the Middle East and North Africa*

October 27

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 3

Open Topic (TBA)

November 10

Policy Issues I: Political Development

Readings TBA (suggested by presenters)

November 17

Policy Issues II: Political Economy

Readings TBA (suggested by presenters)

November 24

Policy Issues III: Regional Conflict

Readings TBA (suggested by presenters)

December 1 (TBD)

Analytical Game

Readings TBA

Role briefings will be circulated several days in advance.