

Contemporary Politics in the Middle East - Summer Course Syllabus

Instructor Information

Instructor: Syed Taha Kaleem

Office Hours: TBD

Course Dates: TBD

Class Times: TBD

Course Description

This course provides an in-depth, thematic exploration of the political landscape of the modern Middle East, delving into key factors that have shaped its socio-political evolution. Topics include the endurance and adaptation of authoritarian regimes, the role of oil economies and rentier states, grassroots political mobilizations, and the transformative impact of the Arab Spring. We will examine how colonial legacies, nationalism, and global power dynamics have influenced state formation and political identities across the region. Particular attention will be given to the intersections of religion, governance, and social movements, as well as the challenges posed by external intervention and regional conflicts. Students will engage with a wide range of historical, political, and sociological scholarship to develop a nuanced understanding of the Middle East's contemporary challenges and its diverse future possibilities. This interdisciplinary approach will also enhance students' analytical, critical thinking, and writing skills as they explore the complexities of a region at the heart of global affairs.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

1. Identify and critique various political regime types in the Middle East.
2. Analyze the role of religion in political and economic systems in the region.
3. Examine the causes and outcomes of the Arab Spring.
4. Explore the concept of state control over resources and its impact on governance.
5. Develop critical writing and analytical thinking skills.

Course Schedule

Week 1: Introduction & Studying the Middle East

Readings:

- Fromkin, David. "How the Modern Middle East Map Came to be Drawn." Smithsonian (1991).
- Said, Edward. "Islam through Western Eyes." The Nation (1980).

Topics:

- Historical contexts and definitions of the Middle East
- Orientalism and perceptions of the region

Week 2: Colonial Legacies & Nationalism

Readings:

- Gasper, Michael. "The Making of the Modern Middle East" in The Middle East, ed. Ellen Lust (2016).
- Hourani, Albert. "The Climax of Arabism" in A History of the Arab Peoples (2002).

Topics:

- Colonialism and independence movements
- Nationalism, Pan-Arabism, and state formation

Week 3: Islam and Political Authority

Readings:

- Lewis, Bernard. "The Roots of Muslim Rage." The Atlantic.
- Abou El Fadl, Khaled. Islam and the Challenge of Democracy.

Topics:

- Islam's influence on political systems
- The interplay between religion and democracy

Week 4: Authoritarianism and Rentierism

Readings:

- Bellin, Eva. "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East." Comparative Politics (2004).
- Luciani, Giacomo. "Resources, Revenues, and Authoritarianism."

Topics:

- State control over resources and rentier state theory
- Authoritarian resilience and political suppression

Week 5: The Arab Spring & its Aftermath

Readings:

- Hamid Dabashi. The Arab Spring: The End of Postcolonialism.
- Bellin, Eva. "Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East" (2012).

Topics:

- Causes and regional impact of the Arab Spring
- The persistence of authoritarianism post-2011

Assignments and Evaluation

Participation: 15%

Quizzes (3 total): 30%

Reading Responses (2 total): 20%

Final Paper (6-8 pages): 35%

Final Paper: Students will select a topic related to course themes and develop an argument supported by readings and independent research.

University Policies and Support Services

Academic Integrity: Students are expected to adhere to Brandeis' academic honesty policies.

Student Wellness: Mental health support services are available to all students.

Disability Services: Accommodations are provided for students with documented needs.