POL479H/POL 2418H - Topics in Middle East Politics,  
Department of Political Science, University of Toronto,  
Fall 2009, UC 148, Thursdays 12-2pm.

Course Title: Authoritarianism and Protest Politics in the Middle East  
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Course Description: This course sets out to understand the challenges facing protest politics in the Middle East in the context of resilient and historically embedded authoritarian regime structures. It is divided into two parts. The first section consists of article presentations by students and class discussion. It begins by focusing on different analytical approaches to the study of the region’s resilient authoritarian regimes, critiquing in particular essentialist approaches to the study of the Middle East (be they cultural, political, and/or economic), and encouraging instead the adoption of an approach that incorporate insights from political economy and comparative history. This is followed by an examination of the various factors that have been highlighted in contemporary scholarship as being helpful in explaining the resilience and dynamics of authoritarian rule in the region. The structure of this discussion will follow the logic of the text for the course, Oliver Schlumberger’s Debating Arab Authoritarianism: Dynamics and Durability in Nondemocratic Regimes, Stanford: Stanford University Press, (2007). It will revolve around four main themes: (i) intra-regime politics, (ii) state-society relations, (iii) the implications of economic restructuring and, (iv) the influence of the international arena.

The second part of the course revolves around the findings of student research on particular country-based protest movements within the Middle East. The class itself will be organized around student seminars on their research – lasting anywhere between 20-30 minutes depending upon the size of the class. These seminars should act as a trail run/first draft of their final research paper and the class will be designed as a workshop, aimed at providing collective positive feedback to the student presenter as to how their arguments for their papers can be enhanced. Ideally, depending upon your own choices of protest movements, each week will be devoted to seminars that focus on the same country or group of countries with similar regime types. Analytically, there are two main aims of this latter section of the course. First, students will be expected to apply (to the extent that it is appropriate) the framework of “social movement theory” to their seminars and research papers, a framework found within Quinton Wiktorowicz’s, Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach (2004) and about which all students in the course will be required write a short essay. Second, students will also be required to integrate into their seminars and research papers insights from the first half of the course on the political context and/or “political opportunity structures” within which their respective protest politics case study operates.

Course Readings: There are two required texts for this course.

3. The remainder of the course readings can be found in short-term loan in Robarts Library or, for journal articles, on-line in the Roberts electronic catalogue.
Course Requirements:

- 10% for one oral presentation of an article. It should be 10-15 minutes in length and follow the following format: (i) an articulation of the article’s question and thesis; (ii) a presentation of the context within which the article is being written – time period, historical background, etc; (iii) a summary of the argumentation used to prove the thesis; and (iv) a constructive critique of the article, following by one of two substantive questions around which class discussion can revolve.

- 10% for class participation. This evaluation will be based upon both the degree of participation in class discussions as well as the quality of participation – the latter indicated by evidence of whether students have done their readings. As for the readings, articles with an [*] are required reading for all students and you will expected to come to class able to speak knowledgeably on them. As for the other readings – which are for formal presentation in class by designated students - undergraduates are expected to read at least two of them per week and graduate students are expected to read them all.

- 20% for two five page article summaries, each comparing all the articles from any one of the weeks in Section One of the course. Each summary is due one week after the material has been discussed in class. They are worth 10% each. These should NOT be organized on an 'article by article‘ summary. Rather, they should be written in comparative format, organized around cross-cutting themes that are common to all of the articles.

- 20% for a 5-7 page/12 pt font review essay of Wiktorowicz, Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach (2004). Students should answer the following question: “The success of social movements depends upon the emergence of political opportunities. After comparing and contrasting some of the different kinds of ‘political opportunity structures’ that emerge in the various case studies in this volume, discuss the validity of this statement”. Due October 15th in class (after the Thanksgiving break!). Also, a note of advice. Please do not organize your essay on a chapter by chapter basis – something that would be an impossible task anyway given the short length of the paper. I am expecting students to identify and discuss some cross-cutting themes.

- 40% for a final paper (17-20 pages/12 pt font). Students can opt to have 10% of this mark be based upon their seminar presentation if they so choose. Due December 3rd in class. Please see the last paragraph of the course description above for an outline of the instructor’s expectations for the seminar and research essay.

Late Penalties: .5% of the final mark in the course per day of the assignment being late.

Plagiarism: Every year, students are caught for plagiarism. This is defined by the University of Toronto’s Code of Behavior on Academic Matters as “the wrongful appropriation and purloining, and publication as one’s own, of the ideas, or the expression of the ideas...of another” Please do not even think of doing this. The penalties are severe. See http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm.

Accessibility Needs: The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility. If you require accommodation or have any accessibility concerns, please email disability.services@utoronto.ca or visit http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/accessibility.
Section One - Authoritarianisms in the Middle East (Article Presentations):

1. Introduction (September 10th):

   *Schlumberger, Oliver, “Arab Authoritarianism: Debating the Dynamics and Durability of Non-Democratic Regimes” in Debating Arab Authoritarianism, p. 1-20.

2. Pitfalls in the Study of Middle East Politics - Avoiding the ‘Essentialization’ of Culture, the State and the Market (September 17th):

   *Zubaida, Sami, “The Nation-State in the Middle East” in Islam, the People, and the State, 1988, p 121-183.


3. Debating State and Regime Formation - Authoritarianisms in Historical Perspective (September 24th):


   Waldner, David, “Constructing Coalitions and Building States” (Turkey and Syria Compared) in State-Building and Late Development, 1999, p. 53-94.
4. Intra-Regime Dynamics (October 1st)

*Bellin, Eva, “The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective” in Comparative Politics, 36, 2, January 2004, p. 139-158.


Valeri, Marc, “State-Building, Liberalization from Above, and the Political Legitimacy of the Sultanate of Oman” in Debating Arab Authoritarianism, p. 143-158.

5. State-Society Relations and Political Opposition (October 8th):


6. The Economy and the Polity (October 15th):


Poppi, Daniela, “Privatization of Social Services as a Regime Strategy: The Revival of Islamic Endowments (Awqaf) in Egypt” in Debating Arab Authoritarianism, p. 129-142.

7. The International Arena (October 22nd):


Arts, Paul, “The Longevity of the House of Saud: Looking Outside the Box” in Debating Arab Authoritarianism, p. 251-270.


Section Two - Protest Politics in the Middle East (Student Presentations – October 29th to December 3rd): To be decided.