Protest Politics in the Middle East

POL479H1 S - Topics in Middle East Politics

Summer 2022

Instructor: Semuhi Sinanoglu
Email: semuhi.sinanoglu@mail.utoronto.ca
Office Hours: by appointment

Time: M-W 4-6 pm
Location: Zoom

Course Objectives

This course aims to overview critical explanatory factors for collective mobilizations in Middle Eastern politics. The course is organized thematically but chronologically follows significant turning points. We will investigate key topics such as the legacies of colonial state on the formation of collective identities; the repercussions of patrimonial capitalism and rentier state on resource mobilization; the impact of autocratic ruling bargains on contentious politics, and the role of foreign intervention in a comparative perspective, by covering different countries under each theme. The Middle East exhibits remarkable diversity in economic development, social mobilizations, and state capacity. This course's primary expected learning outcome is to capture this intra-regional variation and deconstruct blanket explanations for the region's politics. Secondly, Middle Eastern studies have so long suffered from exceptionalism. The course's thematically organized structure aims to equip students with tools of analysis and contextual information to draw inferences beyond regional politics. The course will also invite students to adopt analytical frameworks that attribute agency to people and challenge over-deterministic accounts of social change. They will be encouraged to be attentive to social mobilizations under different types of autocratic ruling bargains. Lastly, through in-class discussions and debates with guests, students will follow current regional events to identify prominent actors, events, and institutions, especially in social mobilizations.

Requirements & Grading Policy

- **Participation (15%)**: Regular attendance is crucial for getting the most out of this course. In addition to the readings listed in the course outline, we will cover news articles, watch videos, and organize group discussions in class. Please note that you are expected to participate in these conversations actively. I'll take into consideration your active participation, not attendance. I also hope everyone turns on their cameras. Unless you are offered accommodation in advance, that’s a strict policy to ensure active participation. I will also upload guiding questions for each week to facilitate your reading.

- **Short Presentations (15%)**: You will brief the rest of the class about your chosen readings. You’ll sign up for two readings from a given list. I'll distribute a sign-up sheet in our first class. It would be best to go beyond summarizing the articles/chapters, connect with the general topic, provide your critical engagement with the readings, and, most importantly, connect them with current developments in that country. I expect you to extract necessary historical details and the core of the argument and present them in a concise, critical, and accessible way to others. You may find further information at the end of the syllabus.

- **Connecting-the-dots (30%)**: Even though we cover different topics each week, they are all connected, in one way or the other. You’ll write one article (around 3000 words) connecting the dots between the topics covered. You may find further details about the assignment at the end of the syllabus. You should let me know which question you would like to use from the prompt and submit a headline and short introductory paragraph that outlines the basic contours of your argument. The
The deadline for the paper proposal is July 18. The paper is due on August 3. Please note that the paper proposal will also be graded (5%).

- **Quizzes (40%)**: There will be five quizzes in total. Your quiz with the lowest grade will not be accounted for toward your final grade. All quizzes will be conducted in class/online, each appx. 15-min. long that aims to assess your familiarity with that week or the previous week’s readings, lecture notes, and presentations. The quizzes will consist of multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, short-answer types of questions. There will be no make-up for missed quizzes. The date of each quiz will be announced two days in advance.

- **Extra Credit/Optional - Data Geeks Workshop**: I will conduct an extra workshop (2 hours long) and present available datasets on Middle Eastern politics, such as the Carnegie Middle East Governance and Islam Dataset. We will run together quick statistical analyses using these datasets and visualize some data—2% toward your final score.

**Grade Appeal**: If you wish to appeal your grade, you must send me a one-paragraph long explanation of why you think your grade does not accurately reflect your work in a week after posting grades. Be advised that your mark may go up or down after the appeal process.

**Late Penalty**: The penalty for late submissions is 5% per day. Extensions will be granted for valid and documented reasons. Assignments submitted five calendar days beyond the due date will be assigned a grade of zero. Accommodations due to late registration into the course will not be approved. If you require an extension, please send me an email with a valid and documented excuse before the deadline and as early as possible. You are also required to declare your absence on ACORN.

**Submissions & Plagiarism**: Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to the University’s plagiarism detection tool for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the tool’s reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University’s use of this tool are described on the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation web site (https://uoft.me/pdt-faq).

**Communication**

I typically respond to emails swiftly, but please allow 48 hours for a response. I will host virtual office hours using Zoom. You may schedule a 1-on-1 meeting via email.

**Accessibility & Accommodation**

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you have a disability/health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach the Accessibility Services Office and me as soon as possible.

I am fully aware that some of you may come from autocratic countries and having these conversations online may be potentially dangerous for you. It is crucial to remember that repression is often random, and it’s a risk you should not underestimate. I will do my best to create a safe space for everyone according to university policies. Please let me know if you think you need specific accommodations.
Course Outline

Week 1.1 (July 4)
Introduction — How to study the Middle East?

Week 1.2 (July 6)
State formation, colonialism, and popular movements during decolonization

Week 2.1 (July 11)
Autocratic ruling bargains I – Patrimonialism and economic reform: Does capitalism bring about democracy?

Week 2.2 (July 13)
Autocratic ruling bargains II — Autocrats vs. the military & the elite: How do autocrats politically control the elite and coup-proof their regime?

Week 3.1 (July 18)
Autocratic ruling bargain III — Autocrats vs. the masses: How do autocrats contain popular mobilizations?
Week 3.2 (July 20)

Autocratic ruling bargains IV — Oil and rentier state: Does oil wealth shield autocrats from popular movements?


Week 4.1 (July 25)

Contentious politics I – Why/how do people join social movements under autocracies?


Week 4.2 (July 27)

Contentious politics II – Public opinion and political parties: How do they impact social mobilizations?


Week 5.1 (August 1)

Civic Holiday

Week 5.2 (August 3)

Contentious politics III – Civil wars, ethnic and sectarian conflicts


Week 6.1 (August 8)

Contentious politics IV – Kurdish conflict


**Week 6.2 (August 10)**

**Regional politics, foreign interventions, and proxy wars**


**Week 7.1 (August 15)**

**Conclusion: Making sense of popular mobilizations in the MENA**

Recommended

Country/Historical Backgrounds

Film/Documentary Suggestions
Lawrence of Arabia (1962)  
Battle of Algiers (1966)  
Lion of the Desert (1980)  
Yol (1982)  
Nargess (1992)  
Al-irhab wal kabab (1992)  
Ta’m e guilass (1997)  
Nimeh-ye penhan (2001)  
Vizonte (2001)  
Terra incognita (2002)  
Lakposhtha parvaz mikonand (2004)  
Zozo (2005)  
The Forgotten Refugees (2005)  
Niwemang (2006)  
Blood and Oil (2006)  
Takva (2006)  
Omarey yakobean (2006)  
Reel Bad Arabs (2006)  
Bikur Ha-Tizmoret (2007)  
Sous les bombes (2007)  
Persepolis (2007)  
Vals Im Bashir (2008)  
Iki Dil Bir Bavul (2008)  
Ehky ya Sheherazaade (2009)  
678 (2010)  
Incendies (2010)  
Et maintenant on va ou? (2011)  
Asmaa (2011)  
Jodaeiye Nader az Simin (2011)  
The Reluctant Fundamentalist (2012)  
Syngu’e sabour (2012)  
My Sweet Pepper Land (2013)  
Al Midan (2013)  
The War in October (2014)  
Anthony Bourdain: Parts Unknown (2015)  
Tickling Giants (2016)  
The Caliph (2016)  
Sykes-Picot: Lines in the sand (2016)  
Decadence and Downfall (2016)  
L’insulte (2017)  
De sidste mænd i Alep (2017)  
Ali’s Wedding (2017)  
City of Ghosts (2017)  
The Dictator's Playbook (2018)  
Tomorrow's Children (2018)  
The Angel (2018)  
Capharnaum (2018)  
For Sama (2019)  
The Cave (2019)  
Ramy (2019)  
The Dissident (2020)
Assignment Prompts

Short Presentations

The output/medium of your presentation may take different formats (4-6 min. presentation per reading). You may record your presentation in advance and run it in class or deliver it on the spot. Regardless, you are highly encouraged to prepare PowerPoint presentations or visual materials to keep your friends engaged. Presentation materials must be uploaded to Quercus. Please also send the materials via email one day before the class.

You may find some tips on how to deliver a high-quality presentation below:

- Make sure you relay the basic argument of the reading and key historical events but do not spend more than 2-3 min. to give an overview. Try to connect it to the required readings, readings from previous weeks, and contemporary events in the region.
- A high-quality presentation may take the following structure, though this is just a suggestion, and you are free to follow another flow/structure. Set the agenda first. First, in the very beginning, provide an overview of the presentation, a road map. Second, summarize the reading and communicate the main take-away. Third, share with us your overall take. What’s your view on the topic? You are expected to support your argument with evidence (either by connecting it with other readings or referring to some events/incidents in the region.)
- You will be evaluated based on your 1) ability to synthesize, 2) to summarize quickly, succinctly, and to the point, 3) and presentation style. Do not just read it from paper. Be as engaging as possible. Ask questions to your audience to make sure they are following you. Share interesting anecdotes/puzzling statistics to intrigue them, etc.

Connecting-the-dots

You will choose from the following list of prompts. You are expected to use only the readings listed below and do ALL OF THEM. Depending on your argument, you are expected to cite ¾ of these readings meaningfully. You may use non-academic sources such as news articles. But you are NOT allowed to cite other scholarly sources. This assignment aims to incentivize you to do these recommended readings and formulate an argument around them.

In your paper, you are expected to advance an argument. This essay is not just a summary of readings. Your paper must be argumentative. In other words, your paper should be an overall critique of the readings. Summarizing will lower your grade since it takes away valuable space from your arguments. The authors you read are often engaged in a conversation, whether implicitly or explicitly. Your goal is to take part in that conversation by identifying the strengths and weaknesses of their arguments.

In political science, we primarily focus on three major independent variables and their impact on political phenomena: institutions, interests, and ideas. In the readings, which one is the predominant explanation? Does that account convince you? Is there anything missing? Are these findings generalizable? Under which conditions do you think the argument will hold? What is the empirical evidence that supports or challenges the arguments of these readings? Any insights from country-case studies?

A well-crafted argumentative paper will show an excellent understanding of the arguments, draw specific parallels or highlight contrasts among them; focus on making solid and specific arguments about the readings; avoid summarizing, and offer precise, well-constructed, and substantiated arguments.

You may find other instructions below:
You must have a concise and clear thesis statement in your introduction, which encapsulates the overall argument, and throughout, you must closely follow your thesis statement.

An ideal introduction should be structured as follows: a) You should immediately start with a research question or puzzle. No long stories, overtures. b) Outline the debate. Briefly introduce different sides of the debate. c) What’s your take on it? What’s your thesis statement? Make sure your thesis has a causal mechanism and it’s clear and precise. d) Offer an argumentative road map for the rest of the paper.

A coherent set of arguments and evidence should be deployed to support the thesis statement. Arguments and evidence must be sophisticated and persuasive. The connection between each supporting argument and the thesis statement should be clear.

There should be a conceptual/theoretical framework that the analysis rests upon.

Connections to lecture conversations or current news are highly encouraged.

The flow of your argumentation must be well-structured. There should be no jumps or gaps.

Each paragraph should have only one main idea and a clear topic sentence.

Your writing must be clear and concise. Avoid long, convoluted sentences. Proofread before you submit. Make your writing as accessible as possible.

Your paper should be around 3000 words, but you will not be penalized for going over the limit.

Cite properly. All materials that require citation should be cited. If an idea comes from a specific page, you must cite the page number. Use Chicago author-date citation style. I highly encourage you to use software such as Mendeley.

Submit your essay in .doc/docx. format on Quercus. You are responsible for ensuring that the files are not corrupt and submitting the documents by the deadline. Technical glitch is no excuse.

**Prompt 1**

Some autocratic regimes are more durable than others. One crucial factor is oil income. The existing scholarship shows how an autocratic regime uses oil income to manage the elite, coup-proof their regime, and contain mass mobilizations. On the other hand, rentierism may result in dismal economic performance that hampers autocratic survival. How does oil income impact regime durability? What are the causal mechanisms that connect oil income to autocratic survival?


Prompt 2

How do autocratic regimes politically control the elite and the masses? They use several tactics such as repression, cooptation, and propaganda. However, they are not always effective. Under which conditions are tools of political control effective?


**Prompt 3**

How should we study public opinion and political behavior in the Middle East? The study of public opinion is a daunting task, indeed. The scholarship has used several methodologies such as ethnography, surveys, experiments, and observational data analysis, to cite a few. They all suffer from several shortcomings. Why? What would be the ideal methodology to study different forms of political participation?


A Warning About Plagiarism

Plagiarism is an academic offence with a severe penalty.

It is essential that you understand what plagiarism is and that you do not commit it. In essence, it is the theft of the thoughts or words of others, without giving proper credit. You must put others' words in quotation marks and cite your source(s). You must give citations when using others' ideas, even if those ideas are paraphrased in your own words. Plagiarism is unacceptable in a university. What the university calls "plagiarism", non-university institutions might call "fraud".

The University of Toronto provides a process that faculty members must initiate when they suspect a case of plagiarism. In the Department of Political Science, suspected evidence of plagiarism must be reported to the Chair; in most cases, the Chair passes the case on to the Dean.

A faculty member may not mark an assignment or assess a penalty if he or she finds evidence of plagiarism – the matter must be reported. Penalties are assigned by the Chair, by the Dean or by the University of Toronto Tribunal.

The following are some examples of plagiarism:

1. Submitting as your own an assignment written by someone else.
2. Quoting an author without indicating the source of the words.
3. Using words, sentences, or paragraphs written by someone else and failing to place quotation marks around the material and reference the source and author. **Using either quotation marks or reference alone is not sufficient. Both must be used!**
4. Adapting an author's ideas or theme and using it as your own without referencing the original source.
5. Seeking assistance from a friend or family member in respect to work you claim as your own.

Ignorance of the rules against plagiarism is not a defense; students are presumed to know what plagiarism is and how to avoid it. Students are especially reminded that material taken from the web **must** be quoted and cited in the same manner as if it came from a book or printed article.

If you are not sure whether you have committed plagiarism, it is better to ask a faculty member or teaching assistant than risk discovery and be forced to accept an academic penalty.

Plagiarism is **cheating**. It is considered a **serious offence** against intellectual honesty and intellectual property. Penalties can be **severe**, ranging from a mark of "0" for the assignment or test in question, **up to and including expulsion from the university**.

**Some website listed below on avoiding plagiarism:**

'How to Use Sources and Avoid Plagiarism' - available at:  

Other Advisory Material available at: [http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources](http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources)