Middle East Politics
Fall 2016, PSC 87620
CUNY Graduate Center
Tuesdays, 2:00-4:00 pm

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 12:30-1:30 pm, or by appointment

Overview:
This course is designed to introduce graduate students to the key debates in the comparative study of Middle East politics. No prior knowledge of the region is required, but would be helpful. The readings are organized thematically rather than geographically, covering major issues in comparative politics and some of the most important recent scholarship on Middle East politics. The readings cover a range of methodologies and many are interdisciplinary, which is characteristic of the field of Middle East politics.

Readings:
Each week includes required readings. These must be completed in their entirety prior to class, and students should come prepared to discuss any aspect of these works. The syllabus provides additional readings and resources that are not required, but may be of interest to students with particular interests and for future reference. Numerous books are required reading, so students may wish to investigate how to obtain them used, at low cost, or through library loan. They are listed below but also marked on the syllabus with an asterisk *. All other required readings will be available on Blackboard or online.

Required books:

Kanna, Ahmed. 2011. Dubai, the City as Corporation (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press).


Not required but recommended:

If you have no background on the Middle East, or want a good book with country and thematic chapters written by political scientists, I highly recommend this book:


Grading:

Class participation 25%
Preparedness for presentation days 25%
First Review Essay 25%
Second Review Essay 25%
Readings:

All of the assigned readings represent first-rate scholarship, but you will not likely find every reading equally compelling. Learning to “read” scholarship—beyond simple words and arguments—will entail recognizing and understanding what the author is attempting to do, to whom she is speaking, into which debates she is intervening, and at what stakes. Begin by asking what the author is arguing (in a sentence), and how they are using evidence to support their argument. Some arguments are easily reduced to a central thesis, but many others are not. Resist the urge—all too common in graduate school and academia in general—to move directly to critique. Take the argument first on its own terms. What are key concepts? Does the evidence support the author’s claims? What are the arguments or schools of debate against which the author is arguing? Look closely at the engagement with other literature or arguments for clues as to what the author is aiming to accomplish. If the author is right, for why does it matter?

This practice of reading “generously” will serve you well, not only in reading others’ work fairly and with an open mind, but in helping you to more carefully develope your own arguments and contributions. You should try to gain insights and value from a wide range of approaches and arguments, including those with which you disagree. Reading generously as a practice will also prevent you from paralyzing yourself by spending three years of course work ripping every argument to shreds but come dissertation time, feeling unable to write anything that is not equally flawed.

Only once you have taken the author on his own terms should you move to critique. Again, developing a practice of generous critique will serve you better in the long run and prevent you from constructing straw-man critiques that are easily dismissed. Instead of, “This totally sucks,” aim instead for “I’m not persuaded by the argument because…” Remember that assigned readings will all have some value, even if to demonstrate alternative arguments or approaches. No instructor assigns readings without a purpose, so if you find yourself frustrated or not understanding the point of a given reading or assignment, turn your frustration into a question: So instead of, “Why do I have to read this garbage?” aim instead for, “What does the instructor want me to get out of this book that I otherwise find so horrible?” Get inside the argument first, and find what you can learn from it, even if you disagree with the conclusions or methodology.

Where there are multiple require readings, do them in the order listed on the syllabus. Ask yourself why they were ordered in that particular manner; there is always a point or progression.
**Presentations:**

Students will take turns preparing the readings for each week, working in teams of 2-3 (depending on class size). Students should expect to present at least 3 times during the semester, and possibly 4. All students will submit questions on the readings at least 24 hours prior to each class, posted on Blackboard, and the presenters will consider those questions in structuring their presentation. Presenters should circulate a full set of questions (adding their own) either at the start of the class or else prior to the class (on email). Presenters must also prepare and distribute one “synthesizing” document or diagram, which puts the readings into conversation with other readings (from the same week, from previous weeks, and from outside of the course readings). A key aspect of your intellectual and scholarly development will be learning to put arguments into dialogue with each other, including across methodologies, subfields, major topic, and disciplines. As you progress in your studies, the connections and conversations will become increasingly apparent to you, so try to both take arguments on their own terms (as discussed above) as well as draw connections as a routine aspect of your studies.

**Review essays:**

The writing assignments will be two review essays, structured around a topic and readings chosen in consultation with the instructor. Each will be 12-15 pages in length, double-spaced with standard margins. We will discuss the elements of a good literature review as we move through the readings, but the goal should be to accurately portray the argument and conclusions of the chosen readings and to put them into dialogue with each other. You may choose themes or topics that connect to your broader research interests. It can take years to develop one’s own voice in scholarly writing, so to encourage you to spend time writing clearly, essays will be graded on grammar and style as well as argument. Avoid jargon—it makes writing sound academic but is a trap that only thinly masks sloppy argumentation. Try to write clearly and plainly, and to be as precise as possible. We will spend some time in class discussing examples of good writing. Since learning how to write review essays can take some practice, students receiving an essay grade of lower than A or A- will have the opportunity to revise and resubmit.

**Academic Integrity and Honesty:**

Students should be familiar with the statement on academic honesty, which is available in full in the student handbook. A key component, dealing with what does and does not constitute plagiarism, is available here: http://www.gc.cuny.edu/CUNY_GC/media/CUNY-Graduate-Center/PDF/Policies/General/AvoidingPlagiarism.pdf
Accommodations:

The syllabus is a contract to which the instructor and students must all adhere. Please obtain readings well in advance, so that accommodations can be made if you are unable to find them. I may not be able to help if you only inform me that you cannot find a book within a week or less of the class for which the reading was assigned. Come prepared to each class and consult the syllabus often for assignments and due dates. If you are unable to attend class, please try to inform the instructor in advance (if possible). Accommodations will be made for religious reasons or family crises. While strict attendance is not taken, you will not be able to participate fully in the course if you are absent frequently, and that will affect your grade.

Schedule of readings and writing assignments:

August 30
Orientalism

We will begin discussing the sections by Edward Said but please come prepared to the first class meeting to discuss the full text. The conversation may continue into the next class, but we will also discuss the Lockman book that week.


Additional Reading and Reference:


September 6
Politics of Knowledge Production


September 13
Authoritarianism and the State


**September 20**
NO CLASS (Prof attending conference)

Students will submit their proposed topic for the first review essay. The proposal must include a paragraph explaining the topic and its significance, and a list of 5-7 scholarly articles or books that will be examined. Submit via email no later than 2 pm (the scheduled start of the class meeting).

**September 27**
**Democracy and Democratization**


*Additional Reading and References:*


**October 4**

The CUNY schedule has no classes meeting on this Tuesday, or the following week (October 11). Friday, October 14 follows a Tuesday schedule, but I cannot meet on
Fridays. I hate to miss two weeks of classes, so I would like to consider either meeting on a different day this week, or perhaps meeting at my place in Brooklyn on October 4. We will discuss the possibilities in class and make an alternative arrangement only if it works for everyone.

**Civil Society**


*Additional Reading and Reference:*


**October 11**

**NO CLASSES (Friday follows Tuesdays schedule but I cannot meet on Fridays)**

**October 18**

**Social Movements and Revolution**


**October 25**

**Uprisings**


**October 28**

**First Essay Due Electronically**
November 1
Political Economy of Oil 1


November 8
Political Economy of Oil 2


November 11

Proposed topic for the second review essay due electronically. The proposal must include a paragraph explaining the topic and its significance, and a list of 5-7 scholarly articles or books that will be examined.

November 15
Liberalism


*Additional Reading and Resources:*


November 22
Confinement and War


November 29
Geography and Neoliberalism


Additional Reading and Resources:


December 6
Beyond Neoliberalism?


December 13
Reading Day

December 18
Second Essay Due Electronically