

INTL 4370

Middle Eastern Politics, Fall 2025

Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:20-3:35, Leconte Hall 221

Dr. Eli Sperling

Office: 312 Candler

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 11:30-1:30

Email: Eli.Sperling@uga.edu

Teaching Assistant: Hasan Sourav

Email: Hasan.Sourav@uga.edu

Course Description

Through critical analysis of scholarly, journalistic, cultural and other sources, this course will explore the many evolving political challenges Middle Eastern regimes and societies face; all of which have been in a particularly active state of fluctuation since the start of the so called "Arab Spring" in 2011. We will begin the course by analyzing the social and political history of the modern Middle East as to build an understanding of the non-democratic political systems that have characterized most states in the region in the last decades; as well as their causes and effects on the region and its societies. Further, the course will examine Middle Eastern states' diverse cultural, religious, social, economic and political circumstances, as well as the ways in which these circumstances overlap with regional and international politics.

Grading Scheme

A	93-100
A-	90-92
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F	00-59

Grade Composition

Quizzes and writing assignments: 15%
Group Presentation: 15%
Attendance and Participation: 20%
Midterm: 20%
Final exam: 30%

Assignments

Quizzes and writing assignments:

There will be period quizzes on course topics and readings **and** two writing assignments with your groups.

Group Presentation:

Students will be divided into 8 groups. Each group will represent a different state or non-state actor in the region. During the last two weeks of the semester, each group will give a 20 minute presentation—details will be discussed in the first weeks of the semester

Participation:

Students should regularly attend class, having read all the required readings. They should be prepared to both pose and answer questions about the readings and engage in discussion on the broader subject matter.

Midterm Exam:

Midterm exam covering the topics in the course so far.

Final Exam:

Final exam covering major themes, topics, and concepts from the entire semester.

Policies

Academic Integrity:

Every student must agree to abide by UGA's academic honesty policy and procedures known as A Culture of Honesty and the University of Georgia Student Honor Code, which work together to define a climate of academic honesty and integrity at the university.

Use of generative AI:

Use of generative AI (i.e. ChatGPT, Perplexity AI, Claude etc.) is permitted only when explicitly allowed for specific assignments. When used, students must cite it appropriately and clearly indicate how it contributed to their work through a “Generative AI Disclosure” placed at the beginning of the assignment it was used for. Unauthorized or undisclosed use of AI tools will be treated as academic misconduct. If you're unsure whether AI use is allowed, ask before proceeding.

Attendance:

- You are allowed up to 3 unexcused absences without penalty. After that, each additional unexcused absence will lower your attendance/participation grade by 5 points. Excused absences (i.e. illness, family emergency, religious observance, university-sponsored activity) must be documented and communicated to our Teaching Assistant Hasan Sourev in advance or as soon as possible. You will have up to five days after an illness to provide a doctor's note.
- If you miss class, it is your responsibility to obtain any missed material or announcements from a classmate or the course website.

Special Needs:

This course is guided by the assumption of dignity and respect for all persons in the classroom. My hope is to support diversity of learners and to provide an inclusive environment. Students who feel they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss their specific needs. All discussions will remain confidential. To ensure that you receive the most appropriate reasonable accommodation based on your needs, contact me as early as possible in the quarter (preferably within the first week of classes), and make sure that you have contacted the Disability Resource Center: <http://drc.uga.edu>

In-Class Discussion Guidelines:

Civility and respect are essential when engaging in productive academic discourse. All communications for this course should be conducted constructively, civilly, and respectfully. Differences in beliefs, opinions, and approaches are to be expected. Please bring any communications you believe to be in violation of this policy to my attention. Active interaction with peers and your instructor is essential to success in this course, paying particular attention to the following:

- Be respectful of others and their opinions, valuing diversity in perspectives, backgrounds, abilities, and experiences.
- Challenging ideas, phenomena and the scholars that we engage with is integral to critical thinking and the scholarly process. Please articulate your written and verbal communications carefully and thoughtfully, recognizing that a positive atmosphere of healthy discourse is encouraged.
- It is important to do the reading! We will be discussing nuanced and often complicated circumstances. Being a productive member of in-class discussions means doing the reading and being prepared to talk about those assignments and how they relate to lectures and concepts discussed in class.

Required Texts

Lust, Ellen. *The Middle East*, 15th Edition, CQ Press (available for purchase at the UGA bookstore and on reserve at the library. Please note that on Amazon you can also rent a copy of the book or purchase an e-book for less than half of the price).

- Additional readings will be available on the library website or on ELC.
- Students should also regularly read Middle East current affairs articles on:

Al-Monitor: <http://www.al-monitor.com>

Foreign Policy: <http://foreignpolicy.com/channel/middle-east-africa>

Al-Jazeera: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast>

New York Times: <http://www.nytimes.com>

Class Schedule and Readings:

* This is a tentative schedule. Any changes will be announced and posted to ELC throughout the semester.

1. August 14: Introduction to the Course

- Read through syllabus, discuss semester

2. August 19: Imagining the Middle East – History, Conceptions, and Misconceptions

- *The Middle East*, “The Making of the Modern Middle East,” pp. 69-101.

3. August 21: Imagining the Middle East – History, Conceptions, and Misconceptions Continued

- Lewis, Bernard. "The roots of Muslim rage." *The Atlantic Monthly* 266.3 (1990): 47-60.
- Huntington, Samuel P. "The clash of civilizations?" *Foreign affairs* (1993): 22-49.
- *The Middle East*, “The Making of the Modern Middle East,” pp. 102-117.

4. August 26: Colonialism, State Formation, and Palestine

- *The Middle East*, “The Making of the Modern Middle East,” pp. 118-161.

5. August 28: States, Institutions, and the Arab League

- *The Middle East*, “The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” pp. 228-242.
- *The Middle East*, “States and Institutions,” pp. 331-342.

6. September 2: Religion, Society, and Politics in the Middle East

- *The Middle East*, please read all of “Religion, Society, and Politics in the Middle East”

7. September 4: Non-democratic systems

- *The Middle East*, “States and Institutions,” pp. 343-404.

8. September 9: Map Quiz

9. September 11: In-Class Activity

10. September 16: Monarchy

- Lucas, Russell E. "Monarchical authoritarianism: survival and political liberalization in a Middle Eastern regime type." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 36.01 (2004): 103-119.
- Yom, Sean L. and F. Gregory Gause, III. "Resilient Royals: How Arab Monarchies Hang On." *Journal of Democracy* 23. 4 (2012): 74-88.

11. September 18: Monarchies and Autocrats, International Relations

- *The Middle East*, "International Relations," pp. 631-675

12. September 23: Theocracy

- Hoodfar, Homa, and Shadi Sadr. "Islamic politics and women's quest for gender equality in Iran." *Third world quarterly* 31.6 (2010): 885-903.

13. September 25: Theocracy in Iran: A Case Study

- *The Middle East*, "Iran"
- Screening: *Persepolis*

14. September 30: Sectarian Conflict

- *The Middle East*, "International Politics of the Middle East"

15. Nasr, Vali. *The Shia revival: How conflicts within Islam will shape the future*. WW Norton & Company, 2007. Introduction

16. October 2: Midterm Review, in-Class Activity

17. October 7: Midterm

18. October 9: Framing Islamism in Regional Politics

- Bayat, Asef. "The Making of Post-Islamist Iran." *Post-Islamism: The Changing Faces of Political Islam*. Oxford University Press, 2013. 35-65. (Available as an eBook on UGA library website)
- Cammett, Melani, and Pauline Jones Luong. "Is there an Islamist political advantage?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 17 (2014): 187-206.

19. October 14: Secularism, Islamism, and Democracy - The Turkish Case

- *The Middle East*, "Turkey"
- Esen, Berk, and Sebnem Gumuscu. "Rising competitive authoritarianism in Turkey." *Third World Quarterly* 37.9 (2016): 1581-1606.

20. October 16: Political Economy and Social Transformation

- *The Middle East*, "The Political Economy of Development in the Middle East," pp. 572-593.
- *The Middle East*, "Social Change in the Middle East," pp. 555-569.

21. October 21: Political Economy and the Politics of Oil

- Ross, Michael. "Does Oil Hinder Democracy?" *World Politics* 53:3 (2001)
- Herb, Michael. "No Representation without Taxation? Rents, Development, and Democracy." *Comparative Politics* 37:3 (2005).

22. October 23: Gender, power, and modernism

- Badran, Margot. "Between secular and Islamic feminism/s: Reflections on the Middle East and beyond." *Journal of Middle East women's studies* 1.1 (2005): 6-28.
- Ben Shitrit, Lihi. "Women, freedom, and agency in religious political movements: Reflections from women activists in Shas and the Islamic movement in Israel." *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 9.3 (2013): 81-107.

23. October 28: Saudi Arabia and Top Down Liberalization: A Case Study

- *The Middle East*, "Kingdom of Saudi Arabia"

24. October 30: Civil Society, Social Movements

- *The Middle East*, "Actors, Public Opinion and Participation," 448-480.

25. November 4: Democracy Promotion

- Bush, Sarah Sunn. *The taming of democracy assistance*. Cambridge University Press, 2015. Chapter 7. (Available as an eBook on UGA library website)
- Jamal, Amaney A. *Of Empires and Citizens: Pro-American Democracy Or No Democracy at All?* Princeton University Press, 2012. Chapter 1

26. November 6: The Arab Spring in Context

- Film Screening: "The Square"
- Gause III, F. Gregory. "Why Middle East Studies missed the Arab spring: The myth of authoritarian stability." *Foreign Affairs*. 90 (2011).
- Angrist, Michele Penner. "Understanding the success of mass civic protest in Tunisia." *The Middle East Journal* 67.4 (2013): 547-564.

27. November 11: The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and the Future of Regional Politics

- *The Article for the session has not yet been published, I will post it to ELC once it is available in September

28. November 13: Presentations!

29. November 18: Presentations!

30. November 20: Presentations!

31. November 25: Conclusion

Final exam Dec 4, 3:30!!!!